

# **Contact (Family Time) Between the Child, their Family and Others**

## **STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS**

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

- [Standard 1 - The child's wishes and feelings and those significant to them.](#)
- [Standard 9 - Promoting and supporting contact.](#)

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

- [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.](#)
- [Standard 4 - Contact Between the Child and Their Family.](#)

## **Contact (Family Time)**

Contact- now mostly referred to as family time- with family members, previous caregivers, friends, and others is highly valued and important for most children. It plays a crucial role in their sense of identity and belonging and understanding of their lives.

BFFC's IFA emphasises the importance and benefits of contact for both the child and their birth families and foster carers are expected to support and facilitate contact.

We are dedicated to ensuring that contact arrangements prioritise the needs of the child and provide a safe and positive experience for both the child and their family. However, contact may not be possible or beneficial for all children, and in such cases, the safety and well-being of the child is a priority above all else. The details of contact, including location, timing, and supervision requirements, will be outlined in the Placement Plan and might be available at the time of the referral being received by BFFC's IFA. It is essential that foster carers carefully consider their ability to manage the required level of contact before agreeing to care for a child who may need such arrangements. BFFC's IFA will provide support to help you facilitate appropriate and carefully managed contact, whether it is direct or indirect, with the child's family, friends, and previous caregivers, as desired and appropriate. If you have any concerns about the management of contact, please speak with your social worker.

As a foster carer, your role is to promote and provide practical and emotional support to children both before and after their family time. It is generally expected that foster carers will transport children to and from their family time sessions. This ensures familiarity and consistent emotional support from someone who knows best how to respond to any distress or other emotions that may arise after the child's time with their family.

The child's social worker will provide you with all the necessary information, including any risk assessments involving the individuals involved in family time. It is also important to consider how the child communicates with others, including their use of mobile phones, social networking sites, apps, and gaming consoles such as Xbox or Playstation. By taking these factors into consideration, we can reach agreements on how to ensure safe communication (please refer to our guidelines on Internet, Photographs, and Mobile Phones).

Family time can take place either in the foster home or at other suitable locations, depending on what is deemed best for everyone involved. BFFC's IFA together with Children's Social Care will conduct a risk assessment to determine the level of involvement foster carers should have in family

contact, including the possibility of family time taking place in the foster home. Before any decision is made regarding family contact in the home, foster carers will be consulted.

Family time can bring a range of feelings for children and young people to the surface, from excitement to anxiety. It can sometimes cause distress and upset for a child or young person, and as the foster carer, you may be the first to deal with these challenges. It is natural for mixed emotions to arise during such situations.

If you encounter any problems, such as hostility or aggression, it is important to remain calm, protect all individuals involved, and follow the guidance provided by your supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

The paramount consideration is always the child's welfare in addition to their needs, wishes, and feelings. Foster Carers at times might need to advocate on the child's behalf and share their observations of the child's behaviour before and/or after contact. It is therefore essential to document the child's behaviour and reaction before and after family contact. This can help identify patterns that may contribute to future decision-making.

Whilst family time is mostly a positive experience for all involved, it is important to note that there may be various reasons why it does not go as expected:

- The family may feel guilty or angry about their child being in foster care.
- The child may have been placed in emergency care while the family was experiencing problems.
- Parents may feel frustrated or resentful about their children living with foster carers against their wishes and having to comply with plans they disagree with.
- Parents may worry about foster carers taking their place in their child's life, especially considering media stories about foster carers adopting fostered children.
- Parents may also feel a sense of failure, impacting their motivation and reliability.

Understanding the experiences and perspectives of parents can help make sense of the situation for the child and their family. It is essential to seek support and guidance from your supervising social worker to manage your own emotions effectively and provide emotional and practical support to the child.

If you believe that changes should be made to contact arrangements to protect the child from significant harm, it is crucial to inform the child's social worker immediately or within 24 hours. Similarly, if the child returns from contact and you have any concerns about something that was said or done, particularly if you believe it may have harmed the child in any way, you must report it to the child's social worker or a duty worker in their office immediately or within 24 hours.

While face-to-face meetings and visits are generally considered the best way to maintain relationships, other forms of communication, such as letters, phone calls, photograph exchanges, and cards, can also be beneficial in nurturing these connections. It is important to have open discussions with the child's social worker to explore how electronic communication, including video calls, can support positive relationships for children. Foster carers should ensure that children are supported to stay safe online rather than avoiding this form of contact. Childnet has produced helpful information to assist foster carers in considering family time between children/young people and their families through social media and digital devices.

It is not uncommon for children to express a desire to have contact with relatives or friends they may have lost touch with before entering foster care, or with former foster carers. If such requests arise, please speak with your supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

While we strive to enable siblings to live together whenever possible and appropriate, there may be circumstances where this is not feasible. In such cases, it is important to establish arrangements that allow siblings to maintain contact with each other. If the child's siblings are placed with other foster carers, it is crucial to establish a relationship with their carers early on to facilitate ongoing contact between the children. In some instances, the child may be allowed to visit their birth parents at home, including overnight stays. However, these visits must be planned and coordinated through the child's social worker.

## **Confidentiality**

While seeking support or engaging in general discussions with other carers about the children you are caring for is understandable, it is vital to maintain confidentiality. Specific details about children should never be disclosed or identified. BFfC's IFA can provide advice and guidance in this regard.

In summary, family time is an essential aspect of fostering, and it greatly contributes to a child's well-being and sense of identity. By understanding and facilitating contact arrangements, you play a vital role in nurturing and maintaining the child's relationships with their birth family, friends, and other significant individuals.

Your commitment to supporting and promoting positive family time experiences for children will make a lasting impact on their lives. BFfC's IFA, along with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker, will provide the necessary support, guidance, and training to ensure you are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of contact arrangements and foster strong connections for the children in your care.