



# Child Appreciation Meetings

Practice Guidance



**‘Communication is important, so information should be accessible to everyone. People with sensory communication disabilities may need documents in easy read, large print, audio or Braille formats for example. Others may need face to face communication support through a British Sign Language Interpreter, deafblind interpreter, lip speaker or note taker (as recommended by the NHS Accessible Information Standard). If someone speaks (or reads) a language that is not English, they will need to have the appropriate language-spoken language interpreter and / or text translator’.**



## 1.0 Purpose:

- 1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to outline the value and importance of child appreciation meetings for children and prospective adopter(s). The guidance will detail the procedure for holding a child appreciation meeting and the recording of the information shared.

## 2.0 Underpinning Legislation and Guidance:

- Child Appreciation Days; Good Practice Guide 2011, CoramBAAF

## 3.0 What is a Child Appreciation Meeting?

- 3.1 The aim of a child appreciation meeting is to introduce the prospective adopter(s) to the people who, although they may not be involved in a 'conventional' planning meeting for a child, have significant personal knowledge of the child and their birth family, for example, the child's teacher, health visitor; or a relative who may have tried to give support. These people often have important recollections to share with prospective adopter(s).

### 3.2 Purpose of a Child Appreciation Meeting:

- 3.3 The purpose of a child appreciation meeting is primarily to ensure that the prospective adopter(s) have as much information as possible about the child to guide them through a factual and emotional chronology of a child's life, to understand the impact of experience on the child and plan for his or her future needs.
- 3.4 Child Permanence Reports, profiles and one-off meetings with professionals or carers are significant tools to share and communicate this information. However, child appreciation meetings are a unique and innovative approach to aiding this communication further by helping prospective adopter(s) not to just *read* and *hear* information regarding the child, but to also *see* and *meet* a variety of people who have played a significant part in the child's life, and to experience *feelings* about the child.
- 3.5 Disruption research highlights messages from adopter(s) stating that 'information was not provided in an easily understandable format, or that its presentation made it difficult to gain a complete picture of the child and they felt excluded from all the information about the child'. Hence, undertaking child appreciation meetings ensures a sound knowledge base for a placement and in turn will lessen the chance of the placement disrupting in the future (BAAF 2011).

#### **4.0 Procedure:**

- 4.1 It is an expectation that every child within the Together4Children Regional Permanency Partnership will have a 'Child Appreciation Meeting' to promote long term stability and security.
- 4.2 A child appreciation meeting will vary in length and be dictated by the individual needs and circumstances of the children in terms of, for example, the number of children being placed for adoption together and/or complexities of child's needs and birth history.

#### **5.0 Locality Permanency Hub Process:**

- 5.1 At the child's matching meeting where all professionals and prospective adopter(s) are in agreement for the match to proceed, discussion should take place to determine the timeliness of a child appreciation meeting.
- 5.2 The Family Finding Practitioner will begin the preparation for the child appreciation meeting. The child appreciation meeting will need to be held in a timely manner before the match is presented to adoption panel. This is to allow prospective adopter(s) time to reflect and process the information from the child appreciation meeting, and for them to be able to make an informed decision as to whether they still wish to proceed with the match without feeling pressured.
- 5.3 The timing of holding a child appreciation meeting should not cause any delay in the match being presented to the adoption panel. Hence, if this is the case, in these exceptional circumstances, the child appreciation meeting should be held prior to the start of Introductions. This would require the approval of the Together4Children Principal Manager. This approval and the decision should be clearly recorded on the child's record.

#### **6.0 Preparation for the Meeting:**

- 6.1 The Family Finding Practitioner will be responsible for coordinating these meetings and will be supported by the Child's and Adoption Social Worker. The tasks for the organiser include the following:
  - Organise and appoint a chairperson (this will ideally be chaired by the Permanency Coordinator or an appropriate member of the Adoption Team who has the necessary skills and experience to chair Child Appreciation Meetings).
  - Find and book a suitable venue and organise refreshments. It is important wherever possible that they are held at a venue which is comfortable, accessible and where there is space away from the meeting room i.e. an additional room to allow individuals to have some private time, should this



be required. Facilities for playing DVDs may need to be considered, if these are available.

- Agree how the meeting will be recorded; whether this is via audio or video devices or by a minute taker and to put in place the arrangements for this.
- Identify which professionals should be invited to this meeting: prospective adopter(s), Child's Social Worker, foster carers, contact/support workers, Adoption Social Worker, child's previous Social Worker and previous foster carers, independent reviewing officer, teachers, nursery staff, health visitors, medical professional, psychologist and any other significant professional in the child's life.
- To send out formal invites via a letter and a leaflet explaining what a child appreciation meeting is and what the expectations of the meeting are. The leaflet explains that it is important that attendees bring with them significant memories and anecdotes, as well as any photos, DVDs, paintings, favourite toys, clothing, and any other memorabilia which can be shared with the prospective adopter(s).
- Invitations to child appreciation meetings should be sent as early as possible. Invitations will be saved onto the child's record.
- Ensure arrangements are made for any support that may be needed for individuals to be able to attend the meeting i.e. foster carers may need childcare cover, or support with travel arrangements.
- Send relevant paperwork to the chair of the meeting in advance of the meeting. The Child's Social Worker should provide a genogram and chronology of significant events and moves in the child's life along with an updated Child Permanence Report and any other relevant information/documentation that the chair may benefit from.
- Where individuals cannot or choose not to attend this meeting, the organiser will encourage their contribution through a written report or letter. Again, this information will be saved onto the child's record. However, there is an expectation that, wherever possible all workers attend in person. This is of particular significance for safeguarding and contact/support workers as they hold the richest information of the child's lived experience within the birth family.

## 7.0 The Child Appreciation Meeting:

- 7.1 The person chairing the meeting will ideally be the Permanency Coordinator or an appropriate member of the Adoption Team who has the necessary skills and experience in managing meetings and an understanding of the complexities of preparing both children and families for permanence.
- 7.2 The agenda for a child appreciation meeting should follow a broadly chronological order. The agenda is designed to take participants through a 'guided journey' of the child's life and any impact on the child in terms of 'feelings and experiences'.



- 7.3 The agenda below provides a structure to ensure all key areas are covered but should be used at the chairperson's discretion in terms of what is relevant and appropriate for individual children.
- 7.4 The agenda for this meeting should cover:
- Introductions and housekeeping
  - Recording of meeting explained
  - Context setting and Confidentiality Agreement
  - Introducing the Child; (including a brief profile/pen picture)
  - Child's parental background and their history
  - Child's birth history, which should include the child's holistic needs
  - Child's journey in substitute care, which should include the number of moves, consistency of care, contact, loss, relationships, behaviours, messages child may have received, and how the child is experienced by others
  - What the child's own understanding is of his/her life and how the child has been prepared for permanence
  - The future, which should consider the child's wishes and feelings, contact with birth family (including any siblings that the child is not being placed with), health, education, resilience and protective factors
- 7.5 At the end of the meeting, the chair will sensitively summarise the attendee's contributions presented on the day.

## **8.0 After the Child Appreciation Meeting:**

- 8.1 The minute taker shall forward the finalised minutes securely to the chairperson to ratify via email. The chairperson should then ratify and arrange for the minutes to be saved onto the child's record. If the meeting has been recorded via video or audio, arrangements to be made for this again to be saved onto the child's record.
- 8.2 Between **3-7 working days** of the child appreciation meeting; the Adoption Assessment & Support Social Worker will contact the prospective adopter(s) to securely share either the written minutes, audio or video recording.
- 8.3 Prospective adopter(s) will review and determine whether they have sufficient information to be able to make an informed decision as to whether they are happy to proceed with the adoption match. This time allows prospective adopter(s) to be able to reflect upon and process the information without feeling pressured. This discussion and decision will be recorded on the child's record by the Adoption Assessment & Support Social Worker.

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8.4 If prospective adopter(s) are of the view that they need further clarification on a piece of the information about the child, the Adoption Assessment & Support Social Worker will seek out this information for prospective adopter(s) to enable them to make an informed decision.

## 9.0 Roles and Responsibilities:

- 9.1
- All staff are responsible for following the guidance within this policy.
  - Managers are responsible for enforcing this policy.

