

Maintaining relationships standards survey

Introduction

We really value your time and consideration in providing feedback on this survey to support the development of National Practice Standards for Maintaining Relationships for Adopted Children. Adoption England will be drafting the standards, collating feedback from experts by experience and professionals across the sector to develop the standards.

Adoption England have written other practice standards which you may want to refer to before completing this survey to assist your thinking: [Early Permanence standards](#) and [Matching standards](#). These standards are not prescriptive or mandated; rather, they aim to stimulate practice improvement, foster innovative thinking, and improve practice towards consistently achieving the best outcomes for children across the country.

For additional insights, we recommend reading this [brief article regarding the significance of openness in adoption](#). The survey questions have been categorised based on the individual's relationship to adoption, that is, those personally affected by adoption and those who have a professional role.

If your role/relationship is not listed or you wish to provide input on all 11 starting points, please select the last option below. Please note that none of the questions are mandatory after this page.

Your feedback is highly valued and will be carefully considered. We anticipate sharing the initial draft with you early in 2025.

Kind regards,
Vicky Swift
Practice and Development Lead for Adoption England – Maintaining Relationships

Please select the option below that best fits your role:

- Adopted person, adoptee
- Adopter
- Birth relative or significant other
- RAA/VAA adoption social worker, team manager, leader, or support worker
- Child's social worker, team manager, or assistant social worker (all areas of social care)
- PSW (principle social worker)
- Senior management in LAs (ADMs, senior leadership, directors of children's social care)
- Support worker (including children's centre staff)
- IRO, or IRO manager
- Cafcass practitioner
- Local Family Justice Board Chairs network member
- Not listed/wish to comment on all 11 starting points

Starting point 1

When there is the possibility that a child may become cared for by the local authority (LA), it is essential for all practitioners, managers, and leaders from all organisations involved in supporting the child and family to take active responsibility to ensure that a child's birth family and friends' network is identified, documented and considered in care planning decisions.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 2

Where a child is cared for by the LA and a plan of permanence is still to be determined, preserving a child's connections to their birth family network is important and actively explored to support birth parents or provide care for a child as part of assessments completed. The quality of family time during proceedings will also assist in identifying the support needed for Staying in touch (SiT)/contact plans and indicate the potential for future meaningful relationships.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 3

Where adoption is chosen as the preferred permanence option, all birth family members and significant individuals who have been part of the child's life need to be explored as potential relationships for supporting ongoing Staying in Touch (contact) plans for the child. Such plans must be tailored to each child, be meaningful, regularly/timely reviewed, and subject to open discussions involving everyone involved in care planning and including the voice of the child / their network i.e., older siblings. It is essential that these plans are not viewed as rigid templates but rather as customised, flexible approaches reflecting each child's unique circumstances.

The Cafcass guardian and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) play crucial roles in ensuring that plans for maintaining relationships are effectively communicated among professionals and caregivers or future adoptive parent/s. This communication is facilitated through tools like the guardian's report/outcome letter to the IRO and the guardian's later life letter to the child (this is NOT a replacement for the CSW later life letter and is in addition to).

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 4

The Child Permanence Report (CPR) clearly defines the family members /significant people identified in the Staying-in-Touch (contact) plan, outlining the support provided and specifying how the person will maintain a connection with the child through different methods (such as using digital platforms or having face-to-face meetings). This will also be reviewed at the point of a match for a child with adopters and due consideration given to the implications of and of not Staying in Touch for that child. Possibly considering a presumption that the child will stay in touch and reasons not to fulfil this would need to be clear.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

Agree

Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 5

The Prospective Adopter Report (PAR) should thoroughly explore openness to Staying in Touch (contact) alongside parenting capacity and other elements of the PAR. It is essential for all practitioners, managers, leaders, and decision makers to support adopters to understand and embrace expectations, that Staying in Touch (contact) is not a one off scheduled event but a life-long endeavour. Staying in Touch (contact) should not be seen as a separate element of an adoptive parents' capability but one that is a strength or vulnerability and central to support an adopted person's life-long needs.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 6

When the search for an adoptive family begins, it is important that all professionals involved recognise the needs of the child and the importance of the Staying in Touch plan (contact). It is essential that they make every effort to ensure that prospective adopters are thoughtfully matched to meet both the child's short term and their longer term needs regarding their identity, understanding their history, coping with loss and understanding changing needs as children grow and develop. The Staying in Touch plan (contact) can also support life story work and should be seen as in conjunction with rather than a separate element of a child's needs.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 7

If a child moves in with an adoptive family that differs from their cultural birth identity, it is crucial for all practitioners, managers, leaders, and organisations to acknowledge the responsibility of supporting adoptive parents to build connections with birth parents/relatives or significant others to help respect and maintain a child's cultural identity. Practitioners can support birth family to contribute to the CPR, to ensure connections regarding their culture or ethnicity are retained. Practitioners and managers make use of research evidence and tools (e.g. the [AFDIT](#)) to assist in this process. All aspects of a child's cultural identity must be considered including, but not exclusively: Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender identity, sexuality.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 8

Once a child moves in with their adoptive family all professionals involved actively facilitate and support the development/building of relationships between adoptive parents and individuals considered within the plan, and appreciate and evaluate both the positives and possible negatives of any evolving Staying in Touch (SiT) plan (contact). This is inclusive of the support needed to ensure adopters wishes and feelings are considered to support a healthy and positive experience for children. Professionals should maintain an open mind to SiT/contact plans and a “if not now, maybe in the future” attitude.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

Agree

Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 9

Ongoing adoption support should recognise the importance of providing support for birth relatives /significant others and adoptive parents, with timely reviews of Staying in Touch plans (contact), addressing evolving needs at various ages and stages in an adopted child's life as they grow up. Those around the child, professionals, adoptive parents, connected birth relatives or significant others should also recognise the importance of other evolving needs from varying life stages of the adults around that child. – i.e. elderly birth grandparents, new births within the family of origin.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 10

Adopted children will be able to maintain relationships with their siblings. This is not to detract away from birth relatives and significant others but highlighted by children and young people to be of significance to them. This includes siblings in other adoptive families and those that remain with birth relatives or significant others, whether they be full, half or step siblings as these categorisations may hold little meaning for children themselves and the closeness of their relationships. Professionals and adults should not make assumptions based on such terms.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Starting point 11

Adopter Journey: Consideration by professionals working with adopters to support Staying in Touch plans (contact) for safe and appropriate contact with their birth parents, significant others, and siblings. Recognising the collaborative effort of all parties involved in developing Staying in Touch plans (contact), focused on the well-being of the child/young person. These messages can be embedded throughout a RAAs service from information evenings, preparation training events, matching and support services.

Do you agree or disagree with this starting point?

- Agree
- Disagree

Would you add any comments or suggestions to the starting point, such as how you would meet this and what considerations are needed to achieve this outcome?

Closing thoughts

Do you have any suggestions on what the National Practice standards for maintaining relationships should be named?

Do you have any other comments or feedback?