

Appendix D: **The Placement of Siblings: Together or Apart**

Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together. Being able to live with brothers and sisters (including half-siblings where there is an established relationship) where they are also 'Looked After' is an important protective factor for many children looked after. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person's life, such as leaving care.

A number of factors however, can militate against achieving the positive placement of brothers and sisters together – they may have entered care at different times and/or they may have very different needs related to past experiences, current emotional and behavioural development and age, especially where there are significant age differences. There may be practical difficulties in accommodating large sibling groups together. In some circumstances a child may have been abused by a brother or sister or the sibling group may include one or more children that have developed negative patterns of behaviour and interaction which makes it difficult to meet the parenting needs of all the siblings together. An understanding of family functioning and family history, providing appropriate support to all parties, as well as listening to the wishes and feelings of children, is therefore key to informing these judgements.

There are practical steps that can be taken to overcome some of the more logistical reasons for being unable to place sibling groups together. For instance, where siblings placed together in foster care may be separated when one turns 18, consideration should be given to whether **Staying Put** arrangements may be beneficial for all the children involved.

There will, however, always be circumstances in which it is not possible to place siblings together. Where separation is necessary this must be based upon a proper assessment of the existing relationship between siblings as well as the capacity to meet each child's individual needs, were they to be placed together. It should never be a resource based decision. A sibling assessment can be completed by the child's social worker, but should be informed by the Child and Family Consultation Service where possible. Key considerations in this type of assessment include the experiences of the children prior to entering care, their relationships whilst in care, whether placement together will impact on long term placement stability, or if the significant harm that the children have experienced is such that the siblings would have needs better met by separate placements. Additionally the issue of delay in identifying a suitable placement for siblings has to be balanced against the identified positives of siblings being placed together. If children are separated they must be supported to understand why they cannot live with their siblings. In these circumstances, where it is in the best interests of each individual child, sibling contact should be promoted and maintained.

A decision to separate or to pursue separate placements for **Looked After** siblings should only be taken at a Child Care Review, not at a Permanency Planning Meeting.

Where siblings have been approved for adoption or long term fostering any recommendation that they be separated can be referred to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for advice. Full details of the issues and the action taken in respect of them must be given within the Child's Permanency Report.

Where siblings might not be placed together when a care episode begins, it should not be assumed that they cannot be placed together subsequently. All reasonable efforts should be made to ascertain whether their permanent placement can be within the same family.

If a child has a sibling already placed in an adoptive placement, then active consideration must be given to placing the siblings together. It is good practice to consult families as to whether they wish to be considered as a placement for subsequent siblings.