

# Moving to Adoption

## Introduction to the Moving to Adoption Model

Adoption provides legal security, love and belonging in a new family. However, a child's move to adoption can also involve the loss of key relationships with birth family members and foster family members as well as their social and cultural identities as part of those families. Research shows when moves are abrupt, with short introductory periods, they can be distressing for children and for adopters and foster carers. Of particular concern, such moves may also be linked to poorer child outcomes, including Disruptions.

Adopt North East and its partner Local Authorities are committed to evidence-informed best practice around introductions. Accordingly, the Agency has adopted the Moving to Adoption model developed by the University of East Anglia. The approach is informed by the Secure Base Model and underpinned by six principles:

1. Opportunities for the foster carers and adopters to build a positive relationship should be promoted at an early stage in the moving process, as this is helpful to the success of the move
2. It is helpful for the adopters and the child to become familiar with each other before the adopters undertake caregiving tasks
3. All arrangements and timescales should focus on the needs of the child
4. The child's feelings about the move should be held in mind, and responded to sensitively
5. Some continuity of foster family relationships and environment will support the child in managing the loss of the foster family and building trust in the adoptive family
6. There should be flexibility in the planning, in consultation with the child, the families and the social workers, to allow for emerging circumstances and needs

The model is not prescriptive in determining how an individual child should be moved to adoption. Instead, it provides a framework for all those involved to promote a secure base for the child during the process of moving from a foster family to an adoptive family.

The Framework is based around three distinct stages of a move:

- Stage 1 – Getting to know each other
- Stage 2 – Making the move
- Stage 3 – Supporting relationships after the move

## Stage 1 – Getting to know each other

***Contacts between foster carers and prospective adopters, without the child present, followed by play dates between foster carers, prospective adopters and the child***

Stage 1 begins after the match with adopters has been identified and agreed but prior to Matching Panel. It involves a **gradual process of familiarisation** in which the foster carers and the adopters, and the adopters and the child, can get to know each other and begin to build trust without the adopters taking on any caregiving tasks for the child.

A **Stage 1 Planning Meeting** should be held between the child's Local Authority Social Worker, Foster Carers, prospective adopters and the adopters' Social Worker. The meeting can take place virtually or in person. The meeting provides an opportunity for the parties to get to know each other as adults and to begin the process of working together to support the child through the move. The Secure Base Developmental Checklist is a useful tool to inform this meeting. It should be completed by the child's Local Authority Social Worker and, where possible, the Foster Carer. The tool can provide a focus for detailed discussion and can also be referred to when considering any changes in the child's behaviour further into introductions.

A **Stage 1 Contact Plan** should be agreed. The needs of any resident children in both the Foster Carers and prospective adopters' families will need to be taken into consideration and the Plan should include them as appropriate.

The **Contact Plan** that emerges should feel to all parties manageable, achievable and sensitive to the child's needs. The meeting should also agree how any proposed changes will be dealt with. The process of change should ensure that any proposals are referred back to the adopters' Social Worker and child's Local Authority Social Worker for agreement. This ensures that there is Social Worker oversight of the Plan.

Whilst the Plan may be changed, any changes should not radically alter the plan and should, at all times, ensure that the child's needs remain central.

The Plan should include in person and telephone contact between Foster Carers and prospective adopters to build their relationship, trust and confidence.

The Plan should also include some play dates with the child. The timing of when play dates commence will be dependent on the needs of the child and the consent of the child's Local Authority (it may not be granted until after a Matching Decision). When play dates start, importantly whilst the prospective adopters may observe and play with the child, they should not take part in any care giving tasks (which should be left to the Foster Carers).

Key to the success of each of the contacts during Stage 1 is that the Foster Carers and adopters are helped to feel comfortable with the idea of getting to know each other, and to understand the value of doing so. It is also important that the professionals communicate well with the families and each other, seeking and sharing feedback and making necessary adjustments

A **Midway Review Meeting** should be planned. This can be in person, virtual or by telephone calls. This should be an informal review of the progress of the Stage 1 Contact Plan. Social Workers may need to be alert to the possibility of relationships between the prospective adopters and foster carers developing quicker than planned and that this can sometimes lead them proposing or indeed making adjustments to the Plan. The Review is an important 'check in' on the appropriateness of speed of the contacts.

At the end of Stage 1, a **Stage 1 Review Meeting** should be held with all parties prior to the progression of the work to stage 2. The meeting will be assisted by the use and updating of the Secure Base Developmental Checklist. This can draw together the perspectives of all members of the Care Team (and the child if appropriate). The meeting is the decision point for whether to progress to the next stage.

## **Stage 2: Making the move**

### ***All the steps to be taken for the child to move from their Foster Family to their Adoptive Family***

Following attendance at Matching Panel and a positive recommendation of a match a **Placement Planning Meeting (PPM)** should be convened as soon as practicably possible. The meeting will be chaired by an Adopt North East Team Manager. In attendance should be the child's Local Authority Social worker, the prospective adopters and their Social Worker, the child's Foster Carers and their Fostering Social Worker.

In advance of the meeting, the adopters' Social Worker will have drafted a **Making the Move Plan** which for Stages 2 and 3, specifically including the proposed date of placement.

The purpose of the PPM is to agree the **Adoption Placement Plan** for the child and the **Making the Move Plan**. Where the child is to be adopted by his or her foster carers, whilst there will be no need for a making the move plan, a Placement Planning Meeting will still be convened, in order to draw up the Adoption Placement Plan to cover the areas other than introductions as set out above and to specify the date when the placement is to be regarded as an adoptive placement. For inter-agency placements, the CoramBAAF **Form H1** will also need to be completed which details the contract between the parties in relation to placement.

The **Adoption Placement Plan** should include:

- Whether the placement is to be made under a Placement Order or with parental consent;
- The practical arrangements for Stage 2 and 3;
- The proposed date of the placement, who will be present when the placement takes place;

- The **Adoption Support Plan** detailing any support to be provided to the prospective adopters to promote the child's educational achievements and participation in leisure activities; to help the child develop positive relationships; and to manage any challenging behaviour which the child may display;
- Whether and to what extent, the exercise of Parental Responsibility by the prospective adopters and/or the birth parents is to be restricted, including the delegation of decision making to the prospective adopters about the child's health needs and under what circumstances consent to medical treatment needs to be obtained;
- The arrangements for the monitoring and supervision of the placement (including contact details of key support staff during office hours and out of hours);
- The dates on which the Life Story Book and any Later Life letters will be passed to the prospective adopters (usually within 10 working days of the adoption ceremony / Court visit, i.e. the ceremony to celebrate the making of the adoption order);
- The date and arrangements for the first **Adoption Review**;
- Any **post-placement contact** between the child and members of his or her birth family
- Clarification of who will make the necessary notifications of the placement

A copy of the final Adoption Placement Plan, signed by the child's social worker, should be given to the prospective adopters, their social worker and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer.

The prospective adopters must confirm in writing that they wish the placement to proceed and that they agree to the Adoption Placement Plan. A copy must be retained on the child's Adoption Case Record.

The **Making the Move Plan** should include:

- Details of the steps required leading up to the child's placement with the prospective adopters
- The programme of and detailed arrangements for their introductions (dates, times, venues, transport and accommodation)
- When and how information (photo book, video clips) will be provided to the child to ensure that s/he has a proper understanding about the accommodation and others living at the prospective adoptive home
- The reimbursement of any expenses of the introductions
- Any other financial assistance to enable the placement to occur
- Where appropriate, a meeting between the parents and the prospective adopters.

Stage 2 of Making a Move Plan should be structured to allow a series of visits by the adopters to the foster home. The visits should cover each part of the daily routine of

the child, including the child waking up, meals, bathing and going to sleep. There should be planned opportunities for the adopters to share and then take the lead in:

- Making drinks, making and serving food or feeding the child
- Nappy changing, toileting, bathing, washing and dressing, daytime naps and bedtime routines
- Offering support when the child is needing help
- Simple outdoor activities that the child is known to enjoy

The plan should be individualised to take into account the specific needs of the child. The age of the child is one factor but each child will be different. For example, some babies will take longer than others to comfortably accept caregiving routines from their prospective adopters. An older child who has been with a foster family for some time may need several months to process her losses and adjust to the realities of the new family life – or be ready to move more quickly in some cases.

The Trusting relationships between the foster carers and adopters, established in Stage 1, will help the foster carers and adopters to work together and be flexible in their caregiving roles.

The plan must be sensitive to the needs and circumstances of the adopters and the foster carers. Geography, personal characteristics, additional responsibilities and the needs of other family members, including any resident children, are all important considerations. Adoption and fostering social workers can ensure that important issues are taken into account for their respective families, but they may also need to promote co-operation and help the two families to understand each other's needs and perspectives.

Planning in time within the plan for rest and reflection can be important for the adults to process the (inevitably) emotionally charged events of Stage 2. The possibility of the plan being adjusted to meet changing needs and circumstances should be held open throughout Stage 2.

A **Mid-way Meeting** should be held and Chaired by the adopters' Social Worker. The meeting should be held prior to introducing the child to the adopters' home. The meeting should review the progress made and specifically consider the child's readiness to make the move to the adopters. The proposed placement date will normally be confirmed at this point. The Secure Base Developmental Checklist should be prepared by the child's Local Authority Social Worker and where possible the Foster Carers and used to inform discussion within the meeting around the child's emotional and psychological state and the consideration of what key indicators are present to show the child is developing trust in the adopters. Consideration should also be given to any resident children of the adopters and how they are adapting to the changes and new relationships being formed. Further mid-way meetings can be arranged if required. The stage 2 plan can be amended accordingly at this point, and more time added if the child requires it.

The child's **first visit to the adoptive home** should be planned on an individual basis.

At the point where the caregiving begins to take place within the adopters' home, (e.g. when the child first goes for a meal) the role of the foster carer should

necessarily change. The child needs to experience the (now familiar) adopters as caregivers and to feel their comfort and reassurance at sensitive points such as going off to sleep or waking up. The role of foster carer, therefore, is to encourage the child to feel that the adopters are safe and loving people and that their home is a safe and enjoyable place to be in.

When the child is being placed at a distance, the foster carer's physical presence will need to be supported by the provision of accommodation nearby. This will need to be considered as part of the Making a Move Plan.

Once visits are taking place within the adopter's home, there should be a plan for the foster carer's physical presence to **reduce gradually, but their psychological presence to remain**. Psychological presence can be achieved in a range of ways. For example, photographs of the foster carers can be placed prominently in the adoptive home and referred to regularly by the adopters and/or the adopters can talk warmly to the child about the foster carers when they are not present. The goal is for the child to continue to benefit from the secure base relationship with the foster carers whilst they begin to build secure base relationships with their new parents.

A final Stage 2 Review Meeting, Chaired by an Adopt North East Team Manager should be held during the **final week of the plan before placement**. This can be in person, virtual or by telephone. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure the adopters, foster carers and social workers all agree that the child is ready for the placement using the Secure Base developmental checklist. The draft plan for the placement day and the Stage 3 should also be reviewed and agreed.

### **Stage 3: Supporting the relationships after the move**

#### ***Developing a child's trust and sense of security and belonging in the adoptive family and the gradual reduction in the role of the Foster Carers***

The placement day marks the formal beginning of the adoptive placement. However, it is critical that the placement day is not be seen as the ending of the child's relationship with the foster carer. Rather, it is a step in the gradual process of the child building trust in the adopters, a process that should be supported by a series of visits from the foster carer after the placement day.

**Stage 3** marks a **shift in the relationships between the foster carers and the child** and the adopters and the child and skilled social work will be needed to support these changes.

The key task for adoptive parents in Stage 3 is to provide secure base caregiving which will help the child to develop their trust and sense of security and belonging in the adoptive family.

The possibility of the plan being adjusted to meet changing needs and circumstances should be held open throughout Stage 3. Foster carers and adopters should feel empowered to make small adjustments between themselves but it should also be clear that suggestions for significant changes to the plan should be referred

to the social workers and the role of the adoption or child's social worker as the co-ordinator of the plan should remain clear.

When trusting relationships between the foster carers and the adopters have been built through Stages 1 and 2, the plan for foster carer visits can reduce anxiety for all: the child will be reassured that she will see the foster carer again after the move, foster carers will be reassured to know that they can help the child to settle in their new home, and adopters will be reassured by knowing that they can rely on the foster carer's support and advice during the early days of the placement.

Good practice at this stage involves a sensitive attunement to the changes that have occurred for the child, some continuity of environment where possible, and a spirit of enjoying and looking forward.

The **Stage 3 Plan** should be structured to allow a series of foster carer visits and contacts with the child and the adopters in the days and weeks after the placement / moving day. The purpose of this contact is to support the child's growing trust in the adoptive parents. There are various ways in which foster carer visits and contacts can achieve this:

- The child's anxiety is reduced by the foster carer visiting the adoptive home. The adopter can provide verbal reassurance that this will happen and older children can benefit by having a chart or calendar that show when the next visit is due.
- The child is reassured by seeing that loved adults do not simply 'disappear' and that they continue to show their care and interest. In the child's mind, this may reduce the risk that the adopters might 'disappear' in a similar way.
- The adopters' anxiety is reduced by knowing that the foster carer is available to provide advice on caregiving, if requested. Adopters who are less anxious may be more able to focus on helping the child to settle and enjoy their new surroundings.
- The foster carer can demonstrate pleasure and enjoyment of the new environment.
- The foster carer can demonstrate trust in the adopters as the caregivers of the child.

An example of stage 3 contacts (approximately 6 weeks) between the adopters, pre-school child and foster carers can be seen below:

- Placement day (day 1)
- Day 2- Foster carer visits the adopter's home for a cup of tea and a chat, but does not get involved in care giving (30 – 60 mins).
- Day 4 – Virtual / face time contact between adopters and foster carers, child to be present and takes part if they wish
- Day 7 - Virtual / face time contact between adopters and foster carers, child to be present and takes part if they wish
- Day 10 – Face to face contact in a park or neutral venue (20 – 30 mins).
- Day 16 - Virtual / face time contact between adopters and foster carers, child to be present and takes part if they wish

- Day 21 – Virtual / face time contact between adopters and foster carers, child to be present and takes part if they wish
- Day 28 – first adoption review, foster carers to attend where possible to be able to share their view on how the child has settled.

The review may recommend a further continued period of contacts or to start reducing contact over the next 2 weeks to a monthly then bi-monthly basis. Contact after that can be flexible to meet the needs of the child, adopters and foster carers.

After the first six weeks of the adoptive placement, it is to be hoped and expected that the child's trust in the adoptive parents will be developing and any visits or contacts with the foster carer planned beyond this point will have a different purpose and value for the child.

The early weeks of an adoption placement can also involve a complex mix of positive and difficult feelings and responses for adopters. As well as happiness and excitement, feelings of anxiety, loss of identity, loneliness, disappointment, low mood and physical symptoms are common and adopters may need encouragement to share these and in some cases receive specialist support and advice.

In addition to the planned social worker visits, adopters should be made aware of their own social worker's planned visits, their availability and who should be contacted if they are not available.

### **Further Information about the model**

Details can be found at:

<https://www.movingtoadoption.co.uk/>