

After the moving day, children can feel reassured by:

- The physical presence of the foster carer in the adoptive home at key times (e.g. feeding and bedtime) during the first day or two.
- A series of planned follow-up visits or meetings with foster family members, which may occur alongside other communication such as Skype/ telephone/video sharing.
- Being helped to talk and think about their foster family, perhaps supported by photographs of foster family members and pets.

In the longer term, the relationships formed in foster care are part of the child's life story, to be recognised and respected, alongside their birth family history. A range of ongoing contact can achieve this goal (for example face to face meetings cards, phone or Skype calls) and should be considered wherever this can occur in ways that are helpful to the child.

- **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.**

In order to manage the complex process of moving a child to adoption, it is important that a detailed plan for the move is drafted, in consultation with each of the professionals, the foster carers, the adopters and, where possible, with the child. However, during the moving process, circumstances may change or unforeseen needs may become apparent and it is important that the plan is responsive to this.

All parties should feel able to suggest adjustments to the plan when needed. Children communicate their views and feelings in different ways and it is important that each child is closely observed and listened to (including being thoughtful about the child who appears 'fine' and is not expressing normal anxiety or uncertainty). Remember that any child (even a young baby) may need longer than expected to build their trust and there may be situations when the plan for the move needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Any proposed changes to the plan should be referred back to the respective social workers. This enables the social workers to ensure that important steps are not overlooked and that the child's needs remain central.



These principles are part of the UEA practice model for moving children to adoption. For further information, see [www.movingtoadoption.co.uk](http://www.movingtoadoption.co.uk)



## Key principles for foster carers and adopters who are helping a child to move to adoption

**When children cannot safely return home from care, adoption provides legal security, love and belonging in a new family.**

But adoption also means that the child must be separated from a foster family where he or she has felt secure and loved, as well as from familiar routines and surroundings. In order to manage these losses,

children of all ages will need the sensitive support and understanding of the adults around them before, during and after the move.

This leaflet outlines six important principles for foster carers and adopters to hold in mind as they work together to help children to move to adoption.

- **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.**

When foster carers and adoptive parents can communicate warmly and openly with each other, the child will see that their foster carers trust the new parents and that the two sets of adults are jointly committed to their on-going comfort and well-being. This in turn will help the child to build their trust in the adopters.

It is helpful for the two sets of adults to get to know each other before the adopters meet the child. With the guidance of social workers, important information about the child's development and daily life can be shared and mutual trust established.

Your social worker will suggest opportunities to get to know each other without professionals or the child present. For example, through informal meetings (perhaps meeting for coffee) or talking through Skype.

- **It is helpful for the adopters and the child to become familiar with each other before the adopters undertake caregiving tasks.**

The child's trust in the adopters will build gradually and it is important for the child to become familiar and comfortable with the adopters, before taking the next step of trusting them to care for him or her. This can be achieved through 'observe and play sessions' in which the adopters can observe the child in the foster home,

play with the child (if the child initiates this/is comfortable with it) read stories or share simple local outings (e.g. to the park) with the child and the foster carer.

During these sessions the foster carer should take the caregiving role and act as a secure base for the child. For example, if the child falls over, the foster carer should offer comfort and reassurance and settle the child. The child's trust will build as they gradually become familiar with their new parents while at the same time being reassured by the availability of the foster carers. In turn, the adopters will build confidence in their capacity to care for the child.

- **All arrangements and timescales should focus on the needs of the child.**

There are important adult timescales (for foster carers, adopters and professionals) to be taken into account when a child moves to adoption and you should discuss your specific needs with your social worker.

However, the key consideration when planning the timescale of the move should be the needs of the individual child. Children vary considerably in their willingness and time taken to build trust in new people. Much will depend on their background history, emotional and actual age and stage of development, their previous moves, and the length of time living in the current foster family.

Foster carers have important understandings of how the child shows their feelings and their capacity to build trust and it is important that these are

shared within the adult network so that an individualised and child-focussed plan for the move can be made.

- **The child's feelings about the move should be held in mind, and responded to sensitively.**

Children of all ages will experience a range of feelings (perhaps excited and hopeful, sad, worried or angry) as they move to adoption. However, children do not always show their feelings directly. For example, some children who are angry or worried become controlling or rejecting towards their close adults. Some children avoid their painful feelings and appear not to care that they are moving, or seem excited and keen to move quickly.

During the introductory period, foster carers and adopters can work together to think about what the child might be thinking and feeling. They can then think about how best to support the child in expressing positive and difficult feelings, both about leaving the foster family and joining the adoptive family.

It is also natural for foster carers and adopters to experience a range of positive and difficult feelings when helping a child to move to adoption and it is equally important for these feelings to be acknowledged and responded to. Make time to think and talk about your feelings – and discuss them with your social worker, who will offer professional support.

- **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.**

When a child moves to adoption, so much of their world changes and there are new experiences to be supported and enjoyed. But children of all ages will benefit if there are some things which can remain the same in their new home. Foster carers and adopters can think together about how to achieve this. For example, think about the child's sensory world. How can the adopters achieve some continuity in what the child will see, hear, taste and smell in their new home?

Sometimes there are significant differences between the two families in lifestyle or cultural practices. Foster carers and adopters may need to work together and with their social workers to think about ways in which these can be respected, while at the same time achieving as much continuity for the child as possible.

When the child makes the move to their new family, it is to be expected that they will miss their foster carers and feel a sense of loss. It is important for them to know that their foster carers have not 'disappeared' and that they continue to hold the child in mind. At the same time, the child's growing trust in their adoptive parents can be supported by the foster carers' warm interest in the child and support for the child's new family membership.