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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **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

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

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| **Any additional comments** |