PERMANENCE PLANNING:
Notes for Practitioners

Adoption and Permanence Taskforce

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February 2004

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This material has been produced at the request of social workers who have asked for an accessible and portable guide to help them undertake permanence planning work with children.

It is intended to be an "aide-mémoire" and not a definitive or comprehensive guide. It should be read in conjunction with existing legislation, regulations and guidance issued by the Government and alongside local policies and procedures.

It should be noted that where the word "must" is used, this refers to action required under primary legislation, regulations and other guidance issued by the Government, for example National Minimum Standards. Where the word "should" is used, this denotes ideas based upon experience and positive action.

It has been produced in a ring-binder format for practitioners to add their own notes and up-dated material as available.

A web-enabled version of this document is available at www.elsc.org.uk. This electronic version gives access to key texts and legislation, in full where available, and to relevant web sites.

Many members of the Adoption and Permanence Taskforce have contributed to this document, to whom we are indebted.
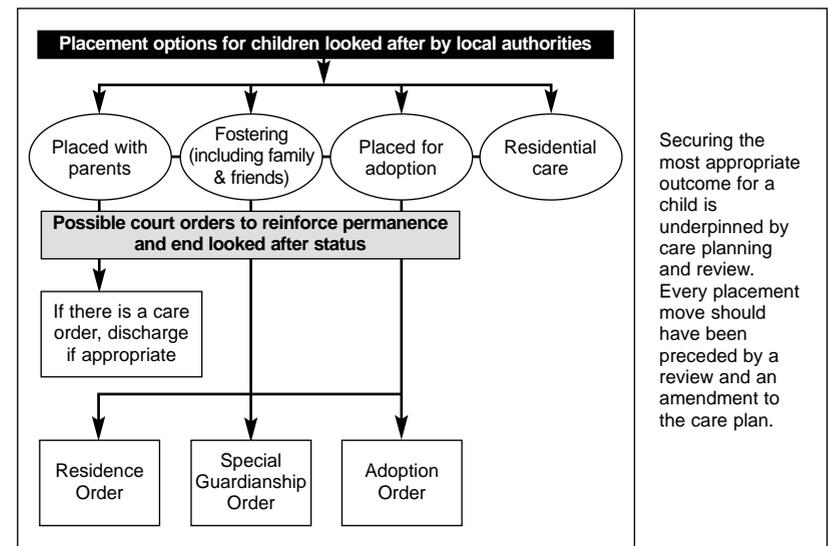
Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

A key Government objective for children's social services is to ensure that all children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. A range of options exists, all of which can deliver high-quality outcomes for individual children. The planning process will identify which option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child and takes account of their views and feelings.

Permanence planning needs to set out the journey that the child will take and the intended destination. Services may be provided and placements used as part of the plan to achieve the desired outcome (e.g. a short-term residential placement to help prepare a child for family life).

Care Planning and Routes to Legal Permanence

The diagram below sets out the range of placement options for looked after children, and legal orders that can be used to reinforce the permanence of placements. Clearly there will be movement between the different placement options, reflecting the child's individual needs which may change over time.

Placement options for children looked after by local authorities

- Placed with parents
- Fostering (including family & friends)
- Placed for adoption
- Residential care

Possible court orders to reinforce permanence and end looked after status

If there is a care order, discharge if appropriate

- Residence Order
- Special Guardianship Order
- Adoption Order

Securing the most appropriate outcome for a child is underpinned by care planning and review. Every placement move should have been preceded by a review and an amendment to the care plan.

Decisions on Permanence

Care planning and reviews

An effective care plan will include a plan for permanence for the child, while setting objectives for work with the child, birth family and carers in relation to the child's assessed needs. Care planning and reviewing are not static, but rather a process of continuous monitoring and reassessment. Review meetings provide a forum in which to review care plans and to agree and record decisions in consultation with all those who have a key interest in the child's life, in particular the child.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have been introduced to quality assure the care planning and review process. They will chair all review meetings of looked after children, ensure the child is involved in the review and challenge poor practice and any drift in implementing the care plan. As a last resort the IRO will have the power to refer a case to the Children and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), which will be able to take the case to court if a child's human rights appear to be in breach.

A clearly articulated plan to achieve permanence for the child must be prepared at the second statutory looked after review and each subsequent review.

Under the Children Act 1989 local authorities are required to make all reasonable efforts to rehabilitate looked after children with their families whenever possible unless it is clear that the child can no longer live with his/her family and the authority has evidence that further attempts at rehabilitation are unlikely to succeed. LAC(98)20 stressed the need to achieve the right balance between efforts to rehabilitate the child with his/her family and the importance of "child time" in achieving permanence for the child.

Where it is clear that a child can no longer live with his/her birth family, and reunification is not possible, decisions about placing children with alternative permanent families need to be made as a matter of priority.

The Permanence Plan should be set out clearly in writing so that social workers, other professionals, the birth parents and the child or young person can understand. The Permanence Plan will set out:

- the objectives of the plan
- the timescales for achieving these objectives
- the key tasks and those responsible for implementing them.
- the criteria that will be used to evaluate the success of the plan

Recording of planning decisions

These should include:

- who was present at permanence planning or review meeting
- whose views were taken in to account
- what options were considered
- the reasons for reaching a particular conclusion
- any disagreements

The Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991, regulation 3, sets out the requirement that every looked after child must have his/her case reviewed within four weeks of being looked after and again within three months of the previous review. Thereafter reviews must take place no more than six months from the previous review. In some cases, particularly where the plan needs amendment, a review may need to be brought forward.

Contingency planning

Where the assessment identifies that parents may be unlikely to make and sustain the necessary changes in their parenting, contingency plans should be made to avoid delay in securing a permanent family for a child.

Parallel/twin-track planning

The child remains with the birth parent/s or is placed with foster carers. A rehabilitation plan with timescales is in place. At the same time, the agency formulates an alternative permanence plan in the event that the rehabilitation plan proves unsuccessful.

Birth parent/s need to be informed that the two plans (rehabilitation and alternative permanence) are being made to meet the child's needs and avoid unnecessary delay. The primacy of the rehabilitation plan should be stressed. Retaining the co-operation, understanding and involvement of the birth parent/s is essential to successful contingency planning.

Concurrent planning

The child is placed with foster carers who are approved as a support to the birth parents in meeting the objectives of the rehabilitation plan, and are also approved to be the child's adoptive parents if the rehabilitation plan proves unsuccessful.
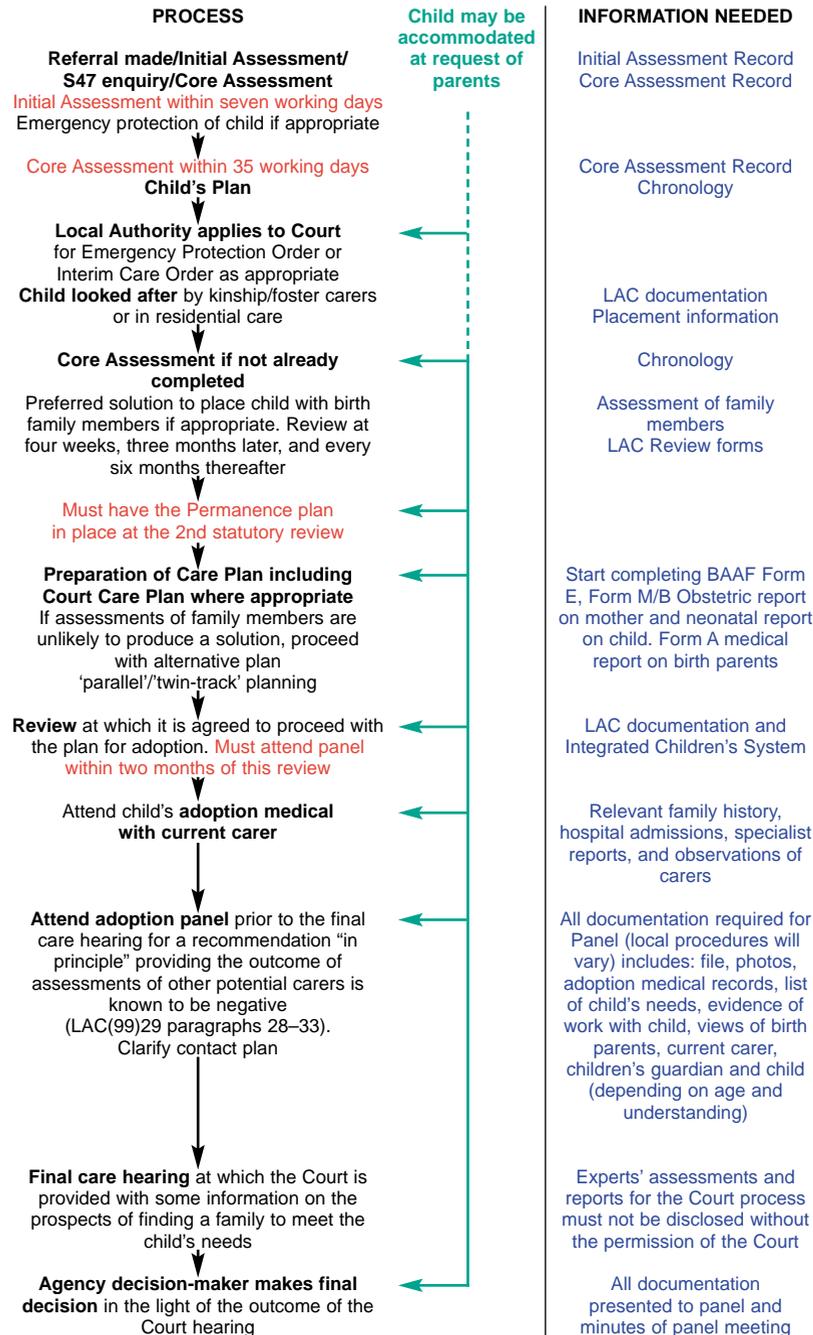
National Adoption Standards

Where the agency has agreed that adoption is in the child's best interests, the National Adoption Standards for England set out timescales to be followed, taking account of the individual child's needs. These include the expectation that a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by the agency within six months of the court decision in care proceedings, or six months of "best interest" decision by the adoption agency, or within three months for voluntarily relinquished children under six months of age.
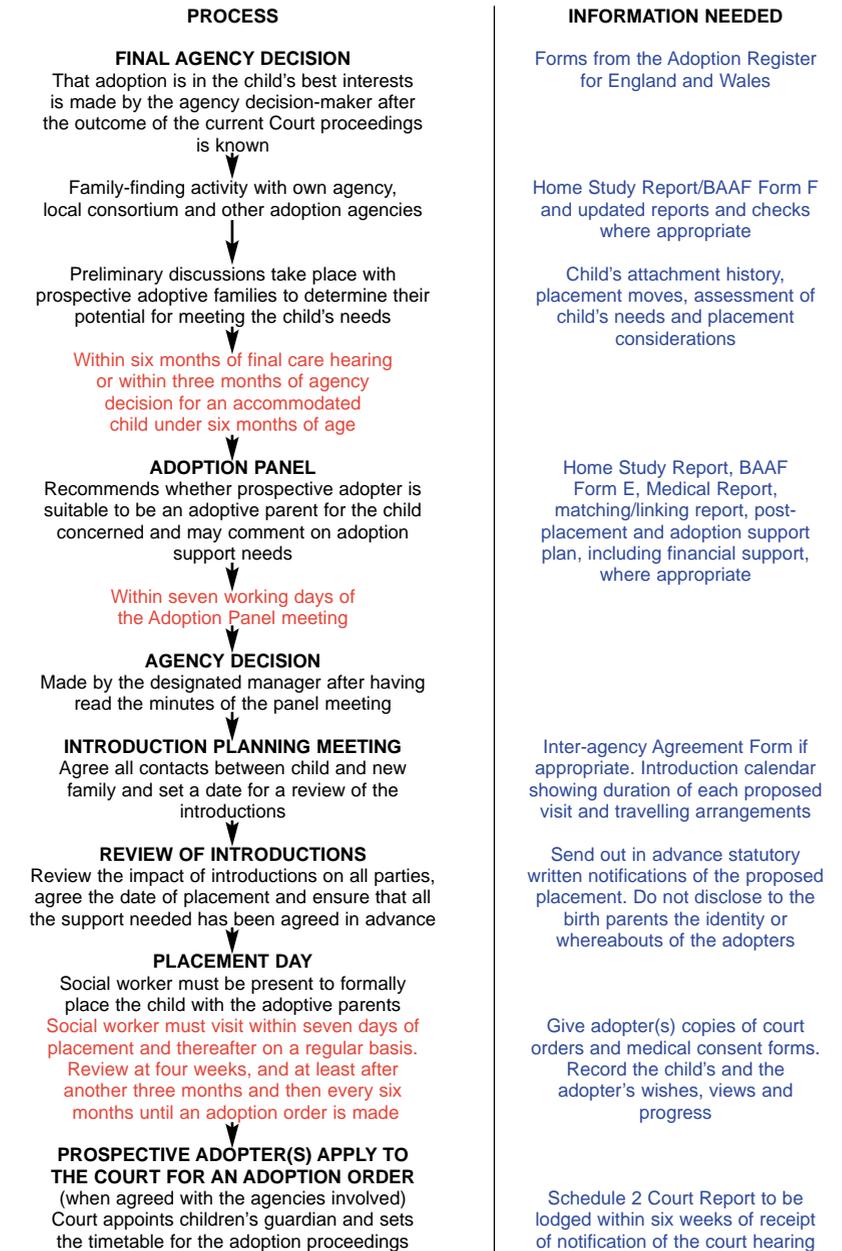
Impact on carers of court orders and support arrangements

| Status	Impact	Support arrangements
No legal order and child not looked after by local authority	None	Services for children in need, their families and others under section 17 of the Children Act 1989
Placement with approved foster carers (including family and friends)	Requirement to comply with fostering regulations	Fostering allowances and support provided under section 23 of the Children Act 1989
Residence Order	Gives the holder parental responsibility and allows the child to live with them. Order can be varied or discharged by the Court. Adoption and Children Act 2002 allows the routine extension of orders to the age of 18	Under paragraph 15 of Schedule 1 to Children Act 1989, a local authority may make contributions to the child's maintenance. Support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 if child in need
Special Guardianship Order	Gives the holder parental responsibility without severing legal ties to the child's parents. Order can be varied or discharged by the Court and will cease to apply at 18	Special Guardianship support services, including financial support, will be available in accordance with regulations to be made under section 14F of the Children Act 1989 (inserted by Adoption and Children Act 2002)
Adoption Order	Severs all legal ties between a child and his/her birth family. Adopted person is treated in law as if born to the adoptive parent(s)	Adoption support services, including financial support, will be available in accordance with regulations that came into effect on 31 October 2003

Adoption Process – Children

PROCESS	Child may be accommodated at request of parents	INFORMATION NEEDED
Referral made/Initial Assessment/ S47 enquiry/Core Assessment Initial Assessment within seven working days Emergency protection of child if appropriate		Initial Assessment Record Core Assessment Record
Core Assessment within 35 working days **Child's Plan**		Core Assessment Record Chronology
Local Authority applies to Court for Emergency Protection Order or Interim Care Order as appropriate **Child looked after** by kinship/foster carers or in residential care		LAC documentation Placement information
Core Assessment if not already completed Preferred solution to place child with birth family members if appropriate. Review at four weeks, three months later, and every six months thereafter		Chronology Assessment of family members LAC Review forms
Must have the Permanence plan in place at the 2nd statutory review		
Preparation of Care Plan including Court Care Plan where appropriate If assessments of family members are unlikely to produce a solution, proceed with alternative plan 'parallel'/'twin-track' planning		Start completing BAAF Form E, Form M/B Obstetric report on mother and neonatal report on child. Form A medical report on birth parents
Review at which it is agreed to proceed with the plan for adoption. Must attend panel within two months of this review		LAC documentation and Integrated Children's System
Attend child's **adoption medical with current carer**		Relevant family history, hospital admissions, specialist reports, and observations of carers
Attend adoption panel prior to the final care hearing for a recommendation "in principle" providing the outcome of assessments of other potential carers is known to be negative (LAC(99)29 paragraphs 28–33). Clarify contact plan		All documentation required for Panel (local procedures will vary) includes: file, photos, adoption medical records, list of child's needs, evidence of work with child, views of birth parents, current carer, children's guardian and child (depending on age and understanding)
Final care hearing at which the Court is provided with some information on the prospects of finding a family to meet the child's needs		Experts' assessments and reports for the Court process must not be disclosed without the permission of the Court
Agency decision-maker makes final decision in the light of the outcome of the Court hearing		All documentation presented to panel and minutes of panel meeting

Adoption Matching and Placement Process

PROCESS	INFORMATION NEEDED
FINAL AGENCY DECISION That adoption is in the child's best interests is made by the agency decision-maker after the outcome of the current Court proceedings is known	Forms from the Adoption Register for England and Wales
Family-finding activity with own agency, local consortium and other adoption agencies	Home Study Report/BAAF Form F and updated reports and checks where appropriate
Preliminary discussions take place with prospective adoptive families to determine their potential for meeting the child's needs	Child's attachment history, placement moves, assessment of child's needs and placement considerations
Within six months of final care hearing or within three months of agency decision for an accommodated child under six months of age	
ADOPTION PANEL Recommends whether prospective adopter is suitable to be an adoptive parent for the child concerned and may comment on adoption support needs	Home Study Report, BAAF Form E, Medical Report, matching/linking report, post-placement and adoption support plan, including financial support, where appropriate
Within seven working days of the Adoption Panel meeting	
AGENCY DECISION Made by the designated manager after having read the minutes of the panel meeting	
INTRODUCTION PLANNING MEETING Agree all contacts between child and new family and set a date for a review of the introductions	Inter-agency Agreement Form if appropriate. Introduction calendar showing duration of each proposed visit and travelling arrangements
REVIEW OF INTRODUCTIONS Review the impact of introductions on all parties, agree the date of placement and ensure that all the support needed has been agreed in advance	Send out in advance statutory written notifications of the proposed placement. Do not disclose to the birth parents the identity or whereabouts of the adopters
PLACEMENT DAY Social worker must be present to formally place the child with the adoptive parents Social worker must visit within seven days of placement and thereafter on a regular basis. Review at four weeks, and at least after another three months and then every six months until an adoption order is made	Give adopter(s) copies of court orders and medical consent forms. Record the child's and the adopter's wishes, views and progress
PROSPECTIVE ADOPTER(S) APPLY TO THE COURT FOR AN ADOPTION ORDER (when agreed with the agencies involved) Court appoints children's guardian and sets the timetable for the adoption proceedings	Schedule 2 Court Report to be lodged within six weeks of receipt of notification of the court hearing

STAGE IN PROCESS	TIMESCALES SET
A PERMANENCE PLAN for all looked after children must be made • Children's wishes and feelings must be listened to, recorded and taken into account: where not acted upon the reasons will be explained to the child and will be properly recorded • Children will be well prepared before joining a new family and life story information will be kept safe • Children are entitled to support services to meet their assessed needs • Adoption plans will set out clearly arrangements for maintaining links (including contact) with birth families and significant others, and how and when arrangements will be reviewed	At **four month review** **Throughout the adoption process**
BIRTH PARENTS • To have access to a separate support worker • To give their account of events and comment on what is said about them in the reports to the Adoption Panel	**From the time the adoption plan is proposed**
AGENCY'S 'BEST INTEREST' RECOMMENDATION **AGENCY DECISION ON LINKING OR MATCHING CHILD WITH PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS**	Within **two months** of LAC review at which the adoption is identified as the plan Within **six months** of best interest decision, **or** Within **six months** of court decision in care proceedings, **or three months** of 'best interest' decision re relinquished infant under six months of age
WORKING WITH APPLICANTS • Response to initial enquiries • Follow-up interview or Information Meeting • To receive a copy of the Home Study Report	Within **five working days** Within **two months** of enquiry At least **28 days** before the Adoption Panel meeting
ADOPTION PANEL • Consideration of application to adopt	Must receive reports within **six weeks** of completion of assessment
AGENCY DECISION • Timing of all decisions • re applicant's suitability • re foster carers • at "best interest" or matching stage	Must be made within seven working days of panel meeting Within **six months** of formal application Within **four months** of formal application **All decisions to be conveyed in writing within 7 working days**
PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS • Matching process • Support services	To be given full information re child's needs and background and have an opportunity to discuss the implications before a match is agreed To be available before, during and after adoption

The Assessment Framework
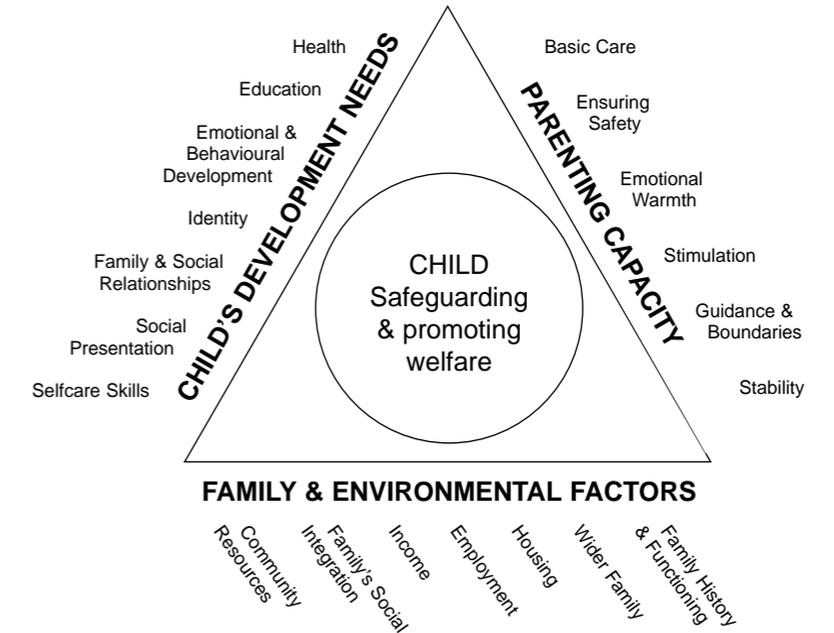
The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (you can access the full text on the internet: http://www.doh.gov.uk/pdfs/frass.pdf) provides a systematic way of analysing, understanding and recording what is happening to children and young people within their families and the wider context of the community in which they live. Use of the framework offers an understanding of what are inevitably complex issues and inter-relationships, to allow the necessary clear professional judgements to be made.

Stages In Child Development

This section is based on the work of Erik Erikson and Vera Fahlberg

Age in Years	Emotional	Physical, cognitive and language
0 – 1.5	**Sense of trust** **Trust in others**	Discriminates among various stages of discomfort (hungry, wet, tired) Picks up objects Sits, crawls, stands, walks Vocalisation: coos, laughs, squeals, imitates speech, understands commands
1.5 – 3	**Sense of autonomy** **Trust in self**	Jumps, runs, climbs Learns to dress with help Toilet training Solitary or parallel play Vocabulary grows immensely ("no", "me", "you", "big", "little") Asks and answers questions
3 – 6	**Sense of initiative** **Right and wrong**	Proficiency in self care Magical thinking Begins co-operative play Physically aggressive Increased motor skills Increased vocabulary (2000 words by age 5)
6 – 10	**Sense of industry** **Conscience development**	Substantially increased motor skills Learns to learn: read, write, basic maths Screens out distractions Friendship with peers Issues of fairness
10 – 18	**Sense of Identity** **Finds their place in the world**	Sexual development Physical growth Emotional changes Increased skills Identity with peers Emancipation

Erik Erikson's Stages in Children's Emotional Development

Age 1 – 1.5 years

Development of a *sense of basic trust*. This grows out of consistent, reliable physical care by at least one nurturing caretaker who meets the child's basic needs. This can be permanently undermined by poor, inconsistent care or by multiple placement. Without this sense of trust, children will have difficulty moving into the next development stage.

Age 1.5 – 3 years

Development of healthy *sense of autonomy*. This grows out of the child's opportunity to make choices appropriate to his/her age, and to move away from the caretaker for brief periods with confidence that the relationship will endure. Overly harsh treatment, prevents the sense of autonomy from developing. Loss of the caretaker, or sequential caretakers, can stunt this development. Without a sense of autonomy, children learn not to trust themselves.

Age 3 – 6 years

Development of a *sense of initiative*. Through taking risks, observing, imitating, and fantasising, a sense of personal initiative develops. As the child experiments with behaviours, a sense of right and wrong grows. A consistent, encouraging caretaker makes these developments possible. Inconsistency of caretakers inhibits this process, and overly punitive treatment leads to excessive guilt and feelings of worthlessness.

Age 6 – 10 years

Development of a *sense of industry*. Through the relationship with the caretaker and teachers, the child learns useful skills, a sense of accomplishment, and an ability to problem solve. Without consistent encouragement and support the child can feel defeated, discouraged and inferior.

Age 10 – 18 years

Development of a *sense of identity*. Building on all prior developmental stages, the child learns to see their abilities realistically and to develop their talents and interests in preparation for adult life. When prior stages have been inhibited or stunted, identity remains confused and full maturity cannot be achieved.
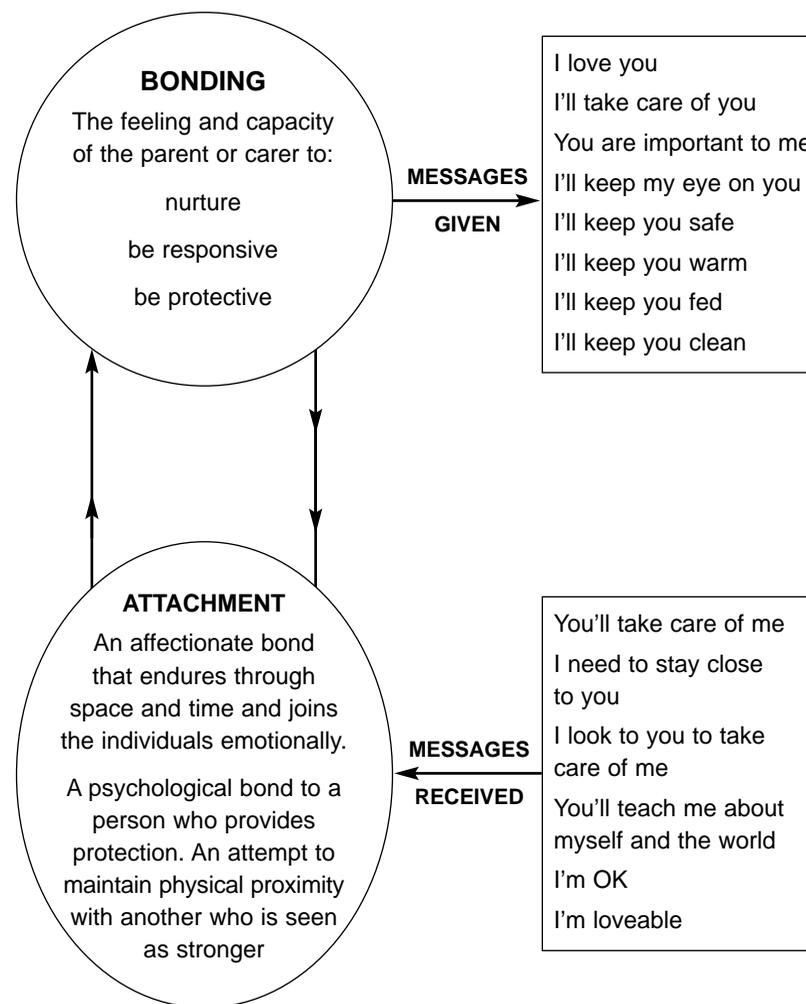
USEFUL READING

Erikson, Erik H.
Childhood and Society
New York: Norton, 1950

Fahlberg, Vera
Child Development
London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 1982

Fahlberg, Vera
A Child's Journey through Placement
London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 1994

Assessing Attachment

The bonding/attachment process

BONDING

The feeling and capacity of the parent or carer to:

nurture

be responsive

be protective

MESSAGES GIVEN

I love you

I'll take care of you

You are important to me

I'll keep my eye on you

I'll keep you safe

I'll keep you warm

I'll keep you fed

I'll keep you clean

ATTACHMENT

An affectionate bond that endures through space and time and joins the individuals emotionally.

A psychological bond to a person who provides protection. An attempt to maintain physical proximity with another who is seen as stronger

MESSAGES RECEIVED

You'll take care of me

I need to stay close to you

I look to you to take care of me

You'll teach me about myself and the world

I'm OK

I'm loveable

Assessing Attachment

Normal attachment processes lead to the establishment of bonds which are the basis of lasting relationships between the child and parent/parent figure, and are the foundation of future positive relationships with others.

Secure attachment helps the child to:

- develop self esteem
- attain full intellectual potential
- sort out what she/he perceives and think logically
- develop a conscience
- become self-reliant
- cope with stress and frustration
- cope with worries and fears
- experience the world as relatively predictable and safe
- feel secure
- reduce jealousy

Assessment of attachment needs to be based on an understanding of child and parent behaviours when there is *appropriate* attachment and bonding. All three domains of the assessment framework need to be considered together and information from them taken into account, in particular:

1. **The child**
   - developmental functioning
   - behaviour
   - interaction with siblings
   - child's interaction with parents and others

2. **Parenting capacity**
   - how parents react to child's overtures
   - interactions with child that parents initiate
   - boundary setting and disciplinary techniques
   - awareness of child's individual needs
   - how parents manage stress

3. **Environment**
   - child's interaction with wider family
   - child's interaction with other adults
   - child's interaction with peers
   - availability of appropriate stimulation
   - safety.

Assessment of attachment requires detailed knowledge of the child's history and placement moves, careful observation of the child's development and behaviour and observation of the interaction between the child and carers.

In order to make any judgement a comprehensive knowledge of child development is essential. The following checklists and references may be helpful:

Child's attachment

Attachment is assessed by observing the child's behaviour in the presence and in the absence of the primary caretaker.

Attachment behaviour

- An attempt to maintain proximity (closeness) with another person
- Body contact
- Cries/becomes anxious when caretaker leaves
- Displays stranger anxiety

Children have secondary attachments to:

- other parental figures
- siblings
- relatives
- day care providers

Parent's attachment

Attachment is assessed by observing the primary parent's behaviour in the presence of the child. Culture influences parent's attachment behaviours.

Attachment Behaviour

- Recognises the child's distress
- Responds to child's distress
- Ensures protection
- Obtains help
- Provides soothing/comfort

Signs of Problem and Distorted Attachments

It is important to remember that the responses listed below represent a spectrum, and that children without distorted attachments may display some of these more extreme responses at times. Also, children display a range of attachment patterns along the continuum. However, should any of the extreme responses become habitual responses, this is a cause for concern.

EXTREME 'OVER' RESPONSE	'NORMAL' RESPONSE	EXTREME 'UNDER' RESPONSE
TOUCH		
Over-clingy and demanding. Indiscriminately affectionate	**Usually enjoys and responds to cuddling, stroking, tickling and bathing**	Under-responsive/disinterested in contact. Only when it suits them – usually to get something
EYE CONTACT		
Looks right through you and stares	**Holds your gaze – seeks to look**	Avoids looking at you directly or does so only when he/she wants something from you
SOUND		
Over-sensitive to everyday sounds and dislikes music and everyday noise	**Sings, mimics, mirrors, moves to favourite sounds**	Ignores music or singing, has little or no sense of rhythm. Does not sing to self or dance
TASTE		
Gorges, vomits, binges, excessive demands for food. Never "full". Hides food/hordes	**Usually enjoys food, unless ill, has likes and dislikes and a normal healthy appetite. May be a 'picky' eater**	Poor appetite, poor feeding. Holds food in mouth. Refuses food
STRANGER ANXIETY		
Excessive fearfulness of new people or situations	**Seeks to be close to parents/carers in new situations, until they become familiar or they see it is OK with their parents**	Unafraid of no one, or nowhere or nothing. Will go to anyone, anywhere. *"Superficially charming" particularly to those outside the family*
SLEEP/REST		
Sleeps a lot and for excessive periods or as a response to stress	**Can be comforted. Has favourite sleep object(s)/routine. Relaxes**	Very difficult to settle. Hyper-alert, vigilant, wakeful, nightmares. Inability to be soothed or soothe self
CRYING		
For extended long periods – inconsolable. May soothe self by excessive rocking. Will cry at anything or nothing – all hurts are responded to by the same intense wailing	**When hurt, lost, upset, cold, suddenly startled, or when child cannot do something he/she wants, or gets frustrated etc.**	Lack of tears. Never cries. No sign of distress when you would normally expect it, for example when child falls

EXTREME 'OVER' RESPONSE	'NORMAL' RESPONSE	EXTREME 'UNDER' RESPONSE
MOVEMENT		
Frenetic, acts "hyperactive", "always on the go". Never sits still or focuses on anything for any length of time (depending on age). Lacks impulse control	**Appropriate to age. Active, responsive. Likes/dislikes. Co-ordinated. Active/rest cycle**	Sluggish, immobile, stiff. Reluctant to move. Poor co-ordination. Clumsy – bumps into things
VOICE VOCALISATION		
Incessant chattering and nonsense. Excessive questioning, and interrupting. May be very repetitive. Controls interaction. Excessive use of baby talk, mumbling, and confused speech	**Likes to hear own voice, practise new words. Likes singing to self and chattering on waking. Chatty. Wants to talk to you, asks "why?"**	Lack of babbling and vocalisation even in response to encouragement. May refuse to talk at all to parents – only those outside the family. Control of silence and speech. Delay in development
MUSCLE TONE		
Very tense – rigid. Arching back, stiffening of arms and legs. Limited range of movement	**With appropriate tone and flexibility of movement. Appropriate. Strong – looks co-ordinated when moves**	Poor muscle tone as if underdeveloped and unused. Dribbling. Drops things. Floppy
SENSITIVITY		
Irritable, easily disturbed even by small changes. Difficult to console. Can be inconsolable	**Sensitive to others, particularly parent and parent figures. Responds to emotion of the parent and is consolable by them or significant persons when distressed**	Appears indifferent to much that goes on – shuts off/shuts down
CONSCIENCE		
Compulsive truth telling – owning up. Excessive shame/guilt for minor issues. Unforgiving of self/hates self	**Feels a realistic amount of shame/guilt accompanied by a desire to repair – "I hurt when I hurt you"**	Lack of feeling of any responsibility. "It wasn't me." Lack of empathy or remorse. Lack of cause and effect thinking. Persistent lying about the obvious
EXPRESSIONS OF ANGER		
Aggressive towards anyone and everyone, suddenly, unexpectedly and unpredictably. Can suddenly throw a tantrum in response to any reasonable request or refusal. Can be physically and verbally explosive, swearing and lashing out	**Toddler and teen tantrums when frustrated, denied or hurt. Between toddler and teens gradually learns not to hit out but to use words to express feelings**	Overly compliant – always says "yes". Shows little or no emotion at all about anything

EXTREME 'OVER' RESPONSE	'NORMAL' RESPONSE	EXTREME 'UNDER' RESPONSE
IMAGINATION		
Makes up stories and insists they are real. Lives in a fantasy world. Creates friends and situations. Preoccupation with blood and gore	**May have an imaginary friend when small. Enjoys make-believe play as a way of experiencing 'self'. Likes dressing up and making up stories and knows they are made up**	Has little or no ability for imaginary play or completing stories. Absence of an "inner world".
HUMOUR		
Will not stop long past when the joke/tease was funny. Thinks insulting you or humiliating you is really amusing	**From a young age will begin to enjoy games e.g. 'peek-a-boo', as a baby. Understands jokes – may make them up. Laughs at amusing incidents – self and others**	No sense of humour. Looks deadly serious most of the time
CARING AND AFFECTION		
All over you so you feel smothered	**Is affected by both parental praise and affection, anger and disappointment. Has a level of concern for others**	Little genuine affection or ability to want to do anything for anyone else unless at a price
POSSESSIONS		
Destructive of own toys and those of others. Constantly demands new toys/clothes. Envies others' possessions. Takes others' toys or possessions – may steal	**Takes reasonable care of own possessions and those of others. Is upset when things are lost or broken. Will share appropriately**	Gives toys away. Does not care about own possessions or those of others. Leaves things behind and loses things
BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS OTHERS (People and animals)		
Cruel, teasing, taunting and bullying – both overt and covert. Without remorse/with pleasure. Poor peer relationships	**Has genuine remorse after hurting people or animals. It is not a pattern. Usually behaves with respect, care and concern. Has friends**	Passive: victim-like as well as genuine victim. Invites being used and bullied. Poor peer relationships
ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONFLICT		
Divide and rule. I divide and I rule. Seeks to split parents as partners. Where there is a fight s/he is usually in the middle of it	**Is distressed by parental conflict and argument. Seeks to resolve conflict**	Appears totally unaffected – in the midst of a blazing row might say "can I have my chocolate bar now" or may be extremely fearful – phobic, if even a mild disagreement takes place

This material has been adapted and developed from the work of Caroline Archer published in the following Adoption UK publications:
Adoption, Attachment and Development
Making Sense of Attachment in Adoptive and Foster Families
Effects of Early Trauma

Building Blocks for Resilience

The concept of resilience recognises that there may be protective factors both within the child (constitutional) and in their family and environment (social) which act as "buffers" against adversity. The assessment should identify those areas that may be important to the child maintaining the three key building blocks for achieving resilience:

1. a secure base

2. the child's self-esteem

3. the child's sense of capability and effectiveness

The presence of the following factors has been found to contribute to the child's ability to combat adversity:

- the child's family demonstrate that they care *about* the child even if they cannot care *for* the child
- there are other supportive people in the child's life
- the child has a network of supports
- the child has experienced a secure and harmonious loving relationship
- the child has success in accomplishing tasks that are central to their interests
- the child has experienced parenting that is responsive, consistent, warm, offers praise, support and encouragement
- the child has experienced parenting that helps them believe they can make a difference in their situation
- the child has purposeful contact with family members and other key adults from the past
- positive school experience
- friendship with peers
- interest and involvement with sport, music, hobbies
- the child displays problem-solving and coping skills and strategies.

USEFUL READING

Gilligan R, *Promoting Resilience*
London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering 2001

Schofield G, *Resilience and family placement: a lifespan perspective*, Adoption and Fostering, 25/3, Autumn 2001.

Assessing Sibling Groups

In assessing the quality of relationships within a sibling group and each child's placement needs, it is important to carry out a full assessment in respect of:

- each individual child in a sibling group
- their relationships with each other
- the dynamics of the group
- how each child sees their role in relation to the other siblings

Important questions

Who does the "core" sibling group include?

What is the possibility of contact or placement with other siblings living elsewhere?

Who are the key people to be involved in the assessment process?

What opportunities are needed to assess different siblings living in different foster homes?

What are the individual views of each child in the sibling group?

Key issues

Factors that have affected the way siblings relate:

- position in family and gender
- type of attachment to parents
- parental conflict
- neglect/absence of carer/parent
- abuse.

What does the children's behaviour suggest about their attachment to each other in respect of:

- warmth
- degree of conflict
- rivalry
- dominance/subordination
- sharing and caring

Particularly significant behaviour:

- sharing in boisterous play
- resolving conflict through age-appropriate reasoning
- reciprocal attempts to alleviate distress

Can work be done to improve the relationship between the siblings?

What dysfunctional patterns of interactions exist and need to be taken into account in placement decisions?

Decisions to separate children, and about which child should be placed with whom, should only be taken on the basis of a full assessment.

Action to recruit carers and facilitate contact should result *from* the planning process and not vice versa.

USEFUL READING

Lord J and Borthwick S, *Together or Apart: Assessing brothers and sisters for permanent family placement*, London: BAAF 2001

Mullender A, *We are Family: Sibling Relationships in Placement and Beyond*, London: BAAF 1999

Assessing a child's contact needs is an extremely complex process that demands the greatest care. This section sets out some of the important issues that need to be given careful consideration, and aims to assist the decision-making process.

Contact arrangements must:
- reflect the plan for the child
- be of direct benefit to the child
- support the child in his/her new family
- never be used as a bargaining tool
- be flexible to allow for changing needs
- be managed and reviewed and changes agreed by all parties

Purpose of contact (whether direct or indirect)

Reassurance
- **For the child:** that birth family members are all right and that she/he has not been forgotten; validates reality; why the child was separated.
- **For birth parents:** that the child is all right in his/her new family; realistic progress reports.
- **For the new family:** provides an opportunity to update information over time; helps them to understand better the child's past.

Maintain existing relationships
- Enables birth family members to adjust to the change of role in the life of their child.
- Helps the birth family give permission to the child to attach to new carers.

Identity
- Enables the child to keep links with his/her own culture and community.
- Enhances the child's self-esteem.

Continuity
- Ensures that the child is not disconnected from their birth family.
- Keeps the communications doors open for the future.

The younger the child, the less likely it is that direct contact will be appropriate at the time of placement. However, it is important to keep the lines of communication open with birth family members because children's needs and wishes may change over time.

Indirect contact arrangements

Indirect contact arrangements need to be set out clearly in writing for all parties, including the frequency of contact, which party is to start the exchange, if two-way, and whether birthday and/or cards for religious festivals, videos or presents are agreed in addition to an update letter. Some participants may need help in writing letters and others may need written reminders when their letters are due.

One-off meeting with adoptive and birth family members

A one-off meeting between adoptive parents and birth family members provides an opportunity for the birth parents to feel reassured about the child's new parents. It also provides a reality check for both parties and makes the task of 'telling' and future contact that much easier. It is important that photographs are taken of this meeting wherever appropriate.

Direct contact

Direct contact is likely to be most successful where BIRTH PARENTS:
- have met the adopters and fully support the adoptive placement
- have "given the child permission" to live with these adoptive parents
- will agree to exchange up-to-date information as the child grows up
- accept the change of role that they will play in the life of their child

Direct contact is likely to be most successful where ADOPTIVE PARENTS:
- can empathise with the birth parents
- have met the birth parents and can sustain a positive image of them
- recognise the potential value to the child of maintaining contact
- feel entitled to parent the child
- do not feel threatened by face-to-face contact with the birth family

Siblings

Special consideration needs to be given to maintaining contact between siblings as these are likely to be the longest relationships experienced during their lives. A thorough written assessment should include the nature of the relationship between each sibling, how long they have lived together (or apart) and their views. Siblings often have competing needs: where compromise is needed it should favour the child with the greatest prospects of a successful permanent placement – most likely to be the youngest of the siblings under consideration.

Planning contact arrangements

Preliminary assessment should clarify:

- the child's attachment history
- the views and wishes of the child, birth family members and significant persons in the child's life
- the capacity of the birth family and the adoptive family to manage contact constructively
- the type and level of contact with which they can realistically cope
- the aims and objectives of the contact plan
- the proposed frequency needed to ensure that there is sufficient recovery time between contacts

Options analysis

Identify all realistic methods of facilitating contact including:

- the benefits and risk factors involved in each potential method of contact
- will the contact proposals reflect the plan for the child, and support the child in his/her new family?
- will the proposed contact arrangements jeopardise the adoptive family's need for anonymity?
- are the proposed contact arrangements likely to be realistic and manageable?
- will the timing of contact arrangements take into account the child's need to attach to a new family?
- the resource implications

Recording of Decision-making Process

A clear written account should be made of the decision-making process, whose views were taken into account, the reasons for the decision and an action plan.

Monitoring and Review

Determine frequency of review of contact arrangements and named persons with responsibility for reviewing, analysing and changing contact arrangements prior to the adoption order being made.

Ensure that the child is consulted on a regular basis about their views and wishes, and that these are taken into account.

After the adoption order has been made, the adopters should be given a specific point of contact should they need advice in the future negotiating any changes in contact arrangements.

NO CONTACT

ONE-OFF MEETING BETWEEN ADOPTERS AND BIRTH PARENTS

ADOPTERS SEND A LETTER TO BIRTH FAMILY ONCE A YEAR VIA AGENCY

BIRTH FAMILY SEND A LETTER TO ADOPTERS ONCE A YEAR VIA AGENCY

LETTERS, CHRISTMAS CARDS AND BIRTHDAY CARDS EXCHANGED VIA AGENCY

LETTERS, CHRISTMAS CARDS AND BIRTHDAY CARDS SENT DIRECT BETWEEN THE PARTIES

TELEPHONE CONTACT OR E-MAIL ARRANGED BETWEEN THE PARTIES

SUPERVISED VISITS VIA AGENCY

UNSUPERVISED CONTACT ARRANGED VIA AGENCY

VISITS ARRANGED BETWEEN BIRTH PARENTS AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS AT A NEUTRAL VENUE

FULL CONTACT ARRANGED BETWEEN THE PARTIES

RANGE OF CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND BIRTH FAMILIES, OR OTHER SIGNIFICANT PERSONS

The Adoption Panel is set up under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangement for Placement and Review) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997. The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the agency decision-maker about:

1. whether adoption is in the best interests of a child, and if so whether an application should be made to free the child for adoption

2. whether applicants are suitable as adoptive parents (including the number and the age group of the child/ren)

3. whether particular applicant(s) are suitable as adoptive parents for a particular child/ren

4. eligibility for financial support

The outcome of each application will be one of the following:
- to agree the application
- to reject the application
- to defer the application

The Panel may have a role in:
- advising on placement possibilities and adoption support
- advising on contact arrangements
- reviewing the cases of children who have been subject to a "best interests" decision where an adoption order has not yet been made
- reviewing the prospective adopters still awaiting a placement
- receiving management reports of agency and service provision in adoption work
- considering any adoption placements that disrupt
- quality assurance
- contributing to the development and reviewing of departmental policies and procedures
- providing training opportunities for new social workers by enabling them to observe panel meetings

To assist the smooth running of panel meetings social workers need to ensure that they:
- have completed all the documentation needed in advance
- bring the child's file with all reports to Panel and photographs of the child

- have checked with the medical adviser prior to Panel to establish if any further information is required
- have obtained legal advice, preferably in writing, unless they are sure that the Legal Adviser will be present at Panel
- arrive at Panel on time as Panels need to run to strict time tables
- have an up-to-date education report (if the child is at school/nursery)

Adoption Panel members and agency decision-makers are required to make some of the most important judgements that are ever likely to be taken in respect of looked after children. In considering whether adoption is in a child's best interest, Panel members will want to know about the following:

- what attempts have been made at reunification
- what attempts have been made to consider and assess family members as potential carers, and reasons why they have been discounted
- the meeting at which a decision was made by social work staff to pursue a plan for adoption in respect of each child
- legal advice given about the case and the date of the final care hearing
- the child's wishes and feelings
- health
- education and behavioural development
- identity
- family and social relationships
- attachment history including significant current attachments
- social presentation
- self-care skills
- any previous history of abuse or neglect
- views of all those with parental responsibility, including any wishes of a child's parents or guardian as to the religious upbringing of the child
- views of the Children's Guardian
- views of current carer(s) and any other significant persons in the child's life
- current contact arrangements and the nature and level of contact proposed after placement for adoption, whether these

arrangements are likely to support the child in his or her new family, and whether they are realistic
- child's understanding of why he/she is separated from his/her birth family
- work undertaken with the child and work yet to be carried out, by whom, and timescales within which this is likely to be completed
- evidence for any proposals to separate siblings, and contact arrangements between them after placement
- therapy/other specialist support already provided or planned

Parallel/twin-track planning and the timing of applications to the Adoption Panel

In order to minimise delays for children, a contingency plan needs to be activated and pursued in parallel if there are serious doubts about the viability of a reunification plan. Where other family members have been explored and discounted as potential carers of the child, the Adoption Panel will need to consider whether adoption is in the best interests of the child, in principle, prior to the outcome of care proceedings.

However, LAC(97)13, Paragraph 46 states: *"As part of their deliberations, where an adoption panel is considering whether adoption is in the best interests of a child, the panel is expected to consider all other possible options for that child and be satisfied that the agency's proposal was arrived at once those options had been explored and discounted."*

LAC(99)29, Paragraph 30, confirms that *"even where the facts in certain cases of the application are not disputed and the preferred option in the care plan is adoption, it is important that local authorities have satisfied themselves that sufficient assessment has taken place to rule out rehabilitation or placement with relatives, for example, under a section 8 Residence Order"*

The decision-maker will need to await the outcome of care proceedings before making a final decision of behalf of the adoption agency.

You may find the Local Information sheet on page 52 a helpful aide-mémoire to fill in and refer to.

Matching a child with a family is one of the most important decisions likely to be made by an adoption agency and should be based upon a multi-agency assessment of all the child's needs including:

- health
- education
- emotional and behavioural development
- identity
- family and social relationships
- attachment history and the child's capacity to make new attachments
- the quality of the child's attachment to the current carer and the capacity of the current carer to help the child attach to a new family
- contact needs
- social presentation
- self-care skills
- accommodation and locality
- any other needs specific to this child

The agency needs to record and take into account the views and wishes of the child, all those with parental responsibility, the current carer and the children's guardian.

In matching children with the most appropriate family it is helpful to use the dimensions of parenting capacity set out in the Assessment Framework including the prospective adoptive family's capacity to:

- provide for the child's basic care
- provide emotional warmth
- promote the child's learning and intellectual development
- set boundaries
- provide a stable environment

In addition it is helpful to take account of the applicants':

- background and experience of being parented
- previous parenting experience/transferable skills
- understanding of the type of background from which the child comes and empathy for the birth family's situation
- expectations of the child concerned – how realistic are they?

- capacity to manage the type of behaviour/difficulties this child presents or is likely to present in the future
- support systems, especially family and friends
- capacity to use support appropriately
- what each applicant has to lose and gain by the proposed placement
- coping strategies and how they have coped with past losses
- strengths and vulnerabilities

It is essential to provide a potential family with as much information as possible before the match is considered by the panel, so that the family are able to make an informed judgement about whether they feel they can meet the child's needs throughout his/her childhood and beyond.

It is equally important not to match applicants with children of a different age range, gender or characteristics from that for which the prospective adopters have been approved and/or for which they have declared a preference, as this is a predictor of placement disruption.

It can also be helpful to identify the messages that life has thus far given to this child, as these can be critical factors in matching children with the right family, such as: "I can't trust adults, they just let me down", or "In our family girls don't matter", or "I have to look after my mum when she is drunk".

To assist the agency in determining the appropriateness of a proposed placement, a "matching/linking" report needs to include:

- reasons for believing the prospective carers have the potential to meet the child's needs
- the health and educational facilities which exist in the prospective carer's locality to meet the needs of the child
- the preparation the prospective family has received to equip them to meet the child's needs
- the views of any children or other adults in the carer's household, and the nature of any preparation work which has been/needs to be carried out with them in respect of the proposed placement
- how far the needs and expectations of the prospective adoptive parents would be met by the proposed placement
- further work which needs to be carried out before and after the placement, by whom, with time scales for completion

- if the applicants are unable to meet one or more of the child's needs, how this will be addressed
- a placement and adoption support plan, outlining:
  – proposed frequency of visits by the child's social worker and the family's worker between placement and court hearing (to be reconsidered at reviews)
  – contact point to whom the adoptive family may go for support after the adoption order is made
  – support to be made available to the adopter(s) both before and after an adoption order is made, by whom and for how long
  – contingency plans in the event of difficulties arising, including respite care arrangements
  – post box arrangements: type and frequency of proposals
  – direct contact: frequency, persons involved and worker responsible for arranging and reviewing contact arrangements

It is helpful for a senior manager to countersign the matching/linking report to confirm agreement to reasonable requests for financial assistance and services to meet the adoption support plan.

Direct work with children provides them with an opportunity to express their feelings about significant events that have occurred, helps them to put the past into perspective, and to participate in the planning process.

Direct work needs to be carried out with children at all stages of the legal and planning processes. The amount of detail that can be given to the child will depend on the circumstances of each case, but they will need reassurance about where they will be staying while the Court decides what is going to happen.

In working with children it is important to recognise the impact of trauma on their capacity to understand and retain information. Workers will need to:

- listen to the child's messages about their capacity to undertake this work at particular stages
- communicate clearly and simply using concepts which are likely to be familiar to this particular child
- ask the child for feedback to confirm whether the child has understood what has been said
- give the child opportunities to ask questions as often as he/she wishes
- simplify or build on explanations given to clarify the child's understanding
- create opportunities for the child to express his or her feelings and wishes, especially about contact
- reinforce the positives for the child
- help the child to develop a simple script that can be used to explain to others why they are not living with their birth parents. Ensure that this is agreed with the current carer and any other significant persons
- use tools appropriate to the child's age and understanding such as:
  – memory box
  – story books
  – eco map (a picture or diagram outlining the people involved in the child's life)
  – picture cards
  – photos
  – jig-saws
  – drawings
  – puppets
  – toys
  – videos

NB This section is not intended to cover life story work, the timing of which needs to take into account the child's age, stage of development, circumstances, and readiness for this complex and sensitive piece of work.

Purpose

To provide a child with an accurate chronological account of his/her life, which remains relevant and has an enduring value.

To provide a tool by which adoptive parents or long-term carers can give the child details about his/her birth family and history in an age-appropriate way as the child grows up.

Aim

To help children to:

- understand the background and history of their birth family
- know where they came from and develop a sense of identity
- understand why they are separated from their birth family and who has cared for them
- put their past into perspective

Remember

- A child's life story book belongs to the child and needs to be readily available whenever the child wishes to look at it.
- It is the social worker's responsibility to collect photographs and information for the child and to encourage the carer to do so.
- It is preferable to take photos with a digital camera and store the photographs on a computer or a compact disc, as instant photographs may fade over time.
- Always keep copies of photographs (with dates and names) and the life story book(s), which should be retained on the file: they are extremely precious and may be needed if the life story book should become damaged or destroyed in future years.
- Some birth parents and grandparents are willing to participate in the collection and provision of information for a child's life story book: this has a value well beyond the photographs themselves. It is helpful to encourage them to write a letter for the child.
- Obtain the child's birth certificate, record of a christening/baptism/other religious ceremonies, and any other significant records, including a family tree with names and dates of birth.

- Provide information about the time and place of birth, and who was present at the birth itself, as well as the weather on the day of birth, significant political events, or other national events, and preferably a copy of a national newspaper for the day the child was born. The child's name tag from hospital and other mementoes need to be kept safe.
- The life story book should accurately reflect the reality of the child's history and situation and why he/she was separated from his/her birth family.
- Details of developmental milestones need to be accurately recorded, such as the date the child took his/her first steps, the first word spoken, and the first day at nursery or school.
- A picture of the child's handprint or footprint makes an excellent keepsake for birth parents as well as adoptive parents.

Format

- The format can vary considerably, but ideally a life story book should contain photographs and factual details explaining the name/relationship of each person in the photograph and the event.
- Include the names and addresses of previous carers and the names and workplaces of workers who have played a role in the child's life.
- Life story books need to be flexible and presented in a way which enables details to be added as further information becomes available, including after adoption. They should be sufficiently robust to withstand being repeatedly handled, for example in a ring binder with each page contained in a plastic folder or laminated.
- Ideally life story books should be written in the third person, unless an older child wishes to personally contribute to the document.
- An animal story line is not generally advised – although it might seem attractive for a 2 or 3 year old, it quickly becomes out of date, and has limited value to children as they get older.

General

- Life story books should incorporate material that has already been collected for the child prior to, and during his/her experience of being looked after.

- For younger pre-verbal children a life story book should ideally be completed by, or as soon as possible after placement.
- It may be helpful to provide a life story book for the birth family.
- The degree to which the child will participate in the life story process will vary greatly according to how settled and secure the child feels, and may well be influenced by what else is going on in the child's life at any point in time.
- For older children it may be better for the life story work to be carried out with the child and the new carers when the child feels settled in his/her permanent placement.
- It is essential that the current carer is involved in this process so that they can understand the significance for the child and agree how the information will be conveyed to the child.
- The "new" family needs to be empowered (through the provision of maximum information) to answer the child's questions in an age-appropriate and more detailed way as the child grows up.
- The provision of a "later life" letter is of critical importance in giving a fuller explanation to the young adult of all the circumstances and decisions made while he/she was looked after.
- A time line depicting when all significant events occurred can be helpful.

Preparation

Before planning to move a child to a permanent placement, check that the following actions have been covered:

- the matching decision has been made by the agency decision-maker following panel recommendation
- up-to-date, comprehensive and accurate information about the child is available, including medical and educational details
- life story work has been completed, or is well underway
- child has an age-appropriate understanding of the proposed move
- contact arrangements have been discussed and provisional plans made in writing
- the new carers have seen photographs or a video of the child
- the new carers have met the current carers
- consideration has been given to a Life Appreciation Day.

Planning

Prior to the Introduction Planning Meeting, the social worker needs to draw up a schedule of essential information, including:

- holidays and other commitments of all concerned with the move
- present and proposed contact arrangements
- "goodbye" meetings with birth family members should take place before introductions to the new family begin
- proposed transport arrangements
- equipment needed for the child (bed, stair-gate, car seat etc.)

It is helpful for the new carers to meet key people in the child's life before introductions begin:

- present carers; previous significant carers (including extended family)
- school staff; nursery staff; previous social workers
- medical adviser or other professionals, if appropriate, e.g. psychologist
- birth parents, if appropriate (although the timing of the meeting will depend on individual circumstances)

The Introduction Planning Meeting, which should be chaired by a manager experienced in adoption work, needs to include the

following persons:

- existing carers and their support worker
- new carers and their support worker
- child's social worker
- the Team Manager
- other workers who have played a significant part in the child's life, such as family centre workers

The purpose of the meeting is to draw up an Introduction Plan taking into account the following:

- the child's age and understanding
- travelling distance
- holidays and commitments of carers, social workers and support workers
- education, including school holidays
- needs of other children in temporary or permanent carers' families
- venues for introductions
- the need for "rest days" during the period of introduction, as this is a stressful and tiring process for all concerned

The plan needs to be written down and copied to key people

Do:

- set a time-scale which maintains momentum, and keep this under review
- decide who is to tell the child about the new family – when, how and what
- allow time for goodbyes to current carers and local friends
- think carefully about the timing of the move, which should be during a holiday period for children of school age, if at all possible
- reassure the child about future contact with familiar figures (temporary carers, family, friends etc.) and provide photographs
- ensure the child takes her or his own belongings to the new placement, packed in a suitcase, not in a plastic bin-liner
- support temporary carers to give positive messages about the move
- agree what names the child and new carers will call each other

- be clear about the purpose of introductions as a positive experience for the child
- remember that introductions are the start of a process of attachment
- ensure emotional support for both sets of carers
- clarify transport arrangements – who, how, when, who pays
- involve carers' own children as appropriate
- make sure the child is well supported during the period of introductions
- make potential difficulties/risks explicit and be aware of tensions
- ensure that statutory notifications are sent out
- set a review date in order to review the adoption introductions prior to finalising the assessment date and assess:
  - the impact of introductions on all parties
  - if child and new carers feel comfortable and the "chemistry" is working
  - the extent to which the child's attachment to the new carer is developing
  - the child's developmental needs and progress
  - whether or not timescales need adjusting
  - whether any further work or tasks need to be completed before the placement is made
  - agree date for final move and confirm that all documentation needed by the prospective adopters has been/will be handed over to them, and by whom

Consider the need for a Life Appreciation Day or equivalent meeting, the purpose of which is to:

- bring together those people who have played a significant part in the life of the child, so that participants may take a conducted journey through the life of the child
- capture in chronological sequence the major events and changes in the child's life, including changes of carer(s) and attachment history
- understand the factors that have influenced the child's perceptions and reactions to events, including his/her developmental stages
- capture anecdotes and memories of the child throughout his/her life

Don't:

- criticise current or new carers in front of the child
- encourage friends and family to visit the new placement during introductions or in the early days of the placement because the child and new parents will need time to attach and establish routines
- move the child on, or close to, significant events, celebrations, or festivals
- move the child when support systems are less available – end of the week or weekends are unlikely to be good times
- arrange for the child to go on holiday with the new carers before the child is well settled in the new family

Making the move

At the time of placement check that:

- medical card, health records, court orders and the child's birth certificate are handed over to the new family
- arrangements have been made for payments to carers to be started from the date of placement
- all equipment has been supplied
- statutory notifications have been carried out, including to the birth parents prior to the adoption placement day
- school or day care have been notified
- the child has been or will be registered with a GP in the area in which the new family lives
- arrangements have been made for any outstanding clinic appointments to be transferred, including dentist

Summary of local authorities' duties in respect of adoption support

The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 require local authorities to make arrangements, as part of the service maintained under section 1(1) of the Adoption Act 1976, for the provision of a range of adoption support services.

They place new duties on local authorities to carry out assessments of needs for adoption support services and having carried out an assessment, a local authority is required to decide <u>whether</u> to provide any services.

They also give local authorities powers to pay financial support and provide services for people living outside of their area.

Local authorities must act reasonably when deciding whether to provide support services following an assessment.

Section 1(3) of the Adoption Act 1976 provides that a local authority may arrange for the facilities that it has a duty to maintain under section 1 to be provided by appropriate voluntary organisations.

When must an assessment be provided?

The new Regulations, which came into force in October 2003, provide that an assessment of needs for adoption support services must be carried out in the following circumstances:

- when considering whether adoption is in the best interests of a looked after child
- when considering a match between a prospective adopter and a particular looked after child
- when the placement for adoption of a looked after child is reviewed within the first four weeks of placement
- when requested by: an adoptive parent; an adoptive child; a child of an adoptive parent

An assessment <u>in respect of supporting contact arrangements only</u> should be provided at the request of:

- a birth parent or relative of the adoptive child
- a person with whom the adoptive child has an important relationship

Who should provide the assessment?

The table below explains which local authority must provide an assessment as laid out in Regulations. Authorities have additional powers to carry out assessments which are designed to allow them to act flexibly in deciding to assess in a specific case.

CIRCUMSTANCE	RESPONSIBILITY FOR ASSESSMENT
Child is looked after by the local authority	The local authority by whom the child is looked after must assess a person entitled to be assessed
Child has been placed for adoption by the local authority	The local authority which has placed the child for adoption must assess a person entitled to be assessed
Child adopted following placement by a local authority	• The local authority which placed the child for adoption must assess a related person • The local authority which placed the child for adoption must assess a person (other than a related person) entitled to be assessed if it is less than a year since the adoption order or less than three years since the child was placed • A local authority must assess a person (other than a related person) entitled to be assessed who lives in their area if it is more than a year since the adoption order and more than three years since the child was placed
In all other cases (i.e. non-agency cases)	Local authority where requester lives must assess

Assessments should follow the guidance set out in, and use the domains of, the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families – the child's developmental needs, the parenting capacity of the adopters and consideration of the family and environmental factors.

Assessments should build on past assessments (e.g. care/adoption plans and Integrated Children's System records).

The initial and core assessment recording forms (Exemplar Records for the Integrated Children's System) should be used until full implementation of the 2002 Act.

Based on an assessment, a local authority decides whether to provide services, and in what way. There is no automatic entitlement to services.

What should the plan contain?

The plan should set out clearly:
- the objectives of the plan and the key services to be provided
- the timescales for achieving the plan
- those responsible for implementing the plan and the respective roles of others; what should be provided, when and by whom
- the criteria that will be used to evaluate the success of the plan
- the procedures that will be put in place to review the services to be provided and the plan

In preparing the plan, the agency should carry out consultation with the appropriate person as outlined in the Guidance.

A plan is not needed where services are being provided on a one-off basis – the relevant information should be covered in the notification letter.

A copy of the plan should go to all those involved in implementing it, and to the recipients of services (or appropriate adult).

Local planning and the adoption support services advisor

Authorities need a strong strategic plan for their adoption services, incorporated into their wider children's services planning, that facilitates multi-agency working.

Each local authority must nominate an adoption support services adviser, who is responsible for there being a single point of contact for those affected by adoption. The adviser will have a three-part proactive brokerage role in:
- ensuring that the best possible arrangements are in place to support each particular adoption placement
- responding quickly and constructively to problems that arise with these arrangements
- promoting and maintaining the necessary agreements at a strategic level across agencies

A Summary of Adoption Support Services

Possible specific difficulties for children placed for adoption	ASSESSMENT FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT	Menu of services	Issues for agencies to consider
Recovering from abuse: – physical – sexual – emotional – neglect Attachment difficulties Learning disabilities Behaviour problems Depression **Coping with loss and separation**		**MAINSTREAM SERVICES** – Health services including CAMHS – LEAs, particularly to meet SEN – Connexions – Sure Start – Children's Fund – Statutory adoption pay and leave – The benefits and tax system – Housing services – LA family centres – Voluntary sector parenting support organisations funded by the Family Support Grant	• All needs may not be apparent at time of placement. Child and adoptive parents' needs should be assessed on an ongoing basis, when requested by the adoptive parents and/or the adoptive child. • Consider access routes into adoption support services – how will these be organised and communicated to adoptive families locally? • Importance of linking in with universal and existing specialist services. • Need to raise the profile of adopted children and adoptive families as potential users of these services.
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS Reactions/coping mechanisms of different children to early life experiences will vary. Because the vast majority of children who are adopted have been looked after, their needs are likely already to have been assessed – perhaps several times. It will be important to ensure that the learning from these earlier assessments is included in assessment of need for adoption support.		**ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES REQUIRED UNDER 2003 REGS** – Counselling, advice and information – Financial support – Support groups for adoptive families – Assistance with contact arrangements – Therapeutic services for adopted children – Services to ensure the continuance of adoptive relationships **OTHER POSSIBLE ADOPTION-SPECIFIC SERVICES** – Support groups for others affected by adoption – Birth records counselling – Search and reunion advice – Intermediary services	• Children needing adoption are already likely to be receiving services – these services should continue post-placement. • Importance of discussing child's early experiences with adopters and identifying possible sources of support before placement. • Importance of identifying needs of adoptive family (including siblings) as well as of adopted child. • Services can come from a variety of sources. The importance of multi-agency multi-disciplinary approach. • Role of social services is to organise and commission, but not necessarily to provide, support services. • Not all children will need all services but it is important that services exist and are known about by adoptive families to prevent unnecessary stress and avoidable disruptions.

Financial support

Financial payments may be deemed appropriate following an assessment of need, but there is no automatic entitlement.

Adoption Allowances Regulations 1991 will no longer apply, although existing allowances paid under these regulations automatically transfer under the 2003 Regulations.

There is new flexibility for agencies to respond to the needs of the child and his/her circumstances in order to secure a placement. This can include:

● lump sums, as a one-off or series of payments

● regular payments for ongoing need

Support may be paid to non-agency adopters, such as intercountry adopters who have given notice to apply for an adoption order or who have adopted a child. Step-parents are not eligible to be considered.

In determining the amount, authorities must take into account any new income that will be available in respect of the child after adoption, e.g. tax credits.

Financial support paid to adoptive families will be disregarded for the purpose of determining eligibility to tax credits; also for calculating income for the purpose of income-related benefits. Financial support will be exempt from tax.

Payments can be made above the usual level for specific periods to ease transition from fostering allowance for foster carers who go on to adopt.

Who funds the services?

The Regulations give local authorities the power to act flexibly in providing services to a person who lives outside their area. The guidance sets out how the Government intends local authorities to exercise this discretion in certain circumstances.

a) For adoption support services other than financial support

The *placing authority* always retains the responsibility to:

● maintain the case record set up in accordance with regulation 14 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983

● manage and support any contact arrangements (e.g. letterbox arrangements) agreed prior to the adoption order and any changes over time.

For three years from the date of placement, the *placing authority* should be responsible for funding adoption support services (other than financial support).

b) For financial support

Where the *placing authority has decided prior to the making of the adoption order* to provide ongoing financial support, it continues to be responsible until support is terminated in accordance with regulation 13. This applies also to adoption allowances currently in payment under the 1991 Regulations.

For three years from the date of placement, the *placing authority* should be responsible for funding ongoing financial support that the placing authority has decided to provide *after the making of the adoption order*.

If the adoption order is secured two years after the date of placement, the *placing authority* will be responsible for funding adoption support for one further year.

c) All support services (including financial support)

A local authority will only ever be responsible for funding services that it decided to provide.

Where a new request for an adoption support service (including financial support) is made more than three years after the date of placement and one year after the adoption order, *the local authority where the family lives* should be responsible for carrying out the assessment and funding any services.

The process for adoption support services
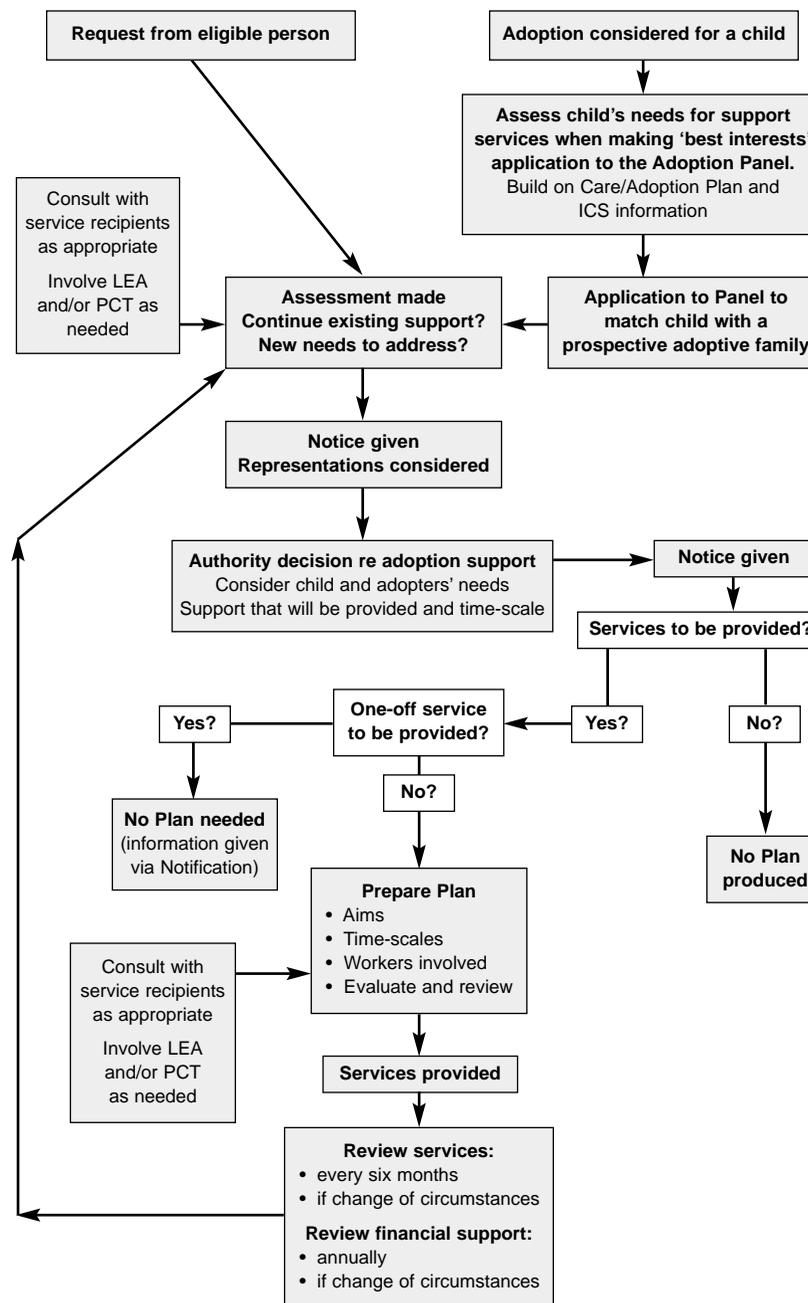
There are thousands of adoptions that result in successful families, but there will always be some placements that end prematurely. It is a traumatic time for all concerned.

Research and experience tell us that there are four main causes of disruption:

- the emergence of previously unidentified or unknown factors
- the mis-assessment of the family or the child's readiness to make an adoptive attachment
- the appearance of unpredictable circumstances which have impacted on the process
- lack of all available information about the child given to the adoptive parents

It is important that workers:

- make sure that the child(ren) and the family have someone they trust with whom they can share their feelings and concerns
- arrange to tell the child together with the adopters why the disruption is happening, to ensure that a consistent explanation is given to the child and to provide support. This will be very difficult, but children usually know when something is wrong and need to understand what is happening, otherwise they will blame themselves
- make sure that the child has been told in simple language that they can understand
- make appropriate arrangements with the adoptive family in preparing the child for the move. This is a loss to both the child and the family, and if they can acknowledge this it will help their understanding of events at a later stage
- recognise that unless a child is at risk of harm, there are no reasons why a child should be moved without careful thought and planning
- consider the position of the birth family: they will need to be told what has happened and this will need careful planning
- ensure that support is available from a manager or another worker with experience of adoption so that neither a sense of frustration, guilt nor blame is projected onto anyone else

Arrange to hold a DISRUPTION MEETING, or an alternative meeting, to identify the circumstances leading to the disruption so that all concerned can learn from the experience and try again. This meeting should be chaired by a person with significant childcare and adoption experience.

It is important that everyone keeps a positive focus, even through these most difficult and trying times. Remember many children and families who have been involved in disruptions go on to have subsequent successful placements.

The agency decision maker is:

Telephone

Fax

E-mail

The name of the medical adviser is:

Telephone

Fax

E-mail

The name of the legal adviser is:

Telephone

Fax

E-mail

The panel administrator is:

Telephone

Fax

E-mail

The professional adviser to the panel is:

Telephone

Fax

E-mail

The panel chairperson is:

Telephone

Fax

E-mail

The Panel is held on the ....

At ....

Panel papers must be received by the administrator not later than weeks prior to panel otherwise the place is likely to be forfeited.

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