

Family Time Guidance



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Introduction

Making arrangements for family time between a looked after, accommodated or adopted child and their family is a vitally important aspect of a child's life.

This guidance:

- Is for all professionals who have a role to play in supporting and/or facilitating family time. Some professionals may include team managers, social workers and social work assistants across children's social work teams, child in care teams and the fostering service. This guidance may also be helpful for foster carers.
- Aims to support professionals to reflect on the importance of family time for all children and to illustrate why children and young people need to stay connected to their wider family and the diversity of what that can look like for them.
- Focuses on the arrangements for children in care to have family time with their parents, siblings, any relative, friend or other person connected to them and how professionals can support these important relationships to be maintained and developed.
- Is for professionals working with all children who have been separated from their parents and are currently in foster care, however targeted for children and young people who are in care, either in long term foster placements or who are currently subject to on-going care proceedings.

What do we mean by family time?

The term family time refers to all connections between a child and their families of origin and friends, regardless of the form and frequency of these links.

Family time:

- Relates to the arrangements in place that ensures children and young people placed in foster care, residential care, semi-independent, shared housing arrangements or when a Special Guardianship Order is made can continue to maintain and develop relationships with their parents, carers, brothers / sisters, relatives, and friends.
- Can include overnight stays, telephone calls, exchange of letters or photographs or indirect links through third parties.
- Will range from frequent face to face contact to occasional exchanges of information.

For most children, it is in their best interests for effort to be placed on supporting them to have links with birth families and other important people with whom they have built close relationships with. Whilst face to face time together is generally the best way to maintain a relationship, even when there is minimal or no contact, social workers, foster carers and special guardians need to address the need to keep a child connected with their family background. This is hugely important to support a child to develop their own self of identity.

As a Local Authority, Kent has a duty to encourage and promote family time between a child who is in care and their parents, relatives, and friends, unless it is not reasonably practical or consistent with the child's wellbeing and safety.

Why is family time important?

Good quality family time is generally considered to be able to support children by:

- Meeting their psychological and emotional needs.
- Aiding their wellbeing and self-esteem.
- Providing them with information about their ethnic, cultural, genetic, and medical heritage.
- Correcting distorted perceptions of family relationships.
- Meeting their basic needs to feel and be safe during family time.
- Provide them with the freedom to enjoy their relationships with family members.

Evidence from research and practice concludes that for most children who are separated from their parents, siblings, or other close relatives, it is in their best interests to have some contact with their family. From the child's point of view, their birth family is likely always to have a role in their lives, with some looked after children 'thinking about their birth families every day' (Cleaver, 2000). It is therefore imperative that professionals truly understand and appreciate the significance of family time, and their role in supporting family time to take place and for it to be as positive experience as possible for the child.

Stepping away from the term 'contact'

"Other children who are not in care don't have to have "contact" they just see their family" - Kent YP

Language is a powerful tool for communication, but sometimes the way it is used creates stigma and barriers for understanding. Language is power, and we want children and young people to feel listened to and empowered in their care experience.

Nationally and within Kent there is a consensus from young people and their families that the terminology 'contact' is outdated and has a very clinical feel. Suggestions such as family time were considered as a step forward as alternative language to describe the time children and young people get to spend with their family and friends (Sara Ortiz, 2019), and it is a term we are now embracing in Kent.

Five key principles

A set of five key principles have been developed to inform practice when assessing, planning for, arranging, and reviewing family time. It is important that all professionals involved in the supporting and planning of a child/young person's care plan is aware of these principles so they can be considered and underpin plans that are put in place.

It is also important that children and their families are aware of these principles to support their knowledge and understanding of family time, and to ensure they are aware of the expectations on professionals to fulfil these principles.

- 1) Family time between children who are looked after and their parents, sisters, and brothers, any relative, friend or other person connected with the child is prioritised.
- 2) Family time is always for the benefit of the child, and they have a choice about who they wish to see.
- 3) The 'purpose' of family time and these principles is always to be explored and discussed with parents, carers, and children.
- 4) Supervised family time will be facilitated by someone familiar to the child (an extended family member/friend or a key worker/foster carer/care giver) wherever possible.
- 5) The role of the foster carer is to prepare children emotionally for family time and positively explore any post family time feelings.

Detailed descriptions of each principle can be found on Tri-x.

Supporting family time: key relationships

Achieving stability requires a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the children, young people, adults, and families involved face (Research in Practice, 2020).

A key component of ensuring family time works smoothly is based on the relationships between the adults involved. Whilst family time is for the child, it is enacted by adults. If the child can see the important people in their lives getting on

“I have funny feet and I just wanted to know where they are from” - Kent YP

with each other, communicating and working together this will send a powerful message to the child that it is ok to belong to both families and join both of their worlds together.

Families

1. The child

It is the role of the Social Worker to talk to children and young people and listen to what they are saying around how they would like to experience family time. Social Workers need to carefully prepare for these conversations and spend time with children; asking them how they feel and what they think. Whilst children’s verbal responses need to be carefully considered, their physical and behavioural responses also help to make sense of how they are experiencing family time. All professionals involved with the child need to be taking note of how they are before and after family time and notice any changes/differences in their behaviour/presentation.

Liaising with the foster carer and professional network around the child will be key to taking notice of any changes of behaviour that could also be an indication as to how the child is feeling about family time, and how they are managing. Making use of the foster carers daily logs will likely contain valuable insights regarding the child’s presentation before and after family time.

A range of formal and informal opportunities should be available for children to feed into the arrangement of their family time with the people who are important to them. There will be some children who are confident in voicing their opinions in person during meetings, but we also need to consider those who do not always feel able to do so.

2. Relatives/friends

Social Workers must consider the family member/relative/friend of the child and young person when thinking about and planning family time.

Family time with grandparents, aunts, previous foster carers or other significant people from the child’s past may support aspects of the child’s identity, build up their sense of continuity and help keep their story alive. A previous Social Worker, residential worker, teacher, or youth leader may have had a special relationship with a child and may be able to keep links with important aspects of the child’s origins and enhance their sense of worth.

The child's Social Worker should always consider making a referral to Kent's Social Connection Service at the earliest opportunity in order to support and aid the process of identifying lifelong links in a child's life.

Social Workers also need to consider that many relatives will use social network sites to try and locate and contact children; children, permanent carers and adopters should be prepared for this and consider how they manage any risks associated with such contact.

Whenever family time can take place, it is important that the relative/family member is clear of what is expected of them and professionals also consider how things are going for them, how they are supported to come to family time, and how comfortable they are with the situation. Family time agreement meetings should be used for this purpose.

Rob told me he knows why he can't see mum and dad but said "why can't I see nan and aunty Jo? I don't understand, they meant a lot to me." – Kent YP

3. Siblings

When children are separated from their brothers and sisters and placed in different care situations the value and significance of family time may not emerge straight away. Careful consideration needs to be taken when thinking about sibling family time.

Separated siblings may gain more from sustaining relationships with their siblings, than with their parents (City of Edinburgh Council, Children and Families Department, 2014) and whilst the relationship of siblings growing up separately is very different from normal siblings, their shared heritage and shared experiences may be invaluable to them in making sense of their life experience. When planning for sibling family time Social Workers must consider the differing needs of all the siblings.

If it is considered that direct family time is not in the child's best interests, efforts should be made to maintain relationships and share information on behalf of the child throughout their childhood, as this may help them build meaningful relationships in the future.

Professionals and Services

The level of professional support is important to successful family time and Social Workers need to consider which professionals need to be involved and what their role is, or can be, to support it. All professionals need to be aware and conscious of their own role and be mindful of their role in reviewing plans when they aren't going as well as hoped.

1. IRO

The role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) is to make sure looked after children's wishes and feelings are central to high quality Care Plans. Care Plans are reviewed at Child in Care review meetings where the child's voice is heard directly or represented by those caring for them. The IRO leads these meetings and is responsible for reviewing the child's life situation, ensuring everyone supporting the child is acting in their best interests.

The role of the IRO is to chair review meetings, meet with the child on their own to find out about their wishes and feelings, monitor the care the child is receiving and resolve any disputes about the review or the child's care plan. The IRO handbook reminds us that the arrangements for family time in relation to the parents, siblings and other family members or significant others should be considered at every Child in Care review.

2. Supervising Social Worker

Supervising social workers provide support to and monitoring of foster carers. Many foster placements will come under serious pressure and the role of the supervising social worker is vital in preventing and managing these situations to avoid a crisis, and potentially the placement breaking down.

3. Family Time(contact) supervisors/social work assistants

The contact service consists of social work assistants whose role is to support parents/carers whose family time is supervised, to provide safe and child focused sessions.

Kent's contact service has the responsibility to ensure that children are kept safe, and their welfare is promoted. Contact supervisors are also responsible for coordinating and undertaking family time sessions and providing detailed reports that may be used in court proceedings. Rarely, contact supervisors can be requested to attend court hearings relating to supervised family time reports.

It is important that contact supervisors have a high level of knowledge of safeguarding and the impact of trauma for observations to be purposeful and ensure children and their families are supported and kept safe during family time. It is the role of the contact service to lead the family time agreement meetings. These meetings are imperative to ensure children and those they are having family time with are clear of the purpose of their time together.

4. Social Connections Service

The Kent Social Connections Service arranges meetings with immediate families and their support networks to help to address the worries of professionals (usually social workers) and build upon existing strengths.

A range of different meetings can be offered, which all work by aiming to build connections between children, family, friends, and the community to find solutions and solve problems.

Emergency meetings happen at a point of crisis, where the family and professionals are brought together quickly with the right professionals to put an emergency plan together to deal with the crisis.

Restorative Meetings can be used to help improve and repair relationships between people.

Lifelong Links aims to make connections with family members and other people who are important to a child in Local Authority care, with the goal of enabling lasting relationships to be formed which will support the child into adulthood.

“At 16 I need to be part of the decision making for who I see in my family” - YP voiced their opinion at a Lifelong Links meeting.

A referral to Kent’s Social Connection Service can be made through forms on Liberi.

Importance of Foster Carers

Foster carers are crucial to supporting family time and helping children gain an understanding and sense of their history (Sen and Broadhurst, 2011). They can have mixed views and experiences of family time as it can be difficult and stressful at times. At times, foster carers may have to support a resistant child attend family time or may struggle to address their behaviour whilst supervising for fear of undermining a parent and so it is important that they receive practical and emotional support to take a strengths-based approach to family time, whilst also being able to meet the challenges that often emerge both during and after family time.

Foster carers should receive on-going training focusing on the experience of trauma the children they support may experience and develop their understanding on how trauma can affect every area of functioning, including physical, mental, behavioural, and social. Additionally, foster carers should be supported to understand the impact that secondary trauma may have on them as carers.

Planning and Purpose of Family Time

The majority of looked after children have a plan for and want a choice of which birth relatives they have contact with (Morgan, 2009). Contact can be through visits but may also take place on social networking sites, by phone, email or letters. For some children, contact with friends is more important than contact with family.

Contact can help a child maintain their sense of identity and come to terms with what has happened to them. Children often worry about their birth family and contact can help reassure them by letting them see that their parents and siblings are all right. Contact also helps to keep children informed of important changes at home. And for some, contact also plays a role in the assessment of whether return home will be safe (Schofield and Stevenson, 2009; Sen and Broadhurst, 2011).

Planning

Thorough assessment should focus on the purpose of family time in the context of each individual child's well-being, development, and care plan. It should analyse carefully how and why parents, siblings and other family members are involved in children's lives. This analysis will help determine where and how often contact should take place. Assessment of the risks and benefits of contact is a process and decisions need to be reviewed regularly to take account of changes in circumstances and in children's needs and wishes.

The assessment for family time document can be found on tri.x and should be completed by the children's Social Worker, alongside input from the child, birth family, foster carer and supervising social worker. The Assessment for family time t aims to identify the purpose of family time and the families' strengths in relation to family time taking place. This document contains a risk assessment for important information relating to the safety of the child and staff members, that needs to be considered to make sure family time is safe any risks have been identified.

The family time arrangement agreement is a separate document that can also be found on tri.x. The family time arrangement agreement is an agreement that enables all involved parties to be clear on the purpose of family time and the practical arrangements that should be tailored to meet the child's particular needs.

Family time arrangement agreements should be completed by the children's social worker, alongside input from the child, birth family, foster carer and supervising social worker, and should be understood and agreed by all parties. It is imperative that all those involved are aware of the expectations on them and knows that family time will be regularly reviewed.

Family time arrangement agreements should include all the practical details regarding length, venue, participants as well as the focus/purpose of the family time (for example to complete an observation of parenting in a specific area).

When face to face family time has been agreed, careful consideration should then be given to the choice of venue. Factors such as the distance for the child to travel and any locations that may be sensitive for the child, such as bringing up memories should be carefully considered. Arrangements such as who arrives first and who leaves first should also be explored within the family time arrangements agreement.

Family time arrangement agreements should also include the nature of any telephone family time between the parent/family member and the foster carer and/or child.

The Assessment for family time must be reviewed at least every six months, or sooner if any incident or report identifies concerns.

Purpose

The first place to start when thinking about family time, is what is the purpose? Only once we are sure about why we are supporting family time, can we then think about how we are doing it.

The age of the child is an important factor in contact arrangements. For older children (post final Order), it is likely that the focus is on preserving or developing existing relationships, while for infants (pre final Order) the main aim may be to develop the attachment relationship with the birth mother, as well as to teach and assess parenting (Schofield and Stevenson, 2009). Contact in infancy is generally for several hours a day and for three to five (or more) days a week. For adolescents, there is an expectation that they should be allowed to start making their own contact arrangements, however, teenagers often need more help than they receive get in managing relationships with their birth family (Schofield and Stevenson, 2009).

It is crucial to clearly work out and articulate to all those involved beforehand what is expected of them, and be clear about the purpose and goals of the family time. If necessary, it may also be important to explain what timescale this need to be achieved in.

Different Types of Family Time

1. Supervised Family Time

Supervised family time normally takes place when a child is in a permanent arrangement and the purpose of family time is for the children to maintain relationships with their birth family/friends. Some family time is 'supervised' i.e., where there is a professional present during family time to ensure it goes smoothly and those involved adhere to appropriate boundaries.

Supervised family time often takes place when a child is in a permanent arrangement and the purpose of family time is to maintain the child's relationships with family and friends.

There are many other reasons why family time might be supervised, however it normally falls within three categories:

Safety - Where there are concerns about a child's safety.

Assessment - Where there is a need to consider parenting capacity, strength of attachment or viability of a child returning home.

Identity - Where there is a need to promote family time for children in care, primarily in long term placements, to help them understand their origins and create a positive sense of self.

Sometimes, the best arrangement might be for foster carers to supervise family time. The foster carer could be a safe, reassuring adult for the child during what can be a difficult time of conflicting emotions and loyalties for the child. However, this needs to be carefully considered, as the presence of the foster carer may also present some complexities that the child's relatives may find hard to cope with, particularly if they are not in agreement with the child being in foster care. This needs to be explicitly assessed before any decision is made.

If the foster carer is required to observe and record family time, they will receive appropriate training and their records supervised by their supervising social worker.

When family time is supervised and notes are completed, the likelihood is that the supervisor will not participate or get involved throughout the entirety of the session. The role of the supervisor needs to be made extremely clear to all those involved so everyone understands each other's role and the purpose.

The supervisor might want to consider 'checking in' with the family member for five minutes after family time has finished and the child has left to give some feedback and relieve any anxieties the individual may have.

2. Supported Family Time

Supported family time differs from supervised family time, as the role of the professional present is not to observe and is rather to participate. There are many reasons why supported family time may take place. It might be when there are on-going Care Proceedings and/or during an assessment process when families need additional support to improve the care they are providing to their children.

In supported family time, direct observations are made, however the main role of the professional is not just to observe but rather to play a more active role in family time.

The role of the professional can vary and will depend on the goal of family time. The professional's role could be to ensure the comfort of those engaging in the session, or to support the parent/family member to provide good enough care to the child during the session. This could be via a variety of different methods, such as modelling, direct advice and/or coaching.

As with all family time, it is important that time is set aside to offer feedback, any advice and support reflection after each session has ended. This is particularly important with supported family time, as this time will support the parent/family member to ask any questions they are unsure of. It will also provide the professional with important insight regarding if the parent/family member has retained/taken away any of the learning/support that was provided during the session, what went well for the parent/carer and if there is anything that could be done differently to make family time more valuable.

Strength-based questions such as, "Tell me about one part of your parenting during family time that you felt you did really well?" or "What do you think your child enjoyed

during family time today?” will support the parent/family member to reflect on the session and draw on the strengths and positive factors that took place.

3. Virtual Family Time

This is a form of family time that takes place online, using video messaging software like Teams or Skype. Virtual family time can either be supervised or supported, so this will need to be considered when planning for virtual family time.

Virtual family time can be a good way for relationships to be maintained in between face-to-face family time, or in some cases instead of.

Virtual family time should also be considered for children to keep in contact with wider family members, friends, and other possible important people in children’s lives.

4. Indirect Family Time

Indirect family time is used when direct family time is either unsafe, unworkable and/or not in the child’s best interests. The term is a generic term for a wide variety of activities that might be considered as family time. These activities can include sending letters or cards (sometimes called “letterbox contact”) or sending gifts.

In these situations, the role of a professional is often to support this process by ensuring the gifts are appropriate, and letters do not contain inappropriate messages prior to the child receiving these. When considering different types of family time and who is important to the child, it is important that indirect family time is not overlooked and is viewed as just as valuable.

When thinking about the purpose of any family time, to maintain a child’s relationships with a parent, grandparent, sibling, other relative, or another person important in their life is the goal. Therefore, maintaining such relationships whenever possible and by whatever means will likely go a long way in supporting these relationships to be maintained, and will support children to gain a sense of their identity.

5. Adoption family time

Family time arrangements will be discussed prior to the child’s adoption and a voluntary agreement between the two families will normally be arranged. Sometimes the details of the family time arrangements may be included in the court order (<https://www.adoptionuk.org/managing-contact-with-birth-family>).

Adopters will also have received training about family time during their preparation and assessment and their capacity to support a child’s family time with their birth family will have been considered during the linking and matching processes.

6. SGO family time

Family time arrangements are explicitly spelled out for some special guardians as part of their SGO and support plan, while others are expected to make informal

arrangements themselves. The expectation is that special guardians supervise as well as arrange family time, although some initial support can be provided with this, depending on the level of need (www.specialguardiansupport.org.uk).

Of note

It may be that there are a range of family time sessions, such as some supported and some supervised. The purpose of family time needs to be made clear to all involved parties beforehand and preferably the professional involved allows time to debrief with the parent/family member after each family time.

Having lots of changes of supervisors and/or professionals present during family time can be very unsettling for children, and their families.

In line with Principle 4, every effort should be made to ensure there is continuity with the professional/family member/foster carer supporting to facilitate family time. If there are any changes then this should be clearly communicated to the child and family member with enough notice for all involved parties to be prepared for the planned family time with no hidden surprises that may cause added stress or pressure.

Recording

The necessity and purpose of how family time is recorded must be agreed by all who are involved well in advance of family time taking place. This agreement should reduce any misunderstanding or stress during the session and afterwards when what has been recorded is discussed with the parent and/or the child.

What is recorded and in what format will depend on the type of family time that is taking place. This should be well-prepared for in advance and all parties involved, including the child should understand the purpose and format of the session.

It is important to ensure that what is written down and recorded is not the observer's conclusions, but that there are also detailed reasons for those conclusions.

Poor example:

***Happy** to see his parent, **relaxed** throughout the session, played well together, **distressed** at the end, went well, child was **frightened** and **anxious** but soon calmed down.*

The words in bold are conclusion words and do not accurately report what the observer noticed that led to this conclusion.

Better example:

Child did not walk over to his parent when he arrived and stood by the door. Parent picked up toy telephone and made ringing noises, to which the child giggled, ran over to parent, and put his arms around him. Parent continued to play with the telephone and child joined in by taking turns to pretend to answer it.

Kent's Practice Framework

Kent's Practice Framework is an important step towards Kent providing an integrated Service across all Integrated Children's Services and overarches the whole of the Children, Young People and Education Directorate.

Trauma informed approach

In Kent we want to promote trauma informed approaches to family time and support understanding around the differing purposes. It is our aim to maximise the positive impact of family time for children to enhance their sense of identity and well-being, prevent placement breakdown and missing episodes and reduce recurrent proceedings

The hallmark of trauma is that survival strategies are developed to cope after experiencing events that were physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. While these strategies are helpful at the time, they can have long-term consequences that continue even when the child is in a safe environment and no longer at risk.

Traumatised children can be hypervigilant to sights, sounds and smells that remind them of traumatic experiences and without careful consideration and planning, family time with birth families can carry a risk of triggering painful memories. Lots of children and families may find family time challenging or stressful, however if it well planned and prepared for, it can be possible to not only reduce the potential for trauma to a stressful but manageable level, but also reduce the level of stress for the child.

It is anticipated that by using a trauma-informed approach, ensuring time is made to to decide and describe the purpose, implement, supervise and review, family time will lead to better informed decisions for children.

Restorative and Strength-based approaches

Keeping socially connected is key to restorative approaches. Learning to maintain and manage even challenging relationships is a key skill required by all parties for family time to be successful. Restorative approaches used in practice to describe behaviours, interactions and interventions can help to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict.

Social Workers should use restorative approaches to not only support children to maintain their connections but should also focus on strengthening their relationships with children, young people, and families, empowering them to share responsibility by using a solution-focused approach, which supports positive change.

Kent uses a strengths-based and restorative approach, that holds families, young people, and children at the center. It is a fundamental part of our Practice Framework.

Further information and training on Trauma informed, restorative and strengths based approaches can be found on the Kent Academy.

Procedures

Sometimes children only need to be looked after for a short period of time before they return to their family. In other circumstances, the arrangement can be more permanent. Whatever the anticipated arrangement is, it is important that family time is explored, considered, and planned for under all circumstances.

To help decide the best plan for a child and their family, there needs to be an assessment of needs. The assessment includes the child's and parents' views, and together arrangements for the child's care are made.

These arrangements are set out in two documents:

- Care plan
- Placement plan

Care Plan

All looked after children have a Care Plan. The Care Plan is written by the child's Social Worker and, when there are Court proceedings, it is agreed as part of the final court decision.

Children and their families should always be included when Care Plans are written and formulated. The Care Plan should clearly show how their views have been obtained and recorded, and this should be reflected and updated any time it is reviewed.

Amongst other areas (such as the child's educational and health needs), the care plan will also focus on arrangements for family time. The purpose, nature, and frequency of family time will be established in the Care Plan.

The Care Plan needs to focus on making individual plans for individual children. There should be a real emphasis on building the relationship between the child and their birth families/wider support networks, even when it is not planned that the child is going to return home. These may be subject to the requirements of a court if an order is in place and/or proceedings are in process.

The Care Plan will be regularly reviewed in meetings chaired by the IRO.

Any long-term plans regarding family time within a child's Care Plan will be subject to change. This is because we need to recognise that what is best for a child at six months old, will likely be different compared to when they are 6 years old. It is important that Social Workers ensure children, their families and the wider professional network is mindful of this whenever plans are made.

There may be times where social workers feel under pressure by the courts to present guaranteed long term Contact Plans (Family Time Plans), sometimes before

permanent foster care has been decided. If these challenges arise, social workers should give a clear message to the court that any family time plan in a child's final care plan will always be a provisional part of the plan. The rationale behind this is to recognise that the child's wishes, and feelings may change, as may the views/situation of the birth family.

Placement Plan

The practical arrangements for family time should be discussed at the placement agreement meeting and recorded in the Placement Plan. It should set out where and with whom the child will live and any special arrangements, such as travel and any restrictions such as people they cannot see.

The Placement Plan needs to be completed within five days of a child being coming in to care and will then be reviewed in the review for the child or young person. Coordinating family time arrangements is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker, who should talk to the foster carer, the child and the child's family and friends.

Child in Care Review meetings

When a child is looked after, their situation is regularly reviewed. The purpose of review meetings is to discuss the child's care plan, make sure that the right arrangements are in place for the child whilst they are looked after and review changes and decisions from the previous review.

The first meeting takes place within 28 days of a child being looked after. The second meeting is held within the next three months and third meeting and later reviews are held every six months. Please refer to Tri.x for further guidance.

Permanency planning

The purpose of a Permanency Planning Meeting is to consider the most effective route to securing permanency for a child. A Permanency Planning Meeting should be convened at the earliest appropriate opportunity and is the responsibility of the Social Worker. When there are Child Protection or serious Child in Need concerns about a child, and they are at significant risk of coming into care, a Permanency Planning Meeting should always be held prior to the child coming into care and in line with the Legal Planning Process.

Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical, and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity. Who is important to the child such as family members and friends, and how these relationships and links could be maintained should the child come into care should be explored and considered during Permanency Planning meetings?

The permanency planning meeting agenda incorporates the new terminology and principles that underpin family time to ensure that family time is considered and reviewed during [Permanency Planning Meetings](#).

A Permanency Planning Meeting must be held within 20 working days of a decision for a child to enter care or by the first LAC review.

Where the child is accommodated in an emergency, a Permanency Planning Meeting must be held within 20 working days (by the first LAC review).

Every child or young person in care must have an overarching Permanency Plan which is formally agreed at the second Statutory Child in Care Review. That is within four months of coming into care.

A formal Permanency Planning Meeting review should be held every 12 weeks – (following the second LAC review and should fall in between each subsequent LAC review) until permanency has been obtained.

Legal Context

The Children Act 1989 contains a general presumption that parents are entitled to family time with children in care and Local Authorities must “allow reasonable contact” (section 34). This applies whether a child is being looked after by a voluntary arrangement or because of a court order. Section 34 was amended by the Children and Families Act 2014 (section 8) which added further clauses to clarify that this is subject to a local authority’s duty to promote and safeguard a child’s welfare, and Family Time should not be allowed if it would conflict with that duty. In such cases, the Local Authority is under an obligation to demonstrate to the courts that Family Time is not consistent with safeguarding or promoting the child’s welfare.

Arrangements for, against or about the amount family time needs to be thought about carefully. If a Local Authority believes ordered family time is doing harm to a child – either because there is none, too little or too much – this will therefore need to be clearly evidenced, including in its impact on the child’s development and relationships.