

Meetings between children and adopters before the matching Panel and ADM

There is an increasing practice of children meeting their prospective adoptive parents before the match has been considered at panel.

A clear example of this is where they meet for the first time at Activity days. This is usually not pre-planned.

However, there can also be planned meetings- often referred to as “chemistry” or “bump into” meetings.

Care needs to be exercised in any meeting taking place pre Panel, as it can raise the expectations of both the children and adopters and pre-empt the decision. Therefore, whether or not to have a meeting will be an individual decision for each child. It is not a requirement for every child. It may be possible to achieve the same purpose by showing the adopters a DVD of the child. The consideration and reasons need to be fully documented in the matching meeting minutes.

The Purpose

The chemistry meeting can bring a child to life in a natural setting. It gives the adopters the opportunity to observe the child. This can be particularly important where the child has some complex needs and it is beneficial to see them in everyday life, interacting with others.

It can also help the adopters “feel” the match- whether they consider they can make a connection or bond with the child.

We need to be clear what we are trying to achieve by having the meeting.

The meeting

There will generally be only one meeting, as anything beyond this becomes introductions. Introductions do not begin until after the Panel and ADM have agreed the match as suitable to meet the child needs. If a second “chemistry” meeting is needed, the reason must be clearly evidenced.

There may or may not be interaction between the child and adopters- this needs to be carefully considered for each child, as the purpose is principally observation.

The setting and duration need to be carefully planned. Examples of suitable places include nursery, school, toddler groups, children’s centres and family centres. Confidentiality must be considered. The foster home will not be appropriate other than for babies and very young children. Public play spaces are not appropriate. It must be separate from any meeting between the foster carer and adopters for other purposes.

At least one of the involved Social Workers must be present. The best person for the child will be a consideration at the matching meeting.

It would not usually be appropriate for children of the adoptive family to be present- they would become involved on day 2 or 3 of introductions.

Preparing children, adopters and foster carers

Care needs to be taken to consider what the child will be told about the meeting- or if they will be aware it is happening if it is a general observation occurring in eg a nursery setting. It is important not to lie to the child, so their age and understanding will be key factors in how much explanation is needed.

Adopters and foster carers need to be fully prepared, including prior agreement about the length of the observation and whether there will be any direct interaction.

Activity Days

Activity Days are usually opportunities for children and adopters to interact, where the adopters are not already being considered as a match for a specific child, and are an important development in Family Finding.

It is sometimes possible to use the Activity Day setting to have a pre-match meeting for the purposes set out above, as it is a safe, confidential and well-regulated setting.

Recording

The meeting needs to be fully recorded on the Adoption files of the child and adopters, by the Social Worker present. This will include the purpose of the meeting, a summary of the interaction and feedback- and analysis.