

# **Learning from Pre-Placement Breakdown and Adoptive Placement Disruptions: Practice Guidance for Practitioners**

Document Title	Learning from Pre-Placement Breakdown and Disruptions to Adoptive Placements: Practice Guidance for Practitioners
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## **1. Definitions**

### **Pre-Placement Breakdown**

A Pre-Placement Breakdown is defined as the unplanned termination of planned introductions (Stage 2 of the University of East Anglia Moving to Adoption Model) of a child to adopters prior to placement with the adopters (the point in time at which full-time care is transferred to the adopters and the care is provided within the adopters' home) and after an Agency Decision Maker has made a formal decision that a child should be matched with the adopters. A Pre-Placement Breakdown may occur upon notification from the adopters that they do not wish to proceed with the planned introductions for the child or where the Local Authority for the child makes a decision not to continue with planned introductions.

A pre placement breakdown can also occur when it is planned that a child moves to an adoptive family under an Early Permanence arrangement. The following process will also apply.

### **Disruption**

A Disruption is defined as the unplanned termination of a placement of a child with adopters after the child has been placed (when full-time care is provided within the adopters' home) but prior to the making of an Adoption Order. This includes when a child has been placed in an Early Permanence Placement. A Disruption will occur upon notification from the adopters that they do not wish to continue with the placement and are requesting the immediate or a planned removal of the child, or that the Local Authority for the child makes a decision to plan to remove the child due to concerns.

## **2. Scope of Guidance**

This guidance applies to all children subject to introductions or placement for adoption (or Early Permanence) who are looked after by Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council or South Tyneside Council whether the adopters are assessed, approved and supported by Adopt North East or they are assessed, approved and support by any other Adoption Agency.

This guidance also applies to all children placed with adopters assessed, approved and supported by Adopt North East.

### **3. Principles informing approach**

For both Pre-Placement Breakdown and Disruptions the following principles will be applied:

- The safety and welfare of the child must always be at the centre of professional responses to the unplanned termination of introductions or of an adoptive placement
- Wherever possible, Pre-Placement Breakdown or Placement Disruption should be avoided through the timely and proportionate provision of effective support
- So far as is practical and consistent with safeguarding, changes in the plan and/or care of the child must be as planned as possible and involve the network for the child
- All unplanned termination of introductions or of an adoptive placement will involve a level of trauma – to the child, to the adopters, to their support network and to members of the professional network including the Care Team, Panel and decision-makers. All those involved in dealing with the consequences of a Pre-Placement Breakdown or Disruption must practice with and be subject to sensitivity and with a trauma-informed understanding
- For both Pre-Placement Breakdown and Disruptions it is essential that opportunities are afforded for the development of professional learning and to ensure the preparation of a narrative of events for the child to understand, age appropriately, what has happened

### **4. Process Overview**

For both Pre-Placement Breakdown and Disruptions the following process should be followed:

- i. Either **notification from the adopters** not to proceed with introductions or continue to care for the child or a **decision by the Local Authority** for the child to terminate introductions or remove the child from the adopters
- ii. Urgent **Professionals Planning Meeting** to plan for the child

- iii. **Initial Learning Review Meeting** no earlier than 10 working days from the return of the child to Local Authority care and no later than 20 working days. This meeting is tasked with establishing immediate learning and the preparation of a Learning Summary. Additionally, the meeting will decide whether a formal Disruption Meeting is desirable.
- iv. **Disruption Meeting** no earlier than 28 days and no later than 42 working days after the return of the child to Local Authority care. This is a statutory requirement for children placed for adoption (Regulation 36(10) AAR 2005). The policy also applies to the unplanned termination of Early Permanence Placements. A Pre-Placement Breakdown may be subject to a Disruption Meeting if the Initial Learning Review thinks it would be of benefit.
- v. **Looked After (Child in Care) Review.** A looked after child review must take place no earlier than 20 working days and no later than 35 working days after the date that the child is returned to the Local Authority.
- vi. **Disruption Review Learning Summary.** A finalised and agreed summary (found within the Chair's Report) should be distributed to the Local Authority for the child and the Adoption Agency for the adopters no later than 30 working days following the Disruption Meeting. An anonymised version will be provided to Operational Leadership Group for consideration.
- vii. **Adoption Panel (Summary).** A presentation of the Learning Summary to the Adoption Panel no more than 40 working days after the Disruption Meeting.
- viii. **Adoption Panel (Review of Approval).** The Adoption Panel must subsequently formally consider whether or not the adopters should continue to be approved as suitable to foster or whether to terminate their approval. Panel may also provide advice to the Agency regarding future matching considerations.
- ix. **Agency Decision of Suitability to Adopt.** Within 7 days of receipt of the Minutes of Panel, the Agency Decision Maker must decide on the continuation or termination of approval to adopt.

## 5. Process Guidance

### Pre-Placement Breakdown

When it becomes clear that planned introductions need to be terminated, either at the request of the adoptive parents or because of concerns identified by professionals, an urgent Professionals Planning Meeting should be convened by the child's Local Authority Social Worker and comprise the Social Worker, the adopter's Social Worker, the Local Authority Team Manager with case management responsibility for the child and a Team Manager from Adopt North East. Members of the wider network may be invited if relevant to the immediate planning needs for the child.

The decision to terminate introductions will be either that of the adopters or the responsibility of the Local Authority Team Manager. The decision should be made in consultation with Adopt North East who will have ongoing responsibility to support the adopters.

Within 20 working days of the formal termination of introductions (but no earlier than 10 working days after termination), the Adopt North East Team Manager will convene an Initial Learning Review Meeting. This meeting should comprise, as a minimum, the child's Local Authority Social Worker, the adopter's Social Worker, the Local Authority Team Manager with case management responsibility for the child and a Team Manager from Adopt North East. Members of the wider network may be invited if it is considered that the professional would be able to contribute to the learning.

A Learning Summary from the Review Meeting will be produced by and agreed by the Review participants, co-ordinated by the Adopt North East Team Manager. This is to be provided to all participants for dissemination within 10 working days of the Review Meeting.

Additionally, the Review Meeting must consider whether a formal Disruption Meeting would be of benefit, based on the circumstances that led to the breakdown. This will depend on whether there are significant learning opportunities and whether it is felt that a narrative of events that led to the breakdown of introductions can be developed for the child by the Review Meeting and/or meeting with the adopters without the need for a Disruption Meeting.

The Adopt North East Adoption Panel will be provided with the agreed Learning Summary.

A Review of the Adopters approval as suitable to adopt will be undertaken by the Team Manager for Adopt North East following obtaining learning from a Professionals Meeting or a formal Disruption Meeting and the findings of the review presented to the next available Adoption Panel for consideration of continued approval or termination of approval and advice to the Agency regarding future matching considerations.

### Placement Disruption

When it becomes clear that an adoptive placement needs to be terminated, either at the request of the adoptive parents or because of concerns identified by professionals, an urgent Professionals Planning Meeting should be convened by the child's Local Authority Social Worker and comprise the Social Worker, the adopter's Social Worker, the Local Authority Team Manager with case management responsibility for the child and a Team Manager from Adopt North East. Members of the wider network may be invited if relevant to the immediate planning needs for the child.

The decision to terminate a placement will be either that of the adopters or the responsibility of the Local Authority Team Manager. The decision should be made in consultation with Adopt North East who will have ongoing responsibility to support the adopters.

Where there is an unplanned termination of an adoptive placement prior to the granting of an Adoption Order, both an Initial Learning Reviewing Meeting and a formal Disruption Meeting must be held.

Within 20 working days of the formal termination of placement (but no earlier than 10 working days after termination), the Adopt North East Team Manager will convene an Initial Learning Review Meeting. This meeting should comprise, as a minimum, the child's Local Authority Social Worker, the adopter's Social Worker, the Local Authority Team Manager with case management responsibility for the child and a Team Manager from Adopt North East. Members of the wider network may be invited if it is considered that the professional would be able to contribute to the learning.

Additionally, the Adopt North East Team Manager will organise for a formal Disruption Meeting to be held. It must be held no earlier than 28 days after and no later than 42 days after the date the child was removed from the care of the adopters (Reg 36(10)).

#### Organisational Responsibility

The Adopt North East Team Manager will arrange for the Disruption Meeting to be Chaired and coordinated by an independent person who is an experienced adoption practitioner or manager.

The Adopt North East Team Manager will take responsibility for organising the meeting, including issuing invitations, room booking, identifying a minute taker from the Local Authority involved and engaging with the independent chair.

#### Participants

Persons invited to participate in a Disruption Meeting will normally include:

- The Independent Chairperson
- The child's Local Authority Social Worker
- The adopter's Social Worker
- The adoptive parent/s – they should be invited to attend, or to provide a written contribution if this would be preferable to them. If attendance at the meeting

would be difficult for them they should be offered a meeting with their social worker and manager or the independent chair in order for their views to be heard and shared.

- A support person for the adopters – if they wish to bring a support person to the meeting then decisions will need to be made as to how much of the meeting the supporter can attend and which aspects are confidential.
- Other professionals involved in the child's network such as teachers (it should be a judgement of the Chair as to whether they should be present for the whole or part of the meeting. A written contribution may be sufficient).
- A representative of the fostering service if the child had previously been fostered.
- The child (If the child is of an age to participate). The child should discuss with their allocated social worker how their views can be heard. If they are to be present they will need significant preparation. The chair might visit them beforehand and they will need to know who will be there, the purpose of the meeting, the layout of the room etc. They may be in attendance for some but not all of the meeting. Other ways that they can make their views known are via a meeting with the chair, or they could be helped to write a letter or do a drawing.

Additionally:

- It is good practice to have a visible photograph of the child during the meeting to help participants to keep the child in mind throughout.
- The child's current carer should be invited to submit a written contribution only in respect of the child's current progress. If they are unable to respond their supervising worker should be asked to provide this.
- As the child would have been placed under Adoption Regulations it is not likely to be appropriate to invite birth parents in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.
- The Chair should have access in advance to the Child's Permanence Report (CPR), the adopters Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR), the Matching Report, Adoption Support Plan (ASP), Minutes of the Panels and Placement Planning Meeting and any subsequent Reviews and a brief summary of events prior to and after the disruption.

#### Elements to consider

The purpose of the Placement Disruption Meeting is not to attribute blame. It is important that all participants understand this.

The purpose of Placement Disruption Meetings is to provide all participants with an opportunity to share information, feelings and views about the causes of disruption and to identify the factors that have led to the disruption that can inform a re-assessment of the needs of the child and the capacity of the adopters. Additionally,

learning gained can be used to inform future levels of support for introductions as well as practice and policy development for all agencies involved.

The agenda might include some or all of the following:

- The child's life prior to becoming looked after
- Previous placements prior to being matched with the prospective adopters
- A review the family finding process and the identified placement needs
- A review of the placement planning and the post placement support
- Identify what aspects of the plan worked and why
- Identify what aspects of the plan did not work and why
- Identify what could have been done differently
- Outline implications for future placements for the child
- Outline implications for adoptive parents

#### Actions following the Disruption Meeting

- Minutes of the Disruption Meeting will be provided to the Independent Chair within **5 working days** of the Meeting
- Upon receipt, the Independent Chair will have **20 working days** to:
  - agree that that the Minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting
  - Manage any confidential information that was shared at the meeting which should not be within the main minutes to be distributed to the parties – producing a Confidential Section of the Minutes and written details of who should receive this section and who should not
  - Produce a Disruption Learning Summary of the learning obtained from the meeting
  - Return the Minutes to the Adopt North East Team Manager
- The Adopt North East Team Manager will distribute the Minutes to participants (with or without the Confidential Section based on their role and needs) **within 15 working days of the Disruption Meeting**
- The parties will be given **5 working days to respond** in writing to the report and for their contribution to become part of the record of the Disruption.
- The Adopt North East Team Manager will **finalise** the report for distribution no more than **30 working days after the Disruption Meeting** was held.
- The Learning Summary must be considered by the Adoption Panel within **40 working days** of the Disruption Meeting taking place.
- Subsequently, the Adoption Panel Must consider a review of the continuing approval of the adopters.

#### Funding for Independent Chairing of Disruption Meetings

The Local Authority for the child and Adopt North East will each pay 50% of the costs of obtaining an independent Chair Person to chair a Disruption Meeting on their behalf. The Adopt North East Team Manager is responsible for processing the payment and invoicing the Local Authority.





### Selection and Commission of Independent Chairs

The Adopt North East Team Manager will arrange and commission an Independent Chair from a list of providers agreed by the Operational Leadership Group. The list will be kept under review. The list will include independent persons who are experienced adoption practitioners or managers.