

Parent and Child Fostering

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In 2019, we held a further focus group to see what had changed since the earlier publication, and to consider current best practice. We are very grateful to those who attended and shared material. They are acknowledged below. We would also like to thank our administrator, Sara Saleh, for co-ordinating and supporting that event.

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Attendees at the parent and child focus group – October 2019

Dawn Bailey, Brighton and Hove Council
Stephanie Badley, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Gwyn Davies, foster carer
Margaret Gardiner, Diagrama and foster carer
Kelly Goodwin, London Borough of Bromley
Maria Hargreaves, Somerset County Council
Hannah Longdon, Lancashire County Council
Lara McKeever, Western Health and Social Care Trust, Northern Ireland
Zanele Mukonyora, London Borough of Greenwich
Sue Murray, Hertfordshire County Council
Gail Norman, Team Fostering
Lucy November, Research Fellow, King's College London, and foster carer
Patricia Palmer-Williams, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mark Pethick, Pathway Care
Joanne Sharples, Olive Branch
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Notes about the authors

Paul Adams qualified as a social worker in 1993, having been inspired by working as a foster carer in the US, and has a background in local authority children's services, managing child care and fostering teams. He is an experienced Chair of fostering and adoption panels, interim manager, consultant, trainer, and an adopter.

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Paul lives in North Wales with his partner Sarah and rescue dog Simba.

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Elaine is now CoramBAAF's Adoption Development Consultant. She has written a number of books for BAAF and CoramBAAF, including *Undertaking an Adoption Assessment* (updated in 2017), *Devising a Placement Plan* (updated in 2018), and co-authored *Parent and Child Fostering* (with Paul Adams), *Adoption by Foster Carers* (with Viv Howorth), *Completing a Child's Permanence Report* (with Lyn Bugarski *et al*), *Preparing to Adopt – England* (with a BAAF author team), and *The Role of Fostering for Adoption in Achieving Early Permanence for Children* (with Viv Howorth).

Elaine lives in West Sussex with her husband, Steve.

Introduction

Parent and child fostering is a specialist fostering arrangement in which a child and their mother and/or father live with approved foster carers in a formalised arrangement. According to the Department for Education (DfE) (2019), five per cent of approved foster carers in England at the time of publication were approved to provide parent and child foster care. The demand for parent and child fostering continues to grow (Fostering Network, 2017) and some independent services in England and Wales note that referrals for such arrangements constitute more than 10 per cent of their total referrals.

Although there have always been examples of parents being in foster homes with their children, these have tended to be *ad hoc* arrangements designed to allow teenage parents, often themselves looked after, to remain with their baby in a safe and supportive environment. The emphasis in these arrangements has largely been on supporting and helping these young mothers to become competent parents, rather than formally assessing the quality of parenting. While this is important, it constitutes a small part of the parent and child fostering that is currently taking place.

The growth of parent and child fostering in England and Wales has been in relation to parents – mainly adults – whose ability to safely care for their child in the community is in question, and where the family court is involved. These parents – most commonly mothers with young babies – would historically have been assessed within a residential care setting, allowing mother and baby to remain together in a safe environment while a specialist assessment of their parenting took place. However, changes to legal aid funding in England and Wales in October 2007 meant that costs relating to a residential assessment of a child could no longer be charged to the Legal Services Commission (England), leaving the local authority responsible for these costs. Taylor (2008) suggests that this resulted in a significant reduction in the making of residential placements.

This led to local authorities looking for a cheaper alternative, and in a context where even given significant child protection concerns, the courts were increasingly reluctant to separate parents from their babies. Justice Munby (2013) described the separation of a parent and child as a ‘draconian and extremely harsh measure which demands extraordinarily compelling justification’, and talked about the need for daily contact between a baby and mother, enough to allow her to breastfeed the child (Schofield and Simmonds, 2011).

The solution that was arrived at was to arrange for the parent and child to be placed together in a foster home, and with early anecdotal evidence about the success of this approach, it increasingly became the norm. In response to the demand, local authorities and independent fostering providers (IFPs) in England and Wales began to develop their parent and child fostering services, and pockets of expertise were established. Where previously parent and child fostering had been primarily offered to children who became mothers while in the care system, the new demand was for placements of adults with their children, usually in the context of care proceedings in England and Wales.

Anecdotal evidence shared by practitioners at a CoramBAAF-organised focus group in October 2019 suggests that across England, the demand for parent and child foster care continues to grow. While it is clear that there is some regional variation, the general trend is for local authorities to be seeking foster carers for increasingly complex families, often involving fathers as well as mothers, and with multiple children. Practitioners at the focus group suggested that drug and alcohol issues were commonly factors in the concerns about parents, as was domestic abuse. It was stated that at times courts were being unrealistic about what could be safely managed in the context of a foster home.

In Scotland, parent and child fostering is not commonplace, and where it exists, it tends to be about offering support to young mothers already in the care system. Practitioners report that in Northern Ireland, there have been informal parent and child fostering arrangements for some time, but that Trusts are now looking to develop their services in response to the growing demand for this type of service. This might mean developing specific parent and child schemes, or including parent and child fostering within other specialist fostering provision.

This 2020 edition of this Good Practice Guide includes updated material, although much of that which was contained in the 2011 edition has remained relevant. It also contains a suite of forms for use by practitioners, available within the appendices as follows:

- Appendix 1: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Fostering Assessment Report
- Appendix 2: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Referral Form
- Appendix 3: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Placement Agreement
- Appendix 4: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Foster Carer Record
- Appendix 5: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Foster Carer Progress Checklist
- Appendix 6: Fostering Hope: Information and resource hub for parent and child foster care

All of these forms and sample letters are also available as Word files for purchase; the set of forms costs £20. These can be purchased at:

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/parent-child-fostering-forms>, or by contacting CoramBAAF Publications Sales at pubs.sales@corambaaf.org.uk or on 020 7520 7517.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Historically, social workers and others have tended to talk about “mother and baby” fostering, and many practitioners continue to use this term. We have preferred “parent and child” in recognition of the fact that increasing numbers of fathers are involved, and on occasions whole families, and also to recognise that not all of the children are babies.

We are mindful of arguments that the child should be named first as in “child and parent”, but have kept with the more recognised wording that emphasises the unique aspect of this arrangement – the involvement of a parent in a foster home.

Less easy is the question of whether we talk about parent and child “placements” or parent and child “arrangements”. The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 introduced a definition of parent and child arrangements as ‘arrangements made by a local authority for a parent and their child to live with a foster parent, whether or not the parent or the child is placed with the foster parent’. In other words, the new term “parent and child arrangement” was introduced in recognition that these arrangements might be placements (a term with a specific legal meaning in England¹), or they might not.

After much consideration, we have decided to use the term “arrangements” in the practice guidance, although it is worth acknowledging that this is not without difficulties. Firstly, it is an England-specific term, and may not be recognised in other countries within the UK. For this we apologise, but have found ourselves caught between wanting to make this guidance relevant to all countries in the UK, and at the same time not wanting to use terminology that is technically incorrect in England, and that fails to convey the legal basis under which parents and children are living with people who are approved as foster carers.

The second difficulty is that “arrangements” is not a term that is routinely used by practitioners, even in England, even though it is enshrined in legislation. It will take some time for practitioners to

1 “Placement” is defined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 as ‘(i) arrangements made by the responsible authority for C to live with P in accordance with section 22C(2), where C is in the care of the responsible authority, or (ii) arrangements made by the responsible authority to provide for C’s accommodation and maintenance by any means specified in section 22C(6).’

adjust to this new term and will mean that recognised terms like “pre-placement” and “post-placement” are replaced with “pre-arrangement” and “post-arrangement”.

These phrases will likely feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable for some time.

We have used the definitions set out in the England Regulations 2011 when describing the different fostering services, so the generic term “fostering services” is used to cover both local authority fostering services and independent fostering providers.

Chapter 2

Messages from research

INTRODUCTION

There is surprisingly little good quality research about parent and child fostering in the UK, a point made by Luke and Sebba (2014, p 5), who conducted an international literature review:

Much of the research on the experiences of parents in foster placements has focused on young people who become pregnant in or shortly after leaving care; there is far less evidence on the views of adult parents who have entered foster homes with their children.

Luke and Adams (2018) found much the same, and this is problematic insofar as anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of parent and child fostering in the UK relates to adult parents in the context of court proceedings. Furthermore, much of the available evidence is from the US rather than the UK.

However, while there have been no large-scale research studies on parent and child arrangements, there have been a number of small studies and serious case reviews. The scale of the studies means some caution is needed in reaching any firm conclusions, but there are a number of common themes and much valuable information about what appears to make these arrangements work well, and what policy and practice is needed to support this.

THE DATA

Quantitative studies

There have been only two studies containing any sort of quantitative element, both of them undertaken within individual local authorities.

Martin and Davies (2007)

Martin and Davies (2007) looked at the quality and outcomes of 39 parent and baby arrangements made between January 2005 and August 2006

in West Sussex involving 34 children (some of whom had more than one arrangement). Information on each case was gathered from existing databases and questionnaires were completed by 79 per cent of the social workers involved in these cases.

About three-quarters of these parent and baby arrangements in the sample were provided by independent fostering services, with the remainder evenly split between residential units and “in-house” foster carers. The length of the arrangements varied from two days to over a year, and the parents were all mothers aged between 14–35 years, but most likely to be in their late teens. About 40 per cent of the mothers were known to have been looked after, or were being looked after at the point the arrangement started, and most were white British. The children were mainly babies aged between one and two months but included toddlers up to two years and ten months old, and the sample also included pregnant mothers.

Donnelly and Wright (2009)

Donnelly and Wright (2009) looked at the outcomes of 61 parent and baby assessment arrangements made in Brighton and Hove during 2004–2008. This used quantitative data already gathered, alongside interviews with carers, parents, social work and health staff.

The vast majority of the arrangements in the sample were parent and child fostering (51) with the other arrangements being in residential settings. Most arrangements were of mothers and their children but two involved a father and child. Ten of the parents were either currently or previously in care. The average length of the arrangement was six months, ranging from two weeks to nearly two years.

Qualitative studies

Other small-scale studies have tended to take a more qualitative approach, based primarily on interviews with foster carers and/or young mothers in parent and child arrangements.

Knight et al (2006)

Knight *et al* (2006) mention mother and baby fostering in the context of a much wider Department of Health-funded study on teenage pregnancy among young people who were either in care or leaving care. The study includes interviews with six young mothers in foster care, and with two foster carers. Although parent and child fostering was not the main focus of this study, it did reveal the use of foster carers to support young mothers in the care of their babies. Chase *et al* (2009) used this same data set in a different publication.

Greenaway (2010)

Greenaway (2010) interviewed five foster carers and one birth parent who were involved in parent and child fostering with the Somerset Family Assessment and Support Team, a specialist parent and child fostering scheme.

Adams and Bevan (2011)

Adams and Bevan (2011) interviewed eight mother and baby carers who fostered for three fostering services within the North West London Fostering Consortium. They had fostered 16 mothers and babies between them. The mothers were aged between 13–30 with the majority (about two-thirds) being under 18 and mostly themselves looked after. Information was also sought from the three local authority fostering services that participated in the study about their use of mother and baby arrangements and any policies and procedures that were used within their service.

Mantovani and Thomas (2015)

Mantovani and Thomas (2015) interviewed 15 young mothers, aged 16–19 and from mainly black African backgrounds. Eleven of them were unaccompanied minors, and 10 of them were fostered in London local authorities at the time they became pregnant.

November and Sandall (2020)

November and Sandall (2020) set up a series of focus groups for 32 parent and child foster carers and undertook eight interviews with mothers who had experienced these placements, and nine interviews with supervising social workers.

The serious case reviews

The other important information comes from serious case reviews involving parent and child arrangements.

Bromley Serious Case Review (2008)

Child B was subject to a child protection plan and had been living with his mother in a parent and child arrangement in a foster home. His mother took him from the foster home to stay at her mother's house, and three days later he died from sudden unexpected death in infancy after sleeping on the sofa with her. The serious case review sought to ascertain whether there had been sufficient assessments completed and whether Child B should also have been subject to legal proceedings.

Brent Serious Case Review (2009)

This case related to Child D, who was placed with his mother in a foster home, where she had previously lived. There was another baby, Child F, who was also placed with his mother in that foster home. Six weeks after his birth, Child D was admitted to hospital critically ill due to suspected salt poisoning, and it was later concluded during care proceedings that the overwhelming likelihood was that the mother of Child F was responsible for contaminating his feed. At the conclusion of the care proceedings, Child D was returned to the care of his mother.

Warwickshire Serious Case Review (2017)

Child J was placed with her mother in a parent and child fostering arrangement that lasted nearly six months and went very well. Child J suffered a significant physical injury after leaving the foster home, and questions were asked about the post-arrangement support that was available from the foster carer.

THEMES

Arising from this important but limited evidence, it is possible to identify a number of themes. It is worth noting that in a number of these cases, the researchers were unaware of each others' studies, but nevertheless came to similar conclusions.

1 Positive benefits of parent and child fostering

There is a consensus that parent and child fostering can offer a very effective way of supporting parents to care for their children. However, there is a need for more evidence that includes comparison groups and longer-term outcome data. Nevertheless, there is positive anecdotal evidence from both foster carers and mothers using the arrangements. Knight *et al* (2006) found that specialist mother and baby arrangements in a foster home appeared to be providing effective support to younger parents in care under the age of 16, and that such arrangements could potentially provide valuable support to older young parents. Adams and Bevan (2011) did not specifically ask about outcomes, but in the majority of cases foster carers were aware that the mothers had continued to care for their babies after leaving the foster home, and they talked about this making them feel that their efforts had been worthwhile.

The Brent and Warwickshire serious case reviews found that parent and child arrangements provided much needed security and support to both of the young people and their babies, and that the level of professional

support offered enabled mothers to demonstrate some good parenting skills.

The suggestion that parent and child fostering can work well is also indicated by the local authority studies. Donnelly and Wright (2009) note that of the 61 arrangements considered in the Brighton and Hove sample, just over half the children returned to the community with their parents. Although this does not in itself provide evidence that the parenting in these cases had improved, it is clear that professionals at least had been satisfied that any perceived risk had been reduced. Donnelly and Wright (2009) identify the need for a longitudinal evaluation to consider the longer-term outcomes of these arrangements.

In West Sussex (Martin and Davies, 2007), parenting skills were assessed before and after each arrangement and in 30 per cent of the cases they showed significant improvement and were rated as good at the end of the arrangement. The arrangements were seen to be of significant benefit in developing parenting skills in 43 per cent of cases.

Parent and child fostering was not always viewed positively, however, and Mantovani and Thomas (2015) found a more mixed picture. Just over half of the young women in their study described financial and material deprivation and felt that their emotional needs had not been met.

It should also be noted that significant numbers of children in both of the local authority studies were unable to remain with birth parents, and permanence was progressed elsewhere. If parent and child fostering allowed for a fair, timely and effective assessment – although the data do not allow us to take a view on this either way – then this too could be deemed a positive outcome. In acknowledging the positive benefits of such placements, it must also be recognised (Donnelly and Wright, 2009; Adams and Bevan, 2011) that the work can be challenging, both for the foster carers and also for the parents.

2 Roles, responsibilities and pre-arrangement planning

Another clearly defined theme is the importance of ensuring that the various roles and responsibilities of all parties are clearly established and understood, and good pre-arrangement planning is crucial in achieving this. A number of the studies make the point that clarity about roles and responsibilities is a key factor when things go well, and equally, lack of clarity is a factor when things go wrong (Greenaway, 2010; Adams and Bevan, 2011; Luke and Sebba, 2014). Foster carers themselves note the importance of clear written agreements, including clarity about contact with partner or family (Donnelly and Wright, 2009), with one foster carer (quoted in Adams and Bevan, 2011, p 35) explaining the real practical benefits of this:

I could say to her 'You go and look at your contract'...[it covered] what her role was and what mine was and when the father could visit...[and] when I'd look after the baby for her.

Knight *et al* (2006) also raise concerns over the lack of clarity about the responsibilities and roles of foster carers in relation to both the mother and baby in the arrangement; were they offering support or assessing the young parent? These issues are also important in relation to the expectations of the social workers involved.

In thinking about planning arrangements, it is important not to forget the practical issues such as finances and any agreed respite support for foster carers (Greenaway, 2010; Adams and Bevan, 2011).

Not surprisingly, a key issue in the Brent serious case review was about the extent to which it was appropriate to have more than one parent and child living with the foster carer in the home at the same time. This issue is discussed elsewhere in this practice guidance. The serious case review also highlighted that where a parent is looked after, the statutory reviews should maintain a clear focus on the individual's holistic needs with issues of parenting being appropriately and separately addressed. It also raised the importance of good communication between the respective social workers allocated to a looked after young mother and her child and this could be equally applied where there are two reviewing officers involved.

3 Relationship between foster carer and parent

The importance of the relationship between the foster carer and the parent is a theme raised in a number of studies (Luke and Sebba, 2014), and the significance of this in terms of enabling positive outcomes. Greenaway (2010) notes that, where the parent made progress, this was reflected in the relationship between the carer and parent, but where a lack of trust and communication developed between the parent and carer, this led to deterioration in the overall outcomes. Adams and Bevan (2011) make a similar point, concluding that a key factor in successful outcomes was whether the mother wanted to be in the foster home, and whether she "fitted in". Where this was the case, there was mutual warmth: parents felt able to accept advice and guidance, and carers felt a pride in the mother's achievements. Donnelly and Wright (2009) note that for some parents, their experience in a parent and child arrangement is the first time they have received nurturing and warmth, something many of them had never seen in their birth families.

Where adult parents are placed this is not always easy, and in some cases parents are older than the foster carers, may have had previous children removed, and may feel disempowered and resentful to find themselves living with foster carers at that stage of their lives (Donnelly and Wright, 2009). It is suggested that if this cannot be addressed, then

this might prove difficult for both parties, and even for young mothers who are looked after, relationships with foster carers were not always positive (Montavani and Thomas, 2015). Luke and Sebba (2014) point out that young parents in foster care can often feel stigmatised and scrutinised, and November and Sandall (2020) note 'mixed experiences'.

It is suggested that arrangements worked better where birth parents had the opportunity to meet with foster carers before the arrangement began, and with mothers who are themselves looked after, it is advantageous if they can move in before the baby is born (Donnelly and Wright, 2009; Greenaway, 2010; Adams and Bevan, 2011). Foster carers in the Donnelly and Wright (2009) study suggested that new mothers (moving in after giving birth) needed the first two weeks to settle into the home, often feeling particularly vulnerable and overwhelmed by the experience.

4 Effective support to parent and child foster carers

It is not surprising to find a number of the studies highlighting the importance of providing the foster carers with good support from both their supervising social worker, but also from the child's social worker. The Brent serious case review notes that while the fostering social worker provided consistent input and support to the foster carer, there was an inconsistent level of support from the child's social worker. The report highlights that the foster carer should have been given more formal assistance in addressing the needs of the two young mothers and their babies. This mirrors a point made elsewhere (Donnelly and Wright, 2009; Greenaway, 2010; Adams and Bevan, 2011, Brent serious case review) about the central role of the child's social worker in these arrangements, the importance of good communication with them, and the importance, wherever possible, of ensuring that this worker is consistent for the duration of the stay.

The research also highlighted the need for effective training. This is very clear in the serious case reviews, which suggested that additional guidance was needed for social workers in relation to assessing carers for mother and child arrangements. Training needs for foster carers were identified as particularly important, including matching, recording and child protection.

5 Multi-agency working and wider support

The contribution of good multi-agency working to achieving positive outcomes is another recurrent theme. Multi-agency working matters at all stages of the process, and the Donnelly and Wright (2009) report highlights the importance of health professionals working closely with children's social care services in parent and child fostering. This indicates the benefit of a core training programme for social workers

and health visitors on the role of parent and child arrangements. This recommendation is made by both the Bromley and Brent serious case reviews.

Issues about transitional arrangements are also discussed (Donnelly and Wright, 2009; Adams and Bevan, 2011) with an emphasis on arranging both appropriate semi-independent living, housing and good post-arrangement support. This was a key issue in the Warwickshire serious case review (Pettitt N and Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board, 2017), and studies note the benefits of foster carers being involved in identifying the most suitable support.

6 The importance of assessment

While not all of the studies look at the assessment of parents, this is central to some of the literature. Most notably, the serious case reviews emphasise the failure of assessment in the child protection context, and stress the importance of this in the context of parent and child arrangements. The Bromley serious case review identified shortcomings in the assessment of risk, and found that the threshold for making a legal application was met on the grounds that B would be likely to suffer significant harm. In the Brent serious case review, there was a suggested requirement for a pre-birth risk assessment for all young women in care who become pregnant.

All three serious case reviews set out above highlighted the risks of focusing too heavily on current positive parenting in the assessment without taking into account either past history or assessing likelihood of sustaining progress.

Adams and Bevan (2011) also looked at the specific issue of assessment of foster carers, and found that most of the carers in their study had not been approved specifically for this specialist task. They conclude that the fostering services in their study lacked appropriate policies and procedures in this respect.

CAUTIONARY NOTE

Notwithstanding some of the positive indicators discussed, it is important to be cautious about reaching any firm conclusions based on small-scale exploratory research. Currently there are far more questions than answers, and future research is needed to look at how parent and child fostering compares with community-based or residential assessment.

It would be useful to try and identify whether there are particular characteristics of those who will make the best use of this resource.

Both of the local authority studies discussed above made efforts to identify factors that correlate with poor outcomes, but the size of their samples meant any findings were of limited value. For example, Martin and Davies (2007) highlight one contra-indicator as being mothers aged over 18, whereas Donnelly and Wright (2009), in correlating likely failure with parents under the age of 20, suggest the opposite.

There are also significant questions about how fathers fit into this discussion, as in most cases they are simply not mentioned. The fact is that relatively few men participate in parent and child arrangements, and so while it is understandable that they do not feature in the existing studies, it is important that their needs and potential role are not forgotten.