

# Early Permanence - Fostering for Adoption

## Could you foster a baby or child with the possibility of adoption?

The 'Fostering for Adoption' scheme is used for babies and children who are in local authority care where the plan is likely to be adoption, but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family.



## Why Early Permanence?

Early Permanence protects children from experiencing multiple moves within the care system. It provides children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care whilst detailed assessments of their birth family are completed and the Court decides on the plan for the child. Consistent care for the child reduces possible future harm and it supports the child in developing healthy attachments.

## What does it involve?

Babies and children are placed with approved adopters who have been assessed and approved as dual or temporary foster carers for the child. The early permanence carers will provide the day to day care for the child and will continue to work with the child's social worker to ensure that the child has all of their needs met.

At the same time, the child's social worker will continue working with and assessing the child's birth parents to see if they have made the changes needed to have the child returned to their care. The Court will make the final decision on the plan for the child. If the decision is that the child should be adopted, then fostering for adoption carers can go to an adoption linking panel and if panel agree, will become the adopters for the child. Alternatively, if the Court decides that the child should be returned to their birth family then the child is returned.

## In what circumstances does Early Permanence apply?

An Early Permanence placement will only be made in exceptional circumstances where one of the following reasons applies:

- Where the parents have had one or more children previously placed for adoption or other forms of permanent placement and the evidence strongly suggests that their circumstances have not changed and pose the same risks as they did to the previous child. The local authority does not have a proactive plan to rehabilitate the child as the circumstances of the parents are such to pose serious on-going risk.
- Where this is the first child, the circumstances of the parents and the risks to the child are such that there is no proactive plan to return the child to the birth parents or to other family members.
- Where parent/s indicated that they may want their child adopted, but have not formally consented (S52(3) Adoption and Children Act 2002).
- There are other circumstances where placement with a dually approved carer may be in the best interest of a child, and this would be discussed with you.

## Why is Early Permanence good for the child?

Early permanence enables the child to live with potential adopters, at the earliest opportunity and gives them the opportunity to form an attachment to the new family sooner. National research tells us that moving children and changing their carer once they are in our care further damages their emotional wellbeing and makes it more difficult for them to settle and make relationships in the future. It also means, they can celebrate developmental milestones, key events and build shared memories with a carer they can stay with if they cannot return home.

## Will I be expected to facilitate a lot of contact during the fostering phase?

Yes, there is an expectation that you would be able to carry out the same level of contact that of a normal foster carer for birth parents and extended family. This could be several times a week for a young baby, depending on the court's view and whether a fostering for adoption plan is under consideration. It may also mean you having contact with the birth parents. Our expectations are that you transport the child to and from a Contact Centre and handover the child to a contact supervisor who will observe the family for the duration of the contact. Contact can be very important for children and their parents, but any arrangements must be centered on the child's needs and their welfare. The specific arrangements would be discussed with you. Sometimes the Court may order additional contacts, which if ordered by the Court, West Sussex Local Authority must legally support.

As fostering for adoption carers your confidentiality is protected, so the birth family will not know your private details. If the child has contact, you'll be expected to transport the child to and from a contact centre, where a supervisor will supervise the contact. Fostering for adoption carers will be expected to get the child ready, pack their bag with required items, such as nappies and milk.



## What are the benefits and risks for the carer?

Early permanence carers have the immense satisfaction of providing stability and security for the child at their early stage of development, with the possibility that the child may become their legally adopted child, if agreed by the Court.

Fostering for adoption carers receive thorough preparation and training during their prospective adopter's assessment and post approval.

You'll need to think about the possibility of the court not agreeing the adoption plan and the child leaving

your care. It is important for anybody thinking about early permanence to consider what support they might need, what access they have to support and how they typically deal with stressful, upsetting and painful situations. There will be specific issues to be thought about in Early Permanence placement and you should try to identify what this might mean for you and then discuss this with people who you trust and respect.

## Do carers get financial support?

Yes, early permanence carers will receive a weekly fostering allowance for the child and will be entitled to adoption leave and pay. The child remains a child looked after, so carers will not be able to claim child benefit. West Sussex Adoption Team always recommends that early permanence carers, if employed, speak to their employer to explore their full entitlements. Fostering allowances will cease once the placement has been agreed at adoption linking panel or the child returns to their birth family or is placed in an alternative placement with family friends etc.

## What support is available for Early Permanence carers?

When a child is placed, the early permanence carers are supported by an adoption social worker and fostering supervising social worker who will be able to provide advice and support. The adoption team will provide a fostering handbook and details regarding fostering requirements but also information of any available support groups and training courses will be shared by the fostering supervising social worker in your role as foster carer. They will continue to offer support up until the point of an adoption linking panel or if the child leaves the early permanence placement.

You will receive support from the child's social worker, your adoption social worker and a fostering supervising social worker. This is a different role to adoption as you are fostering under the direct supervision of the Local Authority under Fostering Regulations. As such there is preparation, training and guidance offered at all stages of the fostering phase.

## Do Early Permanence carers have a different type of adopter's assessment?

Early permanence carers are approved adopters who have the skills, emotional resilience and willingness to be able to offer a child a loving and nurturing home whilst living with the uncertainty that the child may be returned to their birth family.

As well as the skills we look for in all prospective adopters, early permanence carers will be expected to demonstrate the following characteristics to care for children in this way:

- ✓ Emotional resilience
- ✓ Capacity to put the child's needs before your own
- ✓ Ability to manage uncertainty
- ✓ Ability to work in partnership with birth parents
- ✓ Ability to support the return of the child to their birth family if it is decided this is their best interests
- ✓ Empathy for birth parents
- ✓ Strong and secure support networks
- ✓ Capacity to positively manage tension and stress
- ✓ Positive outlook

During the prospective adopter's assessment, your adoption social worker will provide further information and training on early permanence. You and your social worker will be able to discuss if you and your family have the special qualities needed to offer a fostering for adoption for a child. The social worker will record your views and their recommendation in your prospective adopter's report. Early permanence placements may not be suitable for everybody.

## How do I become an approved early permanence carer?



Early permanence is not a generic assessment; carers are dually approved as part of their adoption assessment, or following their adoption approval are temporarily approved for a specific child following an assessment of their capacity of the adopters managing against the needs of the child.

Once an approved adopter, you will receive information about children needing early permanence placements. Information will be shared with you about the child; usually this includes information about their health, development, birth family history and the reasons why they are unable to live with their birth family. Your

adoption social worker will support you in deciding if you feel that you would be able to meet the child's needs and will liaise with the child's social worker to find out further information.



If the child's social worker feels that you are a good match and that you are able to meet the child's needs, then they will visit you and your family at home to discuss the match further, they may show you reports, photos if the child has been born, and will want to explore how you feel you'll manage the uncertainties, how you'll meet the child's physical, emotional and contact needs.

If agreed by all parties that you are able to meet the child's needs then you will need to confirm this in writing. If not dually approved already, the adoption social worker will then complete an assessment, which you will need to read, agree and sign, which is provided to the fostering Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for their recommendation.

If agreed by the fostering ADM you then become a temporary foster carer for the child. Your social worker and the child's social workers will discuss with you when the child will come to live with you. The child's social worker will continue to visit the child at your home and will keep you updated regarding the plan for the child. Your fostering and adoption workers will continue to visit and offer support in relation to your fostering role throughout the care proceedings for that child.

If, during the care proceedings the Court decides that the child should be adopted, then your adoption social worker in agreement with the child's social worker may recommend that you go to linking panel. If the link between you and the child is recommended by adoption panel, the placement will cease being a fostering placement and it becomes an adoption placement. At this point your fostering payments will cease.

Once the child has lived with you for ten or more weeks, your adoption social worker can advise you on how you can apply to court for an Adoption Order.



## More information

To find out more about fostering for adoption visit [www.westsussex.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/adoption)

If you would like to talk to us about any adoption issue, call **0330 222 7777**

or email us at [adoption.team@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.team@westsussex.gov.uk)

