



Early permanence with



Parents And Children Together

Early permanence resource pack





Early permanence with



Parents And Children Together

Common questions from early permanence carers

Can early permanence carers take the child away with them to stay with friends for a few days without prior discussion with the social worker?

If early permanence carers are planning to go away overnight with the child, they need to inform the local authority in advance and provide the address of where the child will be.

Can early permanence carers take the child on holiday abroad?

Early permanence carers cannot go on holiday without permission or make changes to the child's appearance, for example haircuts and piercings.

If the early permanence carers usually go to church but the parents don't want their child to go with them – who decides?

Parents' views about their child's upbringing, including religious beliefs, need to be respected where possible.





If the parents request certain dietary changes (for example, starting solids at four months), do early permanence carers have to comply with their wishes?

Early permanence carers discuss any changes regarding the child's care, for example, the introduction of solids, with the parents. Any disagreements need to be addressed through the social worker.

Can early permanence carers cancel social worker visits if they want to?

The child's social worker will visit regularly. They have a statutory duty and must adhere to timescales. Early permanence carers would not be expected to cancel or change these without good reason.

Can early permanence carers ask a relative or friend to babysit for the child?

There will be an agreement in advance about close relatives or friends who can look after the child in an emergency or for one off appointments that the carers need to attend.

Do early permanence carers attend court?

Early permanence carers do not attend court or make any statements within the legal proceedings – they are not responsible for decision making for the child.

Can early permanence carers change family time if inconvenient for them?

Frequency and length of family time will be decided by the court; the local authority will make a recommendation; it will be discussed with other parties in court.

Early permanence carers usually bring the child to family time as agreed, unless a significant issue arises, for example, if the child is unwell.

Early permanence carers support the child's time with their family, including the handover.

Early permanence carers should respect the child's family and recognise their role as the child's early permanence carer.

!! Names are important! The child's birth parents are "mummy" and/or "daddy" throughout the early permanence placement.

Can the early permanence carers' parents be called grandma and grandad?

Early permanence carers are not "mummy" or "daddy", so their parents are not "grandma" or "grandad".

Can the early permanence carers register the child under their surname, for example, with their GP?

Early permanence carers cannot make any change to the name by which the child is known.



Early permanence with



Parents And Children Together

Family time (contact) between child and parents

“A significant proportion of parents indicated that if they could not have their child returned to them, they were pleased that they had got to know their adopters through contact and had confidence in them”.

————— Coram Early Permanence Project



Family time

The purpose of family time is for the child to maintain a bond with the parents until a final decision is made as to the plan for the child. This is a child centred approach. If the child returns to live with their parents it is important that they have kept this connection. If the child remains with the early permanence carers and an

Adoption Order is made then the adopters will have got to know the parents well and this can help when talking to the child about their birth family and with ongoing direct or indirect contact.

It is natural to have worries about meeting parents in the early stages; however, once relationships develop, it often becomes a constructive and helpful experience for all.

- It is a feature of many early permanence placements, but not all, as some parents do not engage right from the start.
- Research has evidenced that consistent and quality family time is more important than frequency. On average family time can be two to three times a week or, in some cases, daily; it is ultimately up to the judge as times and days for family time are set in court.
- Parents may attend together or separately. It is dependent on the status of the relationship.
- Family time with family members being assessed may be added later.

Where will it be held?

Most local authorities have their own contact centre or commission services from a contact centre. and will provide a contact supervisor to supervise the sessions. The rooms should be child-friendly with toys and baby equipment available.



The role of the early permanence carer in family time

- To bring the child to family time.
- If possible and safe, to be involved in the handover of the child to the parents and provide updates on the child.
- To let the parents and the contact supervisor know when the next feed or nap is due and when the last nappy change was.
- If not in attendance, to remain available by phone while family time is taking place in case it is disrupted and needs to end early.

What is family time like for early permanence carers?

- Coming to family time several times a week can be disruptive to the child's routine; however, it will be a requirement of the court and is seen as a benefit for the child in the longer term.
- The child may be unsettled after family time. Early permanence carers may experience conflicting feelings of knowing the parent has the right to see the child, but find it hard to see the unsettling impact on the child afterwards.
- Family time can emphasise the lack of control that early permanence carers have in the process.

Family time tips for early permanence carers

- Dress the child in clothes provided by the parents as this shows respect and supports development of a relationship.
- Think of 3 things on the way to family time that can be shared, for example, last nap, last nappy change, blew a raspberry, rolled over. This helps to guide the conversation, particularly at the beginning.
- Keep a separate baby bag for family time as this avoids bills and confidential information ending up in there. Keep it stocked with nappies, food, snacks, favourite book etc.



Family time for the child

- The aim is to create a consistent and positive experience for the child as possible.
- A positive relationship between the carers and parents at handover is important for the child because it is reassuring.
- Bringing a familiar toy/blanket from home for the child to have during family time is comforting for them.
- The child will experience different styles of care and this can be confusing for them.
- The contact supervisor will aim to support the parents and child to minimise the impact of this and they will intervene if the child becomes distressed. The contact supervisor will support maintaining routines where possible.
- Babies can often manage family time more easily, if their care needs are being met.
- As the child gets older, separation from their primary carer can become more challenging.



Family time for the child's parents

- Parents miss and want to see their child. It is disempowering to have your child removed and hard to see them being cared for by another person.
- Family time can be a positive time for them to be with their child. Parents can also develop positive relationships with contact supervisors, who are there to support them in their parenting.
- Parents will have their own views on parenting that may not align with that of early permanence carers and may sometimes appear critical.

Parents understandably want to claim their rights as parents; it is up to the contact supervisor to negotiate any differences.



The role of the contact supervisor in family time

- To create a friendly, honest, respectful environment.
- To ensure boundaries are adhered to.
- To support all parties at the handovers.
- To praise parents when appropriate.
- To model parenting skills during family time and feed back afterwards.

How the contact supervisor supports family time

- Asking the early permanence carers questions about the child and directs answers to the parents at handover.
- Encouraging eye contact and direct communication between early permanence carers and parents where possible.
- Encouraging early permanence carers to refer to parents as 'mum' and 'dad'. This demonstrates that early permanence carers respect them as the child's parents.
- Reassuring early permanence carers that they will be there during family time and will keep the child safe.
- Ensuring that early permanence carers do not reveal confidential personal details.
- Making sure early permanence carers are updated as to the child's routine during family time when early permanence carers pick them up, for example, when fed, slept, etc.



Recording family time

- The contact supervisor will keep a record of all family time sessions for the local authority, including how the parents are managing; their strengths and difficulties, the child's experience, as well as attendance etc.
- If the parents are repeatedly late or not attending, this will be fed back and reviewed by the local authority.
- Alternative arrangements may be made in discussion with the parents, for example, a reduction, or confirmation by the parents that they will attend on the day, to avoid unnecessary disruption for the child.

Possible challenges of family time

- Unreliable family time when a parent does not turn up or is consistently late.
- Replay of negative relationships.
- Sense of diminished influence of the early permanence carer.
- Frequency of family time for a child can be stressful if care is discontinued or is insensitively managed.
- Disruption to child's daily routine can make it difficult for them to experience settled caregiving.
- Children who have experienced trauma pre-birth or after birth may be experience distress from frequent and/or unsatisfactory family time.



Boundaries of family time

A contact agreement meeting is held prior to the start of family time. At this meeting there is the local authority family finder, the child's social worker, the adopter's social worker and maybe a team manager.

Together expectations are set out regarding:

1. Attendance
2. Punctuality
3. Family time not proceeding if parents are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, etc.

Contact supervisors set out their role to ensure the wellbeing of the child, to support parents, to record family time and ensure boundaries are adhered to. They advise on any issues that arise during family time and feed back to the local authority.

Getting support with family time

If early permanence carers need any support around family time they can go to their social worker, speak to the child's social worker or the contact supervisor.



Early permanence with








Parents And Children Together

Early permanence carers' weekly diary sheet

Child's Name:

Week commencing:

Diary entry to include, when relevant, the following: education and development, health, contact, meeting/visits, behaviour, self-care, other events or issues/achievements and any action taken, or professionals contacted. Please refer to prompt sheet.

Milk/other feeds 		
Nappy changes 		
Daily activities 		
Medical 		
Family time/Meetings 		
Observations 		
Emotions displayed 		
Notes:		

Early permanence with



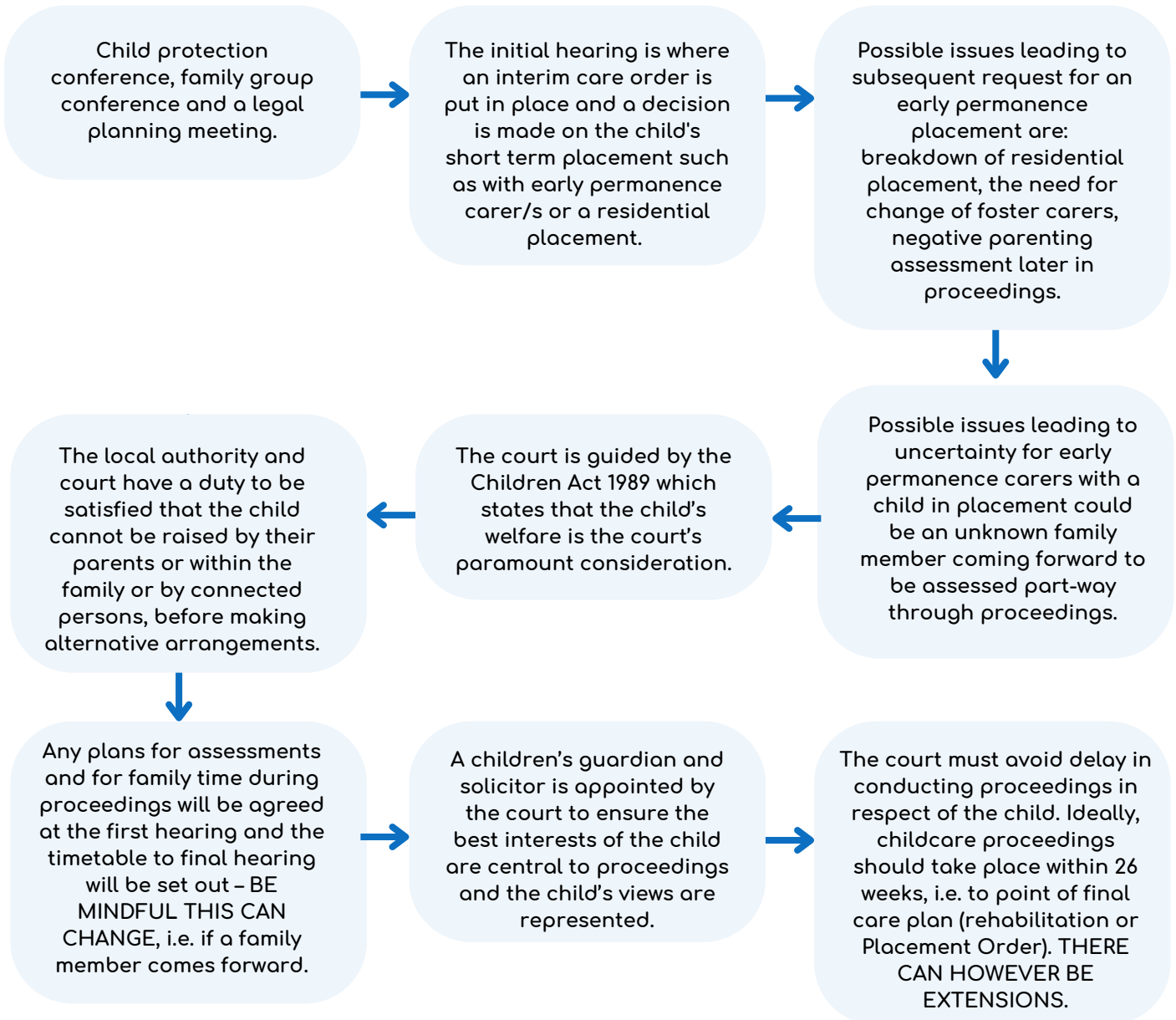
Parents And Children Together



Early permanence legal proceedings



Pre-proceedings



Connected family assessments

Family members or someone who has a significant link to the child, for example, a close family friend, may be assessed in order to determine if they could care for the child.

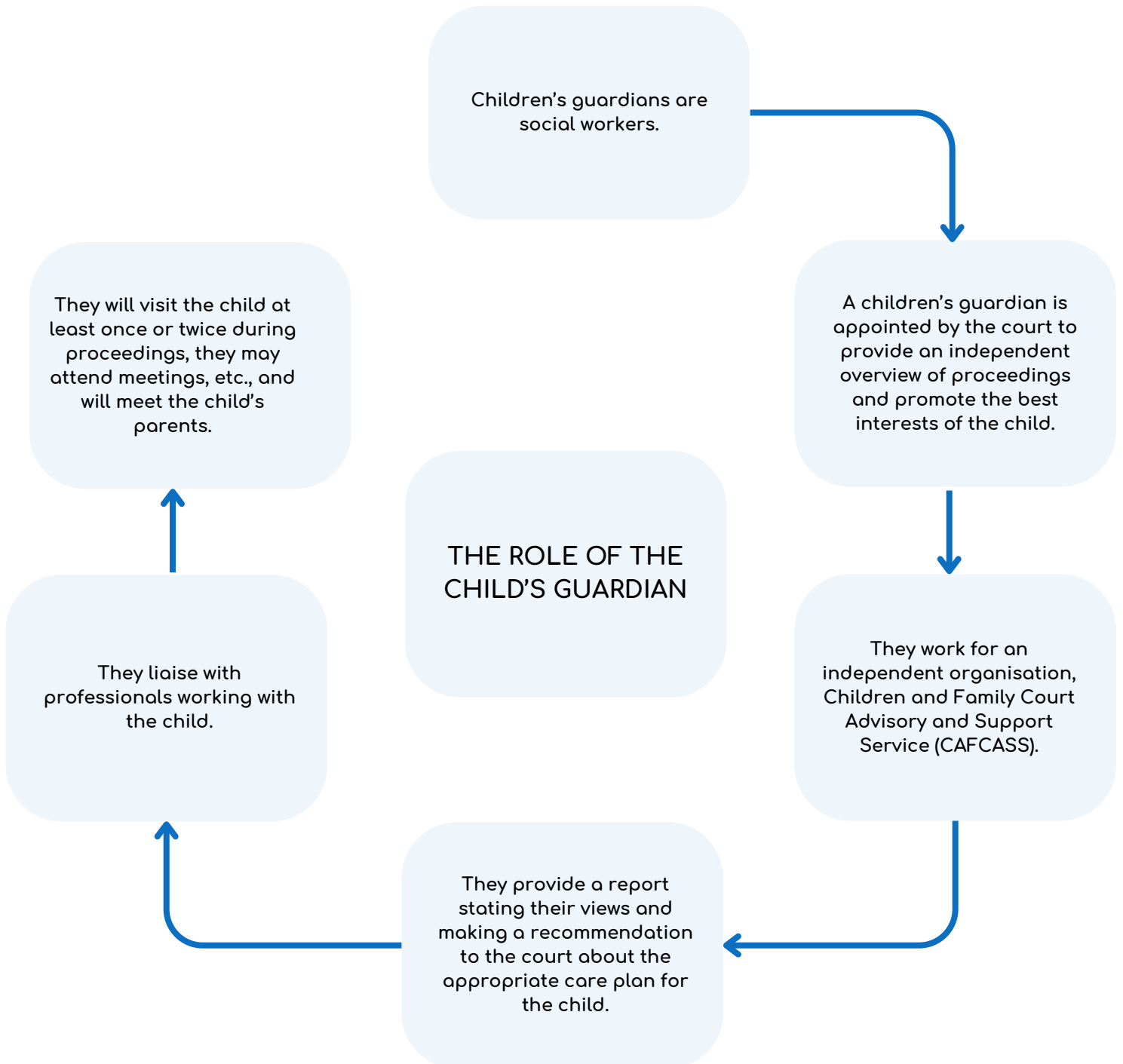


The assessment is completed by a social worker. It is not the same as an adoption assessment. As well as parenting capacity, they assess if they can keep the child safe from, and manage boundaries with, parent/s whom they probably know well. The timeframe for these assessments can vary but ideally they average 10-12 weeks.



Therefore, if someone presents later in proceedings, this can lead to delays in the 26-week timeframe - this may be agreed by the judge as being in the interests of the child.

The role of the child's guardian



Family time (contact)

During the legal proceedings, family time takes place in many cases but not all. Sometimes parents do not engage with family time right from the start.



The purpose is to maintain a bond with the parents until a final decision is made about the plan for the child.

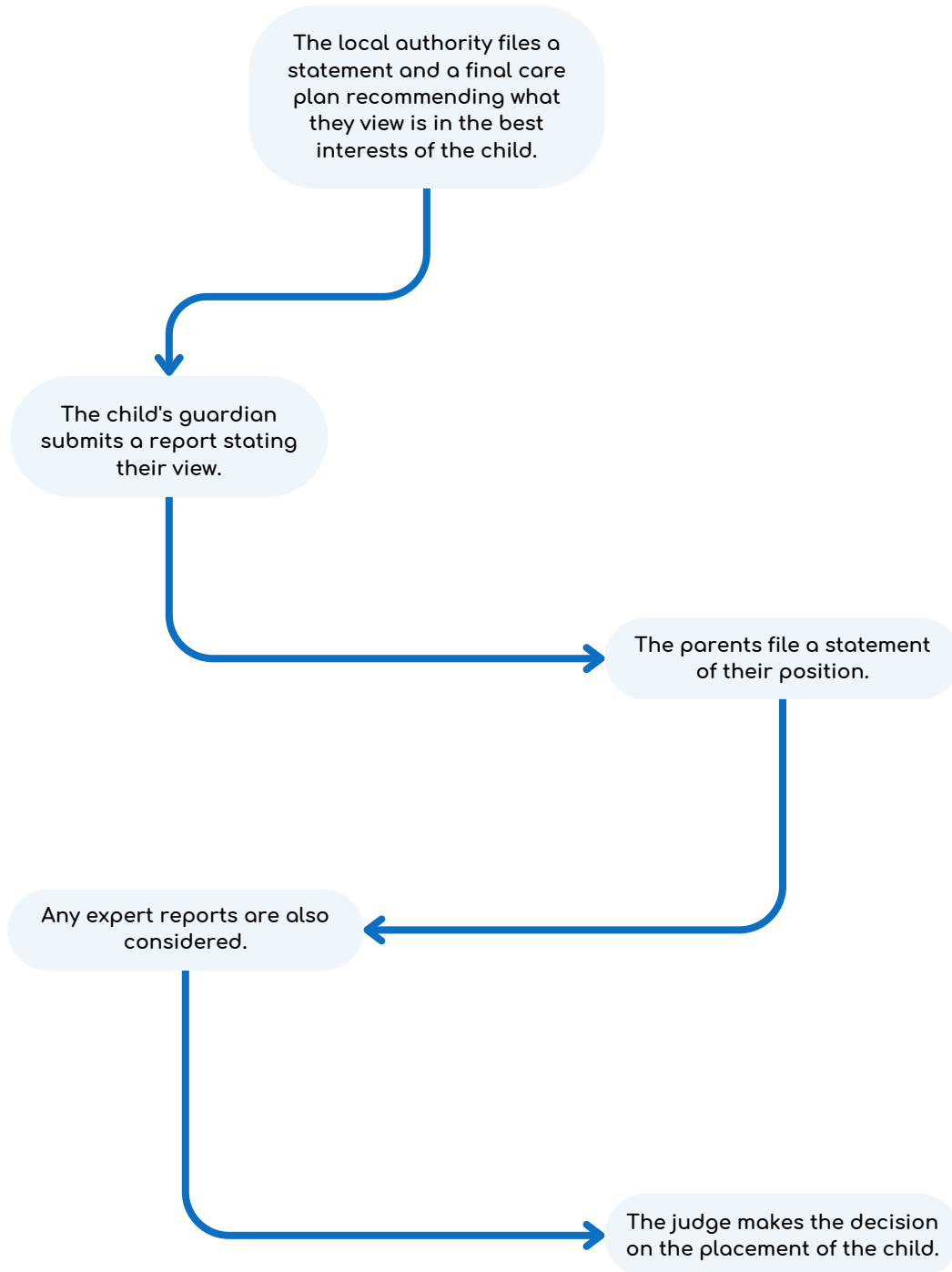


The starting point for children who are 'looked after' by the local authority, is that there will be 'reasonable' contact between the child and their parents and any significant people, e.g. siblings, grandparents.



The judge makes the final decision on contact arrangements, which are on average, three times per week.

Final hearing in care proceedings



How an early permanence placement becomes an adoptive placement

Once the judge has made a Placement Order, plans can be made for adoption.



Where the child has been placed with early permanence foster carers, the local authority adoption panel must still consider the proposed match for the carers to become prospective adopters for the child.



The prospective adopters will be invited to attend the matching panel with their social worker and the child's social worker.



After the panel, the local authority agency decision-maker must agree that the match is appropriate and in the child's best interests.

Adoption Orders

Once approved by the agency decision-maker, prospective adopters can apply to the court for an Adoption Order after the child has been in placement for 10 weeks.

The judge considers the evidence, decides that adoption is in the child's best interests and makes an Adoption Order.

Contact orders can be made in adoption but, post-adoption contact arrangements are usually made by agreement and recorded on file.

An Adoption Order permanently transfers parental responsibility to the adoptive parents and the order removes the parental responsibility of parents and of the local authority.

Parents can ask the court for 'leave to appeal' the Adoption Order. The judge will decide whether to grant this request, based on the evidence put forward; however, there needs to be a significant change of circumstances.



Early permanence with



Parents And Children Together

Early permanence financial considerations

Early permanence financial considerations

Early permanence carers are paid a fostering allowance by the local authority and may receive a grant for initial equipment. They are not entitled to claim child benefit.

Some car insurers will state that, as a foster carer, business use will need to be added to their policy.

Early permanence carers are entitled to receive Statutory Adoption Leave (SAL) and Pay (SAP) from the start of the placement, i.e. when the child is placed with them in foster care. The local authority must provide a letter for employers, notifying them of the proposed placement of the child, which is the equivalent of a matching certificate in confirming Statutory Adoption Pay and Statutory Adoption Leave for employers.

From the same date, prospective early permanence carers who are expecting a child to be placed, will be entitled to time off on five occasions (main carer) or two occasions (secondary carer) for appointments such as introductory and planning meetings.

There is no qualifying period in employment for eligibility for Statutory Adoption Leave, however, early permanence carers are only entitled to Statutory Adoption Pay if they have worked for their employer for 26 weeks and received a minimum level of weekly Statutory Adoption Pay.

Statutory Adoption Pay is 90% of average weekly earnings for six weeks, followed by a flat rate of £172.48 or 90% of weekly earnings, whichever is lower, for 33 weeks. You may get more pay if your employer has a company scheme. Your employer cannot offer you less than the statutory amount. Self-employed early permanence carers are not entitled to Statutory Adoption Pay.



If an early permanence placement becomes an adoptive placement, there is no additional Statutory Adoption Leave or Statutory Adoption Pay granted.

Shared parental leave is an option. There is a 26 week qualifying period in employment. The early permanence carer or partner must be eligible for Statutory Adoption Pay or paternity pay. Up to 52 weeks can be shared between two partners.

Where a placement does not proceed to adoption (for example if the child is reunified with their family), the carers can continue to take leave booked or they can bring it to an end eight weeks before the planned end. There is no requirement to repay the Statutory Adoption Pay. A carer on Statutory Adoption Leave continues to accrue entitlements to adoption leave and pay.



Early permanence with



Parents And Children Together

Information for family and friends of early permanence carers



You will be aware that your family member or friend has been going through the adoption process. They have been approved as an adopter and are now undertaking an early permanence route to becoming an adoptive parent. You may understand what adoption is, but not what adopting through an early permanence placement means.

What does hoping to adopt through early permanence mean?

This means that they will have been assessed and approved as adopters and also as foster carers for a child who needs an early permanence placement. The plan is that they will have a child placed with them who they will act as foster carers for, while the court process takes place and final decisions are made about the child's future.

The local authority may have completed assessments on the child's parents and concluded that they are unable to care safely for the child in the long term, or some of these assessments may still be on-going. The local authority will also look for and assess any possible wider family members for the child and decide whether any are suitable to care for the child.

The local authority will have assessed that there is a high likelihood that the child will need a plan for adoption, however, the court has not yet agreed this plan. It is important to realise that it is possible that the court may not agree with the local authority at the final hearing stage. This could mean that further assessments will be ordered, or the decision made that child should be returned to their family. If the child has been relinquished by their parent(s), this makes the court process somewhat different.



Why might the child return to their family?

Wherever it is safe and possible, children are best being cared for by their family. Sometimes it can be difficult for parents to care for a child and they need additional services to help them meet the needs of their child. For some parents, complex problems and previous parenting histories may prompt the local authority to consider other plans for the child's future at the same time as trying to support the change needed from the parents. Local authorities often work on these plans simultaneously. People can sometimes make significant changes to enable them to care for a child and they must be given every reasonable opportunity to do so, as long as the timescales they are given to change also fit with the needs of the child. The courts may take a view that the local authority has not offered enough support to the parents, or that they must be given more time to make changes.

Adoption is a very big decision to take in a child's life since it severs the legal link between the child and their family for ever. Adoption should only ever be seen as a last resort after all other options have been properly considered. However, if the social work assessments on the parents and the wider family are robust and the options for the child well analysed in the child's care plan, it would not be unreasonable for the local authority to ask the court to agree with their plan.

Why not wait until the final court decision before placing the child for adoption?

Children need a stable and secure permanent home in which to develop and grow. Research shows that being in temporary foster care has significant long term negative effects on children and any unnecessary moves can cause further disruption and trauma.

Children need stability and good quality care, especially in their early years to form secure attachments to their primary carers.



If children develop a secure attachment to their primary carers, this will form their attachment pattern for life. Likewise, if they form insecure or chaotic attachments to their primary carers, it will be very difficult for them to form more functional positive relationships later in life. The goal of all child and family social work is to achieve timely permanence for a child, preferably within their birth family, but if this is not possible, within another suitable family.



Early permanence placements enable a child to start living in their permanent home and begin to form secure attachments to their early permanence carers as early as possible. This avoids months of temporary foster care and then a disruptive move to adopters after a decision that adoption is the right plan for the child is made; the child is already settled in what becomes their permanent adoptive home.

How long can the assessment and decision making process last?

The timescale for completion of the process and the court agreeing to a placement order should be 26 weeks. However, in trying to ensure the right outcome for the child by taking all appropriate avenues, such as birth family assessments and rehabilitation plans, this can mean that some early permanence placements can be extended for several months.

However, this is not common, because the need for the child to be settled in their permanent home as soon as is reasonably possible is paramount.

Is this asking a lot of early permanence carers?



Yes it is, however, the sooner a child is placed in their permanent adoptive home (if that is the plan) the better. Some prospective adopters will also be keen to offer a child the stability of permanence as soon as possible and commit to that child from an earlier stage in their life and in their care journey. Therefore, taking on the uncertainties that can come with this.

Your family member or friend will have been carefully assessed and prepared to undertake this role. They will also be well supported by their social worker, early permanence professionals and other early permanence carers.

How can I help my family member/friend in their role as an early permanence carer?

Being an early permanence carer is demanding and people undertaking this role need understanding, support, and acceptance from those around them.

If you are very closely involved in this journey as a prospective adoptive grandparent or aunt/uncle, you can attend our friends and family training and talk to your friend's/family member's social worker.

Being an early permanence carer support checklist

The points listed may be helpful, but everyone is different, so check what your family member/friend would find helpful.

Remember that the child they have living with them is not their adopted child, but a child they are acting as foster carers for.

- Don't buy 'Congratulations on your new baby' cards.
- Early permanence carers can find it upsetting to have people congratulate them on becoming a 'mummy' or a 'daddy' when they hear a child is living with them.
- Remember that the child they have living with them has birth parents and is still in a relationship with them while assessments continue.
- The carers will have been told to not refer to themselves as 'mummy' and 'daddy' but to use first names. You need to support and to do this as well.
- Refer to yourself by your first name, you are not the child's granny/grandpa/aunt etc.
- The child your family/friend have living with them is in the care system, so confidentiality is important and they will not be able to share much information with you. This needs to be understood and respected.
- When the child is first placed with them your family/friend, they will be focussing on helping the child to build a secure attachment to them. This will mean that they may not seem very sociable to you and you may feel pushed away. Understand they will need to take some time to settle. It is not good for the child's development at this stage to be having contact with lots of different people as it can be confusing for them.
- Have a balanced approach to the situation they are in. It is important to remember that there is still the chance that the child will not remain with them.
- Find ways to manage your own emotions and be balanced around your family member/friend. Think about how you will achieve this before they have a child placed with them.
- Try not to ask questions about the long term, such as which school or nursery the child will attend.





Providing practical support

1. Decide early on with the carers what they want you to tell other people about what is happening; what story do they want you to tell?
2. Be perceptive about what they may need your help with; work out what you can do to support them.
3. Encourage them to ask for help, but also offer help so they don't have to do the asking.
4. Provide them with practical support such as cleaning, cooking, and shopping.

5. Remember that any support you offer or provide will probably be needed for the duration of the placement and not just at the start.

6. Accept that the carers may not be as available to you as they were in the past.

7. Provide the carers with a break by going for a walk with them and the child, or by being in their home so that you can make them tea or play with the child.

8. Be flexible.

Providing emotional support

- Help them to stay focussed on the best interest of the child.
- Help them get through on a day-to-day basis rather than looking too far ahead.
- Provide them with affirmation not criticism.
- Help them to appreciate even small things, for example enjoying the child's milestones and first experiences.



What next?

If the court agrees with the local authority that the child's parents (and the wider family) are unable to provide a safe and secure future home for the child and that adoption is the plan for the child, they will make a full Care Order and Placement Order at court. It is at this stage that your family/friend can begin to think about themselves as the child's prospective adoptive parents.

However, if the adoption is contested by the child's parents, they may still have a long journey ahead of them until they have an Adoption Order and the appeal period has expired.

If you have any questions about anything, please ask to speak to your family/friend's social worker or agency early permanence professionals.

What happens if the child returns to their family?

If the court makes the decision for the child to be returned to their family, your family/friend will need your support through and following this period of supporting the child to return to their family in a planned and carefully managed way. Don't be afraid to ask your family/friend how you can best support them through this emotional time.

Early permanence with



Parents And Children Together

Strengths, skills and qualities needed by early permanence carers

	Could this be a strength (or a vulnerability) for you?	Notes
Reliability and consistency		
Empathy		
Emotional resilience		
Ability to assess and manage risk		
Communication skills with child, parents and support network		
Time management skills		
Patience		
Work with and trust professionals		
Able to drive and have a car		

	Could this be a strength (or a vulnerability) for you?	Notes
Strong relationship if in a couple		
One carer at home at any time		
Proven, robust support network (this is very important if single)		
A child centred approach and advocate		
Managing competing demands and priorities involved in EP		
Commitment to child regardless of loss through reunification with family		
Adaptability		
Knowledge and understanding of child development		
Childcare experience		
Reflective and thoughtful		
Ability to remain calm under pressure		

	Could this be a strength (or a vulnerability) for you?	Notes
Ability to manage feelings in the moment and put them aside until there is space to address them		
Ability to seek out advice and information and ask for support if required		
Ability to ensure you look after yourself and manage stress		
Add your own strengths, skills and qualities		



Early permanency with



Parents And Children Together

Reunification



Reunification

Prospective adopters entering into an early permanence arrangement will inevitably be hoping that the child remains with them, and adoption is the final outcome, but experience tells us that there will be a small number of cases where the child will be returned to the care of either a parent, family member or someone connected to the child.

If the child is to move, early permanence carers will need support to manage changing family time arrangements and to enable a positive transition for the child whilst managing their own feelings.

Planning for a child to return to a parent, family member or to move to someone they are connected to

If a parent, family member or a person connected to the child is identified during court proceedings as a potential carer for the child, it is likely they will be assessed to establish whether they can meet the needs of the child.

If the assessment is positive, it is likely that the local authority will change their care plan for the child from adoption to a placement with the parent, family member or the person connected to the child.

A child will rarely move prior to the final hearing and therefore the child will remain with the early permanence carers. This provides stability for the child at a time of uncertainty.

Family time is likely to continue or new arrangements will be made with the parent, family member or connected person for direct contact with the child. The early permanence carers should meet the family member or connected person before contact commences.

The early permanence carers will take the child to family time which can provoke conflicting feelings for the carer. However, getting to know the parent, family member or connected person helps reduce anxiety as carers will get to know who the child will be living with.

A positive relationship between early permanence carers and those to whom the child will be moving to, is important as it will support the transition for the child.

Making reunification work

- Early permanence carers and whoever the child is moving to will have their social workers to offer support.
- The parents, family members or connected person should be helped to understand what an early permanence arrangement is and to understand the impact on the early permanence carers of the move.
- The focus will be to make the transition as manageable as possible for the child and this must be a shared goal for all involved.
- There needs an acknowledgement that it is an emotionally difficult time for everyone.
- A clear transition plan will be put in place after the final hearing which will consider how many family time sessions over what period and where, depending on the age of the child, length of placement, and whether there has already been contact.
- The transition of the child to their new home can happen over a few days or more, although not usually more than two weeks. The length of time will depend on factors such as how well the child knows the people they will be moving to live with.



Support for early permanence carers after the child has left

Key support will be from the early permanence carers' social worker as they know the carers well and will have an understanding of the circumstances around the child being placed and the decisions made to move the child. They can support carers:



- Identify feelings of loss and grief.
- To consider what happens next: do the carers want to consider adoption again? Do they need a break?
- Help identify people in their network who can offer support.
- To talk to children who are in the carers household who will also be experiencing the loss.
- With a referral to PACT's buddy scheme for support and advice from another early permanence carer.
- To attend PACT's early permanence support group.
- With a referral to the post adoption team for a therapeutic social worker to be allocated. This worker can offer four to six counselling sessions.

Other resources

- [Talking early permanence with Devin – Part 1: Preparing](#) - CATCH
- [Talking early permanence with Devin – Part 2: Early days](#) - CATCH
- [Talking early permanence with Devin – Part 3: Role of the EP carer](#) - CATCH
- [Talking early permanence with Devin – Part 4: Family time](#) - CATCH
- [Talking early permanence with Devin - Part Five: Reunification](#) - CATCH

Early permanance with



Parents And Children Together



Early permanance resource list





Books/Reading

- Concurrent planning - BAAF Adoption and Fostering
- Proposals for Placing Children With Their Potential Adopters Earlier - Department For Education
- Fostering for Adoption: Our story and stories of others – Alice Hill
- Matching a child in early permanence placement: the importance of identity – Coram BAAF
- Our stories – A collection of early permanence experiences - CCS Adoption
- SWAC Reunification Framework
- Room in the Nest – Holly Marlow
- Teo's story – Adopt Thames Valley
- The Role of Fostering for Adoption in Achieving EP for Children – Coram BAAF



Podcasts/Videos

- [Early Permanence Adoption and Loss](#) - Daddy Life London
- [Early Permanence: A Route to Adoption with Pandora Christie](#) - YouCanAdopt
- [Early Permanence and Contact Conference](#) - adoptionadventures
- [Early permanence after infertility](#) - New Family Social
- [Early permanence - when the child returns to birth family](#) - New Family Social
- [Adopting through early permanence](#) - One Adoption Chat
- [Early Permanence and FASD](#) - Heidi's Family
- [Safi's story](#) - Home for Good

Websites/Pages

- [Early permanence](#) - PACT
- [Early permanence](#) - Coram
- [Early permanence for young children](#) - First4Adoption
- [Adopting a young child: Early Permanence](#) - Coram
- [Early Permanence stories](#) - Coram
- [Early permanence blog](#) - Children's Social Care
- [Adoption leave and pay](#) - Acas