

ADOPTION BY FOSTER CARERS

Adoption by foster carers has many advantages in terms of continuity and stability for a child who is already settled in a placement. There are also advantages in that the carers already know and accept the child's background. They already know that they are able to love the child. Not every foster care adoption is however the best permanency option for a child. If a foster carer expresses an interest in adopting a child or if a worker proposes to encourage a foster carer adoption it is important that there is full consultation to stop foster carers and children getting the wrong message about the care plan for the child. Managers from Child Care Operations, the Family Placement Team and the Adoption Team should all be involved at a planning meeting in taking an initial view of the proposed adoption by the child's foster carer before any discussions are held with the foster carers.

Independent review officers should advise foster carers that there must be a departmental meeting before a response can be given to their request to be considered as adoptive parents. In the early stages no financial commitments should be made about any future arrangements

The following is a checklist to be used by the planning meeting in when a foster carer expresses an interest in adopting a foster child:-

A THE CHILD

- 1. Attachment** – What is the level of the child's attachment to the carer(s) and the carer's family? (Relevant factors to consider will include length of placement, age of child, child's previous history of attachment (or lack of it) and number of moves etc).
- 2. Health** – What are the child's health needs? Can these be met by these particular carers, both now and in the future?
- 3. Child's Siblings** – Does the child need to be placed with siblings elsewhere? Is this more or less important than the child remaining with these carers?

4. **Child's Racial, Cultural, Religious Needs** Is the child's heritage and religion the same as the carers? If not, how could the carers meet these needs? And what is the level of priority given to this compared to the child remaining with these carers?
5. **Contact** What are the long term contact plans for the child with:-
 - a) Birth Parents
 - b) Siblings
 - c) Other Birth Relatives

Are the carers committed to maintaining and encouraging this contact? Should the contact arrangements change because of the proposed adoption?

6. **If this is an Older Child** – What are their wishes and feelings?
7. **View of Birth Parents / Relatives** – What are the views of the birth parents about either adoption by mainstream adopters or adoption by these carers?

Do the birth parents know the identity and whereabouts of the foster home? Does this matter? Do they live nearby and does this matter?

B THE FOSTER CARERS

1. **Why** – why do they wish to adopt this child? Is it an emotional response to wishing to 'rescue' the child or meeting their own needs (say, from having fertility problems themselves) rather than the child's. What is their level of attachment to the child?
2. **Health** – Are they healthy enough to bring up a child into and beyond adulthood?
3. **Age** – Relative to the child's age, are they young enough to have the energy and physical abilities to bring up a child into and beyond adulthood?
4. **The Child's Needs** To what extent can they meet all of the child's needs? (As identified above).
5. **Attitudes to Birth Family** – Will the carers promote positive information and agree to contact where appropriate?

6. **Views of Foster Family / Household** – What are the views of the foster carers' own children, and other household members, and the wider extended family? How will they be affected? Is the child likely to be accepted as a permanent family member? Are there other foster children in the family –how will they be affected? Are there children on other permanency orders – what will be the impact on them?
7. **Space and Sleeping Arrangements** – Is there enough space in the house for this child permanently? Will he / she have their own bedroom?
8. **Fostering Career** – Do the foster carers wish or intend to continue fostering other children and how would this affect this child or vice versa? {NB –Foster carers who adopt are not 'banned' from further fostering, but there is an expectation by Panels and the Agency that there will be a break before more foster children are introduced into the family, to enable this child to become established and secure within the family unit}.
9. **Finances** – What fostering payments are the carers already receiving for the child? Full information should be obtained before a meeting is held. Do the carers receive the experienced carers allowance, sibling enhancements or professional fees? Is any support given for nursery fees or day care?

Is the child eligible for time limited or ongoing adoption financial support? If the child is eligible do the carers know that payments are means tested?
- 10 **Other Orders** – Would Residence Order or a Special Guardianship Order be more appropriate in this situation?