



Managing contact with family members

Kinship carers often tell us that managing contact time with family is one of the most stressful parts of the role. There is pressure to get it right and you want to make the right choices for the child you care for. You are not alone if you feel this way. This guide brings together information that you might find useful.

What is contact?

Contact is arranged time that a child spends with their family. That usually means their parents, but arrangements can also include the child's siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, family friends and even school friends. This contact time is important because it allows the child to maintain key family relationships and a sense of identity.

Creating positive contact experiences

It may seem daunting thinking about creating a positive contact experience. Here are some things to think about when planning and organising contact time to reduce stress and make it a positive experience for and in the best interests of the child:

- be clear on the **purpose** of contact
- contact needs to be **managed** so it becomes a constructive and integral part of life. This needs to be a shared responsibility between carers and the adult who is having contact
- contact should be **age appropriate**. It can take different forms and should consider the needs of the child. It may change over time. Babies and younger children need safe, predictable routines. Communicating online can also be a part of contact for older children and teenagers
- it needs to be **reviewed** regularly
- ask for **support** (see "how to access support" at the end of this guide) when you need it, to help with the complex emotional needs of children, birth families and carers when planning contact

Other things you might want to consider are:

- keeping a contact diary to record what happens at contact. This will help you review the arrangements and spot any patterns or points of concern. It is also evidence if you need to approach children's services and/or the courts to intervene
- organising and talking to your child about contact with siblings.



Creating a contact agreement

A contact agreement can be written in any way that works for you, the child and the child's parents or wider family. It could be a written, signed document or an email. If you are a special guardian, recommendations for contact will be part of your support plan.

Always keep the child's welfare in mind when making decisions and try to involve them in the process as much as possible.

Here are some things to consider including in your agreement:

- **frequency** - for example, weekly or monthly? If there's flexibility for the child's wishes, how will they be managed? Once the child gets older or their lifestyle changes, how will this be reviewed?
- **length of meeting**
- **travel** - how will everyone travel to the venue? Is there any support for travel costs if children's services are involved?
- **type of contact** - there are various options, for example face-to-face, video calls, letters, online gaming, texting.
- **venue** - consider safety, whether it should be private or public? Also think about comfort and accessibility. We recommend it does not take place at your home. A contact centre may be most appropriate
- **safeguarding** - make a plan for if it feels unsafe. For example, if a parent arrives intoxicated, is threatening or arrives with another person.
- **special occasions** - are there specific arrangements for events like birthdays?
- **presents or food** - what and how much is appropriate?

As well as your immediate response if there's a safeguarding issue, consider what to do if inappropriate words are used, conversations are unsafe or upsetting and if the parent does not turn up. This could include having a conversation with your child, seeking advice and keeping a log in your contact diary to discuss with a social worker.

How to access support

Managing contact can sometimes be challenging but you are not alone. There are practical things you can do and support available:

- find a local peer support group - kinship.org.uk/peer
- contact Kinship's Advice Line on 0300 123 7015
- if you're a special guardian contact your local authority's post-SGO team
- for neutral, safe places to meet up take a look at NACCC Contact Centres - naccc.org.uk/find-a-centre



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Creating a contact agreement

A contact agreement can be written in any way that works for you, the child and the child's parents or wider family. It would be helpful, before you create an agreement, to think about the questions below.

Start by listing who your kinship child wants in their life

What are the current arrangements, who do they see, who don't they see?

Do the current arrangements need to change and why?

What kind of arrangements are "reasonable"? As a reminder, these are the factors you need to consider: purposeful, managed, age-appropriate, reviewed, supported



What is the ideal contact plan? There is likely to be some variation in reality, but where is there room for compromise?

If arrangements need to change, what steps do you need to take to make those changes?

What do you think is “reasonable conduct” for everyone during a contact visit?

How might the arrangements need to change to meet the needs of your child as they grow older? It might be useful to have a review date agreed.



