Secure Base developmental checklist

Many children in foster care will have built trust in their foster carers as a secure base from which they can explore, learn and enjoy their world. For some infants, placed from birth, this will have been their only experience of caregiving and their trust will be deeply rooted. For other children, earlier experiences of separation or neglectful or abusive caregiving may cause them to remain anxious and to distrust close relationships or to be vulnerable to further separation.

When children move from foster care to adoption, it is important to note and understand the extent to which they have developed secure base relationships with their foster carers. Information about these relationships and the child’s emotional development can feed in to the moving process and support the development of secure base relationships in the adoptive family.

These checklists are age-related, and correspond with the child’s behaviours under five headings that are important elements of children’s secure base relationships and emotional development:

* Trust
* Managing feelings
* Self-esteem
* Feeing effective
* Sense of belonging

NB. There are major changes to children’s behaviours within each age range, and answers to some questions will depend on the specific age of the child. There are also differences (observable from birth) in levels of sociability and activity due to differences in temperament. The full range of normal development should, therefore, be taken into account.

**These checklists should be used as a helpful source of information, not as an assessment tool.**

**Infants aged 0-18 months**

**Availability – helping the child to trust**

Does the child

* seek comfort when distressed (e.g. crying, gazing towards or (if mobile) approaching the caregiver)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* accept comfort when distressed (e.g. settling when picked up and cuddled)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* use a caregiver as a secure base for exploration (i.e. after accepting reassurance or comfort, become able to explore and play)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show some degree of preference for one or more caregiver (e.g. gaze/preferred for cuddles – develops during the first eight months)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* target attachment behaviours at this caregiver/these caregivers (e.g. gaze, verbalisation when upset/happy – approach once mobile)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* protest at separation from specific caregivers (range of protest – depending on temperament/attachment pattern)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* settle/settle to play at reunion?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show interest and pleasure in objects and things around them?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy playing independently with objects/toys?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy playing jointly with objects/toys?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* “take turns” with/“converse” with adults – initiating and responding to vocalising, facial movements (can start from soon after birth)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings**

Does the child:

* show a full range of positive emotions (e.g. smile, laugh, show pleasure)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* communicate their needs (e.g. for proximity, food, play)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* react appropriately to sensory stimuli (e.g. show interest/react positively or negatively, as appropriate, to light, sound, smell, touch, taste – but not overreact/panic or freeze)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* wait for attention/manage emotions – with help (e.g. voice of caregiver indicating food is on the way)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* sleep regularly and in a relaxed way/accept reassurance if wakes (NB sleep patterns will vary)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* seem comfortable in their body (e.g. able to relax and also enjoy being active)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* cope with being told ‘no’ (e.g. protest but then settle fairly quickly)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Acceptance – building the child’s self esteem**

Does the child:

* express pleasure at their achievements (e.g. shaking a rattle to make a noise, standing up on their own, building a tower)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show interest and enthusiasm for interactive games like peek-a-boo (e.g. showing pleasure at success)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* approach new people/situations positively (balancing curiosity, caution and pleasurable anticipation)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* cope with setbacks (e.g. when the rattle doesn’t work, the brick tower falls over)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective**

Does the child:

* make choices (e.g. between foods, toys)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* assert themself (e.g. getting attention, feeding at their own pace)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* seem keen to try new things (NB some variation in enjoying novelty due to differences in temperament)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show focus and persistence in their activities or play (e.g. sustained activity to complete task)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* co-operate with nappy changes, feeding, going to sleep (i.e. relaxing and accepting events with the reassurance of caregivers)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* play co-operatively (e.g. turn-taking/accepting support to hold the rattle, press the button to make a sound, can lead to co-operative play even in infancy)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Family membership – helping the child to belong to the current caregiving family**

Does the child:

* recognise family members and extended family members?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* prefer family members and family friends (e.g. more likely to communicate with/accept cuddles from)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy family occasions (e.g. seem to fit in as part of the family – if supported/not overwhelmed)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Family membership – helping the child to belong to the birth family**

Does the child:

* recognise birth family members and extended birth family members?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* interact positively with birth family members (e.g. communicates with/accepts cuddles from)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy birth family contact time (if supported/not overwhelmed)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Child aged 19 months-4 years**

**Availability – helping the child to trust**

Does the child:

* seek comfort when distressed (e.g. signal their needs verbally or physically, rather than shut down on feelings; demand then resist comfort; appear helpless; try to control others)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* accept comfort when stressed, then relax and settle?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* use a caregiver as a secure base for exploration (i.e. after accepting reassurance or comfort, become able to explore and play)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* have a selective attachment to one or more caregivers?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* protest at separation from primary caregiver/s (there will be a range of protest behaviours depending on temperament/attachment pattern)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* settle to play at reunion with caregiver?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show interest and pleasure in objects and things around them?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy playing independently with toys?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy playing jointly with toys?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* use their mobility and language to explore, have fun, approach others, to learn?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings**

Does the child:

* express a range of positive feelings (excitement, pleasure, delight) but not be overwhelmed by them?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* express a range of negative feelings (anger, disappointment, sadness) but not be overwhelmed by them?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* name simple feelings?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* use language to communicate needs, feelings, ideas and goals openly and accurately (appropriate to their age)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* ever pretend to feel what they are not feeling e.g. smile when anxious (this can start as young as 18 months)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* understand that others have thoughts, feelings and goals that differ from their own?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show empathy for others?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show some understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (moral development)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Acceptance – building the child’s self-esteem**

Does the child:

* enjoy play and activities?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* take pleasure in doing something well?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy praise?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* cope with setbacks (e.g. not managing a task, not winning a game sometimes)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective**

Does the child:

* make simple choices?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show persistence in completing tasks?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* co-operate and negotiate?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show focus and persistence in setbacks (e.g. not managing a task, not winning a game sometimes)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* manage increased independence without excessive assertiveness/oppositional behaviour?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy/manage sleeping, eating, toileting, appropriate for age?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* manage peer relationships (e.g. prosocial, increasingly co-operative, making and keeping friends)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Family membership – helping the child to belong to the current caregiving family**

Does the child:

* recognise current caregiving family members and extended family members?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show some preference for familiar family members and family friends (e.g. more likely to communicate with/accept cuddles from)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy family occasions (e.g. seem to fit in as part of the family – if supported/not overwhelmed)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Child aged 5-10 years**

**Availability – helping the child to trust**

Does the child:

* seek comfort/help from others appropriately (when needed but not excessively – balancing dependency and autonomy)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* have selective attachment to specific caregiver/s?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* use a caregiver as a secure base for exploration (i.e. seek comfort, have anxiety reduced, then explore/learn/play)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* trust people outside the family appropriately, e.g. teachers, activity leaders, peer group?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* indiscriminately seek out/show affection to others?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* manage friendships with peers successfully?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings**

Does the child:

* express a range of positive feelings (excitement, pleasure, delight) but not be overwhelmed by them?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* express a range of negative feelings (anger, disappointment, sadness) but not be overwhelmed by them?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* communicate their feelings accurately in ways that can get their needs met?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* talk about/reflect on their feelings?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* talk about/reflect on the feelings of other people?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show empathy for other children?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* show more complex emotions of guilt, shame or remorse?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* understand and accept the rules at home?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* understand and accept the rules at school?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* have effective strategies for managing their feelings and behaviour?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Acceptance – building the child’s self-esteem**

Does the child:

* have positive self-esteem – think they are good at things and able to accept not being good at others?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* respond positively to praise at home or at school?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* take pride in their appearance?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* feel positive about their school performance?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* get involved in and enjoy activities or hobbies?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy peer group relationships/cope with the stresses?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* cope with setbacks and disappointments?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* cope with being told off, i.e. not despairing, shutting down or becoming aggressive?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective**

Does the child:

* make choices?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* assert themselves appropriately?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* feel effective and competent?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* follow through and complete tasks?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* look after their things appropriately?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy co-operation with others/can negotiate?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Family membership – helping the child to belong to the current caregiving family**

Does the child:

* seem comfortable spending time with the current caregiving family?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* seem willing/happy to be involved in family events?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy family occasions (e.g. seem to fit in as part of the family – if supported/not overwhelmed)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |

**Family membership – helping the child to belong to the birth family**

Does the child:

* see themselves as part of/connected to their birth family (appropriate to placement type)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* talk about the birth family in a balanced way?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* tell a coherent story of their childhood and birth family life that makes sense to them and is realistic?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

* enjoy birth family contact (if supported)?

[ ] Yes [ ] Sometimes [ ] No

|  |
| --- |
| **Recent examples of these behaviours (to illustrate strengths *and* difficulties)** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Any additional comments** |