

Supervised contact for children in care

If a child is separated from their birth family we have a legal duty to arrange reasonable contact between them. The contact must be in the best interest of the child and their welfare is the main consideration. Good quality contact between you and your child is essential to maintain your relationship and assess if your child can return to your care.

Why is contact supervised?

Contact sessions with your child are supervised if:

- you have been separated from your child because of child protection concerns

or to:

- assess if it is possible for your child to return to your care
- help maintain the relationships which are important to you and your child
- ease the feelings of loss for you and your child
- help develop your parenting skills
- help us when making long-term decisions about your child.

If your child is in long-term care the contact can help them understand what has happened and keep links to their past.

Who supervises contact?

The contact supervisor may be a:

- member of staff from social care services
- foster carer
- family member.

Sometimes a social worker will be present to observe, or the court may ask another professional to complete an assessment and they will observe a session.

What does the supervisor do?

You lead the session. The supervisor will:

- intervene if they are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of you or your child
- monitor your behaviour and listen to what you are saying to your child.

In low risk situations the supervisor will not be present all of the time.

What happens if the court is involved?

If your child is subject to legal proceedings the court has to think about contact arrangements before making an Order. If you don't agree with the proposed contact arrangements talk to your legal representative about challenging the plan.

A children's guardian will be appointed by the court to represent the interests of your child; they will also be asked about contact.

Who plans the contact visit?

The social worker will talk to you, your child and your child's carers to make the arrangements.

A plan for contact is usually drawn up and put in the Placement Information Record. The plan will explain what is expected of you to make sure that the contact session is safe and benefits you and your child. You will be asked to agree to this plan. Ask the social worker to explain anything you aren't sure about.

What about the practical arrangements?

We will arrange for you to meet in a suitable place, such as:

- a children's centre
- a social care services office
- your child's foster home.

We will try to arrange the contact session close to your child's foster home or school. You will usually be expected to make your own way to the contact sessions, but we may be able to help with your transport costs.

If your child is at school, contact sessions during term-time will be after school on a week day. If your child is pre-school age contact sessions are likely to take place on weekdays before 4pm, but may need to fit in with nursery sessions or pre-school.

The contact plan will take into account your work times and any assessments you are having.

What is expected of me?

It is important to make every effort to keep to the contact arrangements. If you do not attend, or arrive late it can be very upsetting for your child.

If you can't attend, or know you may be late, you must contact the care manager, the local social care services office or the contact supervisor with as much notice as possible.

When you see your child you must not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and your behaviour throughout the contact session must be acceptable.

We know that the contact session may be upsetting for you and your child, but it is important to try and control your emotions, as seeing you upset may add to your child's distress.

Do you record what happens at the contact sessions?

We make a written record of the contact visit, including any significant behaviour or conversations. This record forms part of the case records and helps us to assess your parenting skills, your relationships and the possibility of your child returning to your family.

We may also monitor and observe the session through closed circuit television, but sessions will not be recorded. The cameras allow a supervisor to view the session without needing to be in the room. You will be shown the cameras when you arrive.

Are contact arrangements reviewed?

The contact plan is reviewed at your child's children in care reviews. These reviews take place when your child comes into care after one month, after four months and then every six months.

We also review contact if there is a significant change in circumstances. For example if your child does not want to attend, if you are often late or if there are concerns about your behaviour.

What happens if I don't keep to the contact agreement?

If you don't keep to the agreement your contact may be stopped.

If your child is on a Care Order we can refuse contact for up to seven days without the court's permission. We will only do this if we think it is necessary to safeguard your child's welfare.

Before the matter is discussed in court you should seek legal advice. You are entitled to contest any plan to end or change contact orders.

What happens if I want to complain?

If you have a complaint please speak to your social worker. You can also contact the social care service Customer Service Team for a feedback form. Call **08081 683750** or email **CYPSfeedback-mailbox@devon.gov.uk**