



Adopt North East

Early Permanence Information for Professionals



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What is Early Permanence?

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.

For the duration of the Court Proceedings, the birth family has regular contact with their child and is given the opportunity to show that they can care for the child in the future. The Early Permanence carers agree to take the child to supervised family time sessions on a frequent basis (as directed by the court) and to support a plan of rehabilitation to the birth family if this is deemed in the child's best interest. If the courts decide that the birth family has shown that they can meet the child's needs, the child will be rehabilitated home, and the Early Permanence carers have the satisfaction of knowing that they have played an important part in the child's life story. However, if the Court decides that the plan to return the child has not been successful, the Early Permanence carers go on to adopt the child.

Some professionals who come across Early Permanence carers for the first time are often concerned about whether the carers fully understand what they are taking on and whether they are emotionally robust enough to deal with this. Early Permanence carers will have been thoroughly assessed, trained and prepared for this role.

Early Permanence carers are prepared about the possibility that a child might return home, and they are told that there are always two plans running in tandem; Plan A is reunification to family and only if that cannot be achieved, then Plan B is adoption. Whilst in the fostering phase Early Permanence carers are looking after a child/children under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and therefore they recognise that they are not 'Mummy and Daddy'. In your role, as a professional, it is important to keep Early Permanence carers in 'fostering mode'. It would be unfair to allow them to begin to think of themselves as the child's parents whilst assessments are being undertaken and there is a possibility of reunification with birth family.



How to Support Early Permanence carers?

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of carers personal information including their surname, address, email address and contact details is crucial in these placements due to them being potential adoptive parents. Please be mindful of all information that is shared verbally, electronically and written. Breaches in confidentiality may jeopardise the possibility of the placement becoming an adoptive one.

Please also ensure that any referrals to other services (including other Health services) highlight that the carers details need to remain confidential. This is especially important if EP carers are visiting babies/children in hospital. We have had cases previously where birth parents have been sent appointments for their children with the carer's full details on whilst the children are in Early Permanence placements.



Clear multi-agency working

It is important that there are positive multi-agency relationships and clear communication between professionals to ensure the best outcomes for the child/children and their families. There will be a number of professionals involved with the child and the carers. These could include:

Childs Social Worker – a social worker from the Local Authority who will co-ordinate the decision making for the child.

Supervising Social Worker – a social worker from the Local Authority fostering service who will support the Early Permanence carers to meet the requirements of being a foster carer.

Adoption Social worker – a social worker from the Regional Adoption Agency who will support the Early Permanence carers from the point of assessment through to a child being adopted.

Independent Reviewing Officer – In independent person who will have oversight of the care planning for the child. They will chair and lead review meetings.

Family Time supervisor – A person who will facilitate and support the child to spend time with their birth family members.



Do's and Don't for Professionals

As Early Permanence carers hope to expand their family through adoption, there are few things professionals need to be mindful of:

- Please **do not** ask for their surnames, address, details of the GP or any other details which might identify their local area during meetings involving birth parents or other family members.
- Please be aware that carers will only sign their first names on documents or when signing into buildings and they may not write down their car registration number.
- Please also be mindful of birth parent confidentiality. Early Permanence carers are foster carers initially and as such, may not be entitled to all information regarding birth parents.
- Health visitors please take off your lanyard at Review meetings so that the placement location isn't identified. Please also be mindful of what is recorded in the child's health record as this will be shared with parents during family time so it shouldn't have personal details of the Early Permanence carers.
- Please **do not** leave birth parents and Early Permanence carers alone. This can place both parties in an uncomfortable and vulnerable position.
- Please **do not** refer to Early Permanence carers as "mummy or daddy" until the plan is adoption is confirmed and they have been formally matched at panel.
- Please keep the allocated supervising social worker and adoption social worker updated. As we are sure you can appreciate, Early Permanence carers live with and manage a great deal of uncertainty. They are emotionally invested in the child they are caring for and need to be kept up to date accordingly to prevent any unnecessary anxiety.
- Please do carefully consider what feedback is given to Early Permanence carers. For example, please sensitively manage what information is shared following family time.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and help with these issues. Early Permanence is a complex and emotional process that puts children at the forefront. Following this guidance will help us to ensure that the child gets the best possible care and experience in their placement, whatever the outcome.

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