



Adopt North East

Early Permanence

Information for friends and family of Early Permanence carers



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Who is this information for?

You may be aware that your friend or family member has been thinking about Adoption for some time, but now they are talking about adopting through 'Early Permanence'. We hope this information leaflet will help to clarify what Early Permanence is and how this might be different to other routes of adoption.

Your friend or family member has chosen to adopt via Early Permanence, what does this mean?

Early Permanence is a route to adoption which involves a child being placed with prospective adopters who are temporarily approved as the child's foster carer. Unlike other routes to adoption, it allows a child who cannot live with their birth family to be looked after by approved adopters, who are temporary foster carers, whilst future plans are decided by the Court. Early Permanence reduces the amount of moves children experience as they do not have to move from a foster family to their adoptive family, should their plan become one of adoption.

An Early Permanence carer will foster a child for the duration of the court process, and until final decisions are made at Court about the child's future. The Local Authority will be considering adoption as a possible plan for the child, whilst also continuing to work with the child's birth family to determine if the child can grow up within their birth family. This may include completing 'Parenting Assessments' or 'Viability Assessments' with wider family members.

For the child, there are two plans running in tandem; Plan A is reunification to the family, and if this cannot be achieved, then Plan B is adoption. It is important to remember that the Court makes decisions about the child and not the Local Authority, and therefore until final decisions are made there is a possibility the child would be returned to their birth family.

Why not wait until all the decision making is over before placing the child with adopters?

We know from research that children need stability and good quality care, especially in their early years, in order to develop, grow, and form secure attachments to their primary carers. If children develop a secure attachment to their primary carers this will form their attachment pattern for life. Likewise, if they form insecure or chaotic attachments to their primary carers it will be very difficult for them to form more functional positive relationships later in life. Therefore, the goal of all child and family social work is to achieve timely permanence for a child, preferably within their birth family but if this is not possible within another suitable family. Early Permanence placements enable a child to start living in their potential permanent home and begin to form secure attachments to their Early Permanence carers as early as possible.

For the child it avoids them spending time living with a temporary foster carer, and then having to transition to their adoptive family. Even for young children this change in carer is a loss and can take time to recover.

Early Permanence also gives the opportunity for the potential adoptive family to experience as many firsts with the child in their care, and if that child does go on to be adopted, the stories and memories can be shared directly with the child as they grow.





Why might the child go back to live with their birth family?

Adoption is a very drastic step for a child because it severs the legal link between them and their birth family. For this reason, Adoption is defined within English law as being a last resort, only to be considered after all other options. The reasons for a child being returned to their birth family can vary depending on each individual situation, however some of the reasons are discussed below.

For some parents, complex problems and circumstances can make it difficult for them to care for a child safely, and they may need additional support and services to help them make suitable adjustments or changes. In some situations, the Local Authority may be prompted to initially consider a plan of separation for a child due to the level of worry and concern for their safety, whilst at the same time, trying to support change within the birth family. To prevent delay for the child, Local Authorities often work on these plans simultaneously.

In some circumstances, parents can sometimes make the necessary changes to enable them to care for a child and they must be given every reasonable opportunity to do so, so long as the timescales also fit the needs of the child. In circumstances where the necessary change has been evidenced and sustained, it might be that a 'reunification' plan is decided by the Court.

Children are best brought up within their families of birth wherever this is safe and possible. In some cases, extended family members who might not have been previously known to the Local Authority may express a wish to care for the child; this might include a step-aunt or a connected person to the family, or a father who is only identified within the process of Court proceedings. Should one of these assessments with wider family members be positive, then a reunification plan to extended family members may be decided by the Court.

Isn't this asking a lot of Early Permanence carers?

Yes, you are right, it is. However, research shows that the sooner a child is placed in their permanent adoptive home (if that is their plan) the better. Some adopters will also be keen to offer a child the stability of permanence as soon as possible and commit to that child from an earlier stage in their lives and in their care journey. Your friend or family member will have been carefully assessed and prepared to undertake this role. They will also be well supported by their social worker. If you are very closely involved in this journey as a prospective adoptive grandparent or aunt/uncle hopefully you will have been given the opportunity to attend an information session or some training yourselves. However, don't worry if this hasn't happened, as it should still be possible for you to get to talk to your family member's social worker.



How can I help the person I know who is an Early Permanence carer?

It is great that you are asking this question as being an EP carer is demanding and people undertaking this role will need understanding, support and acceptance from those around them.

Below is a list of points that may be useful. But remember everyone is different so it may be best for you to check out with them what they would find helpful.

Support around identity:

- Remember that the child your friend / family member is caring for is not 'their' child, but a child they are looking after whilst decisions are being made. This means, Early Permanence carers are told not to refer to themselves as 'mummy' and 'daddy' and instead to use first names. Some Early Permanence carers have found it very hard to have people congratulate them on becoming a 'mummy or a daddy' when the decision for that child is still being made.
- Refer to yourselves by your first name, and remember you are not the child's Granny/ Grandpa/ Auntie etc. Also please don't buy 'Congratulations on your new baby' cards, instead if you wish to send a card or gift, send it to the child who can take it with them if they leave.

- The child has a mummy and daddy who they may go and spend time with each week whilst assessments continue. This is important for the child but may be an emotionally hard time for your friend / family member. At this time, they may need extra emotional support from you, or someone who will listen to them, without judgement.

Support around confidentiality:

- Because the child they are caring for is not 'their child' confidentiality is important, and this means your friend / family member will not be able to share much information with you. Please understand this and refrain from asking too many questions.
- Decide up front with the Early Permanence carers what they want you to tell other people about what is happening. This will be helpful to ensure other people within their support network are not getting mixed messages.
- When the child is first placed with them your friend or family member will be focussing on helping the child to build a secure attachment to them. This will mean that they may not seem very sociable to you, and you may feel pushed away. Please understand that this will be something they have been asked to do, to help the child settle. It would not be good for the child's development at this stage to be having contact with lots of different people.

Practical support:

- Be perceptive about what they may need your help with – work out what you can do for them and consult with them. Sometimes, help with practical tasks such as cleaning, cooking, shopping can be very helpful.
- Encourage them to ask for help but also offer so that they don't have to do the asking.
- Help them get through on a day-to-day basis rather than looking too far ahead. For example, try not to ask questions about the long term, such as which school or nursery they will attend.

Emotional support:

- Being an Early Permanence carer is challenging. Just 'being there' for your friend or family member can be a great support. Listening, but not asking lots of questions or giving your own opinions can help.
- Have a balanced approach to the situation and remember there is a chance that the child may not remain with them; it is therefore not helpful to be too gushing!
- Find ways to manage your own emotions and be balanced around the carers. Think about how you will achieve this before they have a child placed with them.
- Accept that the carers may not be as available to you as they were in the past.
- From time to time, remind them why they decided to become Early Permanence carers.
- Gently help them to stay focussed on the best interest of the child and help them to appreciate even small things. For example, enjoying the child's milestones and first experiences.
- Your friend or family member may be struggling with very strong feelings at times. If you have strong feelings triggered by this process, try to get support for yourself so that you don't end up burdening the Early Permanence carer with your feelings to cope with as well.



When will the Early Permanence phase end?

At the end of the Court proceedings the Judge will make their final decision to determine if the child's plan should be one of adoption or reunification. If the Court agrees that the child's birth parents and wider family members are not able to provide a safe and secure future home, they will make a full Care Order and Placement Order and endorse a plan of adoption. It is at this stage that your friend or family member can begin to think about themselves as the child's prospective adoptive parent. However, if the adoption is contested by the birth parents, they may still have a long journey ahead of them until they have an Adoption Order and the appeal period has expired.

If the Court does not endorse a plan of adoption, then a plan of reunification will be created, and this will include your friend / family member. These plans look different for each child and will be discussed at the appropriate time.

If you have any questions about anything in this information sheet, please contact your friend or family member's assessing social worker.

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