

Appendix Eight: Support with contact arrangements and managing family relationships

North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium

Contact Arrangements: Written Agreement & Guidance

Names of Child/ren:

Date of agreement:

Goals of the agreement:

This agreement aims to make the contact arrangements clear to all involved. The primary aim of contact is for the contact to be positive for the child. The child's welfare must always come first. It is the responsibility and duty of the person who is the Special Guardian to take the lead in making sure that contact is positive and safe for the child.

Expectations regarding contact for parent/s and adults connected to the child.

Parents will continue to be a very important part of a child's life. Maintaining contact will keep your relationship alive. Managing your contact well will help your child know they are cared for and this will help them settle. If your child picks up that you feel worried or upset because of what you say or how you behave, this will cause your child to worry and be unhappy. Your child will feel better if they see that you are well and you and their carer get on. Having contact may bring up painful feelings for you and your child. If you think support would be useful, you could seek support through talking to a trained person on a 1-1 and make sure you have the booklet 'SGO Booklet for Parents'. You can also find a copy on the website <http://www.specialguardiansnorthlondon.co.uk>. It is very important for you to arrive at contact on time. If you are going to be late or have to cancel it is essential that you let the Special Guardian know as soon as possible. The Special Guardian is now responsible for the welfare of your child. They must ensure that contact is a safe and a meaningful experience for your child. If you attend contact under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances the Special Guardian is expected not to allow contact to go ahead. If you are upsetting your child during contact, or you are unreliable in attending contact, the Special Guardian will be expected to stop contact until they can be sure that contact will be a stable experience for your child. In this situation, the Special Guardian may need to seek legal advice.

Expectations regarding contact for Special Guardians:

You are responsible for keeping your Special Guardian child's relationships with their birth family on both the maternal and paternal sides alive. This will be very important to their identity, sense of belonging and self-esteem. Establishing positive relationships will support arrangements to go well. Things like making sure your child is ready and prepared for contact at the agreed time will help. The arrangements will, of course, change as your child matures and they are able to state their wishes as to how they spend their time. You must do what you need to do to make sure that any arrangement is right for your child, their welfare must

always come first. You may need to stop or refuse contact if contact is not safe. If your concerns require you to stop contact with a parent indefinitely, you will need to seek legal advice. If you feel unsure, you can talk over any concerns to the social work team which is responsible for supporting you. If the arrangement has to change, for example because of holidays or illness, it is very important to let the birth parent(s) know as soon as possible. The birth family will appreciate it when you let them know regularly how things are at home and school. If issues arise during contact or for any other reason arrange a time when you can speak to the birth family later on and away from the child. Lastly, never speak negatively about other family members in the presence of the child.

The contact Arrangements.

Name	Relationship to child	Contact details: address, phone/ email.	Type of Contact – face to face, phone, skype, letter. Name of who supervises the contact	Is there any risk or potential upset? If yes, how will this best be managed?	Frequency of contact.	Where contact takes place & details of the arrangements

What can happen/or not happen during contact.

Special occasions: birthdays, festival arrangements, celebrations and buying presents.

Identify any specific arrangement:

Guidance notes.

Are there any risks:

Is contact allowed: Please say whether no contact is permitted and whether there is an order in place prohibiting contact, or whether no order is required as the contact being restricted is not with someone with parental responsibility.

How is the contact to be managed: Detail specific arrangements about how contact is to be managed, i.e. named person to be always present, time limited etc.

Set out the expectations for a range of situations that could happen: child is ill, transport is delayed or cancelled, whether confirmation is required, expectations of how long child is kept waiting due to lateness, feeding the child, buying sweets and toys, doing activities.

People not known to the Special Guardian may want contact because they are connected to the child or become part of the wider family through a romantic relationship. Set out the arrangements for such situations.

Consider any concerns: Include details of offences, allegations and behaviours that could harm a child's welfare, incidents in the child's history or the person's history or if a person arrives for contact and it is suspected that they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Detail what needs to happen if these concerns arise.

Relationship: Please include full list – parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles, wider family, maternal and paternal, not related connected persons and child's friends.

Contact details: address, phone and email

Type of contact: – please list all types of contact that are can take place (e.g. face to face, telephone, skype, cards, email, presents).

Frequency of contact: Include details of the pattern, i.e. weekly, monthly, if arrangements are set or flexible and how is this managed, i.e. according to child’s wishes and wellbeing, who can change the pattern as the child gets older.

Where contact takes place: Include who collects or takes the child and who drops the child off, whether arrangements are set or whether this may change now or in the future, depending on needs and preferences. Include whether contact includes overnight stays and whether this has been part of the child’s history.

Are there any specific requirements: routine needs, food allergies etc.

Please make sure you have a copy of the handbook: SGO Booklet for Parents.

Is a review required? Yes/No

If yes - Review Date

Person	Signature:
Special Guardian	
Special Guardian	
Parent	



Parent	
Other party	
Other party	
Social Worker	

Steps that are helpful when thinking about contact arrangements between children in SG placements and (other members of) their birth families

This document is an attempt to consider the complexity that can and is likely to arise (in families who have experienced significant adversity and/or trauma) when setting up contact arrangements. Every situation is different though, and some of the steps/issues raised may not be relevant in specific situations. It is unlikely that any contact mediation could be undertaken in less than 6 hours and many will need considerably more. For instance, it may emerge during the early sessions that one or more parties is struggling with an unresolved difficult experience, or even trauma, that are related to events leading to the court proceedings, or the child being unable to live with their birth parents. This will necessarily impact upon the progress of the arrangements.

- 1- **Ideally, the first step in the preparatory work is reading of all back ground info and a professionals meeting** with all the relevant professionals involve so that certain aspects of the case that are more difficult to catch on paper can be discussed and the plan for the contact work can set out and commented on.
- 2- The workers (social workers or other mental health practitioner) meet (if necessary several times) and **establish separate working relationships with the various parties** that will eventually be involved in the contact: usually the birth parent/s, possibly other birth family members, the special guardian/s, and the adopted child/ren. The workers will also need space to communicate with each other about the issues faced by each party.
- 3- The following **issues need to be explored** and addressed during these visits:
 - a) birth parents/relatives:
 - are they supportive of the child's being placed with the guardian(s)? Can they speak positively about the guardian?
 - how are they managing unresolved grief/trauma issues around losing the child? Would they be able to manage their feelings around these issues during contact? are they ready to cope with the child approaching the guardian as primary carer?
 - have they got the ability to interact with the child in a child focused manner?
 - could they answer the child's possible questions about why they are not living with their birth parent(s) in an age appropriate manner?
 - can they put the child's needs first for the length of the contact visit?
 - what are their ideas/expectations with regard to the practicalities around the contact, i.e. meeting place, length of meeting, activity, frequency of contacts, who takes care of costs involved, will guardian(s), other birth relatives, social worker be present during contact, and what will their role be?
 - will they exchange gifts (what kind?) photos?
 - how will news from the birth family-good or bad- be shared?
 - what are their ideas, expectations with regard to how the child will call them during the visit?
 - what are the expectations with regard to other contact such as texting/ phone calls/ social network?

Special Guardians:

- are they able to accept that the child may have strong (positive and /or negative feelings) for their birth parents (and other relatives) which may get triggered by contact and may result in an episode of difficult behaviour?
- do they have any major unresolved grief/trauma issues around incidents from the past? would they be able to manage their feelings around these issues during contact? how would they react if the child appeared to prioritise their birthparents during contact?
- can they answer the child's questions about the reasons for leaving their birth family and related matters in an age appropriate manner?
- - what are their ideas/expectations with regard to the practicalities around the contact, i.e. meeting place, length of meeting, activity, frequency of contacts, who takes care of costs involved, will guardian(s), other birth relatives, social worker be present during contact, and what will their role be?
- will they exchange gifts (what kind?) photos?
- do they expect news from the birth parents (good or bad) to be discussed with them prior to being shared with the child?
- what are the expectations with regard to other contact such as texting/ phone calls/ social network?

b) Child in special guardianship placement:

- has the child shown any signs of 'adaptive grieving' so far (i.e. has the child shown any signs of grieving for the loss of the birth parents (whether the child had a conscious awareness of them or not) *This will be most relevant when the envisaged contact is with the birth parents rather than another relative.*
- does the child find it easy/difficult to talk about his/her birth parents? *(At an age appropriate level)*
- has the child struggled with major emotional/behavioural difficulties due to early traumas? how much does the child understand about his early life traumas and whether or not the birth parents were involved in this?
- how likely is it that the child will find contact confusing, and upsetting for other reasons? Will the child be able to process the emotional after effects with their adoptive parent and/or social worker/counsellor?
- what are their ideas/expectations with regard to the practicalities around the contact, i.e. place, length, activity, frequency, presence and role of adoptive parents, other birth relatives, social worker during contact?
- does the child know what they will call their birth parents during the contact, and who will manage the parental role?
- what are the expectations with regard to other contact – not just direct including social networking?
- etc.

4 - To address some of these sensitive issues there may need to be more than one visit per party. **Ideally** there should be **two professional workers** involved, one for the birth family, and one for the SG family; these two workers would obviously work together in the later stages of the process (see below) whilst maintaining a specifically supportive function with regard to their party.

5 - After the above issues have been explored with the various parties, there can be one or more joint meetings (with all adults and counsellors) to plan how contact should take place **in the child's best interest**.

6- Once there has been a contact it would be useful for both parties to have an opportunity to review the contact with their counsellor and to plan how an on-going review process can be built in to the family relationship to managing changing situations. Sometimes people find it helpful to draw up a contract or formal plan.