

Children's Service

Guidance for Stability Meetings

1. Rationale and purpose

- 1.1 Dorset children who are in the care of the local authority may well have experienced neglect, trauma and abuse. They need stability and a safe place to live, where they have all their needs met, feel safe, are able to explore and express their feelings and have carers who want to understand them. If a child does not feel safe, wanted or have a sense of belonging a placement could become unstable, resulting in a placement change.
- 1.2 Multiple changes of placement are likely to impact a child's emotional wellbeing and sense of self-worth. This can lead to poor self-esteem, blocked trust, and negative behaviour changes. It is therefore vital that the right support is offered to the child and their carers throughout the child's time in placement.
- 1.3 Dorset Children's Services seeks to reduce these risks through its Permanence Strategy, which is focused on the following outcomes for each child in foster care:
- They feel attached to a care giver who provides a stable loving and secure relationship
 - They have a stable secure home environment
- 1.4 Stability Meetings are a means to promote placement stability through multi-agency working, the secure base model¹ and trauma-informed practice; both of these models are grounded in attachment theory. Trauma-informed practice seeks to promote understanding of the child's lived experience and the trauma they have experienced, and to prevent re-traumatisation. The secure base model promotes carers' resilience by empowering them to develop sensitivity towards and acceptance of the child or young person through working with the wider professional group.
- 1.5 This procedure applies to all care placements, including
- Foster care
 - Children's homes
 - Supported Lodgings

¹ [An introduction to the Secure Base model - Groups and Centres \(uea.ac.uk\)](https://www.uea.ac.uk), viewed Nov 2022

- 1.6 Where the young person is in Supported Lodgings, the Stability Meeting should be held within the frameworks provided by the *Tenancy Sustainment and Pre-Eviction Protocol* and the *Joint Protocol for Support of Homeless 16-17 yr. olds*. Both of these documents are in the Local Resources section of the Children's Services Procedures Library.

2. Procedure

- 2.1 A Stability Meeting should be called where:
- The child expresses significant or persistent dissatisfaction with the placement
 - The Foster Carer(s), Home Manager or Provider communicate that they cannot or may not be able to continue with the placement
 - The Fostering Social Worker has concerns as to whether the placement can be sustained
 - The child's Social Worker has concerns as to whether the placement can meet the child's needs, despite the best efforts of all concerned
 - A child in care has had a missing episode
- 2.2 A Stability Meeting may be initiated by any of the following making a request to the Child's Social Worker:
- Fostering Social Worker
 - Children's home manager
 - Supported Lodgings provider
- 2.3 The child's Social Worker may also request a Stability Meeting. Whoever makes the request for a Stability Meeting, the child's Social Work Team Manager must approve it.
- 2.4 Stability Meetings will not be used where there are concerns about the quality of care being provided, or where an allegation has been made against a Foster Carer or children's home employee; there are separate procedures for these instances.
- 2.5 The child's social work Team Manager should chair the Stability Meeting. The child's Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer must be notified of the Stability Meeting.
- 2.6 The Stability Meeting should be held within 48 hours of concerns being notified to the child's Social Worker.
- 2.7 The child's Social Worker should ensure that all relevant parties are invited to the meeting. This is likely to include:
- Young person (if appropriate to do so)

- Foster carer or Placement Key worker
 - Fostering Social Worker and their Manager, children's home Manager or Supported Lodgings provider
 - The child's Social Worker and their manager
 - Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer
 - Any other key professionals who could contribute to the success of the stability plan
- 2.8 The Foster Carer(s) should be invited, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise; in this case, the reasons must be recorded. Even if the Foster Carer is not invited to the meeting, they must be informed about it, and told why they have not been invited.
- 2.9 The purpose of the Stability Meeting is to identify rapid solutions for any difficulties in order to stabilise the placement and to avoid breakdown. It also provides a forum for professionals to hold one another to account for their shared responsibility in meeting the needs of the child.
- 2.10 A Stability Meeting will look to draw on existing supports identified in the initial Placement Planning Meeting as well as identify any additional supports that may support and build resilience in the placement's stability.
- 2.11 The following is a suggested outline for the Stability Meeting:
- Introductions and apologies
 - Chair to explain the Stability Meeting process
 - Reason for the meeting presented by the child's Social Worker
 - Review the strengths and achievements of both the child and the carers/provider during the placement; what resources might they draw on to overcome the current difficulties?
 - Where the risk to the placement arises from the child's conduct, review early life experiences and the impact these may have had, using a trauma-informed approach where this is appropriate
 - What does the child (or their family) say about their past experiences and their current difficulties? What solutions would they like to see in place?
 - Where the child has identified problems with the placement, these should be considered fully, and the carers' or provider's views sought on these issues
 - Encourage open discussion
 - Seek to develop an action plan that has support from all those attending; this will focus primarily on tasks designed to bring about an immediate reduction in the risks to the placement

- Agree a review date not later than ten working days after the original meeting

2.12 Notes of the meeting, and a copy of the agreed action plan, should be circulated to all those attending as soon as possible, and not later than 5 working days after the meeting.