

1.8.1 Contact with Parents, Siblings Relatives, Friends and Visitors including Overnight stays

Regulations and standards

England:

- [Regulation 7: The Children's Views, Wishes and Feelings Standard](#)
- [Regulation 9: The enjoyment and achievement standard](#)
- [Regulation 11: The Positive Relationships Standard](#)
- [Regulation 14: The care planning standard](#)
- [Guide to the care planning standard](#)
- [Regulation 18: Placement plan for a child who is not looked after](#)
- [Regulation 23: Medicines](#)

Wales

- Regulation 15: Personal plan
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1264/regulation/15/made>
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2015/1818/regulation/8/made>
- [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)
- Regulation 15: Personal plan
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1264/regulation/15/made>
- Regulation 24: Language and communication
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1264/regulation/24/mad>

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Outcome statement

Children are able to maintain constructive contact with their families, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives.

Scope of this chapter

These procedures apply to all different types of contact that are significant, supervised, unsupervised, contacts or overnight stays between children and relatives, friends (including neighbours and visitors); within or outside the home.

Section 3, 'Arrangements by the Home' set out the arrangements that may be made by the home for children to have contact or overnight stays up to four days without having to seek the approval of social workers. These procedures also apply to holidays or school trips within the UK, up to four days. For Holidays or school trips outside the UK or within the UK over four days, see: **Holidays and School Trips Procedure**

1. Promoting Contact

Note: As part of the placement planning process, the social worker should consult the Home's manager to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the child to have contact with his/her family and significant others; particularly when the child is placed at a distance away from their family home. No contact may be permitted between children and their parents, friends or relatives (this includes Grandparents and half siblings) without the approval of the Social Worker and must be consistent with arrangements outlined in the Child's Care Plan.

For many children, relationships with members of their family, previous carers, friends and others are incredibly important. Contact can help children and young people develop their sense of identity and better understand their lives, as well as helping to support successful placements.

One of the key principles of the Children Act 1989 is the presumption that there should be continued contact between the child and their family while the child is in the care of the local authority (unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare). The responsible authority has a duty to endeavour to promote contact between the child and:

- Their parents;
- Any person who is not a parent but who has **Parental Responsibility** for the child; and
- Any relative, friend or other person connected with the child.

Contact arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child's needs. The social worker should, as part of the assessment process, identify those people who the child wants to maintain contact with.

Arrangements for contact will be set out in the child's **Care Plan**, and must take account of any **Child Protection Plan** or Contact Order that may be in force.

So far as it is reasonably practicable, the wishes and feelings of the parents and the child's carers must be ascertained before a decision about contact arrangements is made

The purpose of the contact and how it will be evaluated must be made clear in the Plan. Contact arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child's needs. The child's welfare is the paramount consideration at all times and each child's wishes and needs for contact should be individually considered and regularly assessed and reviewed. The wishes and feelings of the child should be ascertained, wherever possible, using advocacy and communication services if necessary

Both direct and indirect contact arrangements should always be clearly detailed setting out how contact will take place, the venue, the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed.

Maintaining contact with siblings from both the same or different parents who cannot be placed together should be prioritised. Independent Reviewing Officers should ensure that Looked After Reviews consider whether contact arrangements including sibling contact in Care Plans has been implemented and that the child is happy with the contact – both its frequency and its quality. The IRO should inform the child that they can access Advocacy Services if they have a complaint.

2. Different Types of Contact

Face to face meetings and visits will generally be the best way of maintaining relationships, but other means such as letters, phone calls, photograph exchanges etc. should be borne in mind. Responsible authorities and carers should work together to explore how electronic media can support positive relationships for children. Children should be supported to ensure they are safe online rather than this form of contact being avoided.

See also **staying in Touch Procedure**.

3. Contact Arrangements (including Supervised & overnight stays of more than 4 days)

When the child's placement is made, information regarding significant relationships and friendships should be obtained when completing the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan. The parents' views on contact with relatives and friends should be obtained. For procedures on Parental Consent.

The Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan should cover the planned contact (including overnight stays) for the child with relatives and friends both at and away from the residential home.

Any such contact arrangements set out in the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan must be consistent with the child's Care Plan. The arrangements must also be consistent with any Contact Orders in force in favour of relatives and/or friends.

Decisions to allow contact with relatives or friends should be made following an assessment of any risks which the contact may pose to the child, including the need for the contact to be supervised.

Although checks should not normally be required as a precondition of a child staying overnight with friends, in circumstances where it is considered necessary as a result of specific risks identified in the risk assessment, or where the child is to stay with adults regularly or frequently or for a prolonged period, checks on members of the relevant household should be made through the Disclosure and Barring Service, the Children's Services and Probation records for the relevant area.

The Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan should include the parameters within which visits or stays away from the home with friends may be agreed by the Home without prior consultation with the social worker, and whether agreement to such visits requires the Home to obtain parental consent.

The guiding principle is that looked after children should as far as possible be given the same permission to take part in normal and acceptable age appropriate activities, such as staying with friends, as would reasonably be granted by parents of their peers. Judgment should depend on the assessed risks to and needs of the child.

Where there are exceptional reasons to require the Home to seek the permission of the social worker, a manager or a parent, or place specific restrictions on permitting a child to stay overnight with friends, this should be because of reasons necessary to safeguard the child's welfare. The child's wishes should be taken into account in reaching any such decision.

Any such restriction, together with the reasons, should be clearly recorded in the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan, and explained to the child. Restrictions should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant.

The need to supervise contact should be considered as part of the assessment and planning process by the social worker and his/her Manager. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to ensure that the person(s) supervising contact is appropriately skilled and experienced to do so.

The primary focus of the assessment of this issue will be the safety and welfare of the child.

Where supervised contact is deemed necessary, the reasons should be clearly recorded and the role of the supervisor or supervisors clearly defined.

A written risk assessment must be completed before supervised contacts begin.

This assessment must take account of all factors that could impact on the success of supervised contact and relevant safeguards including:

- a. Any history of abuse or threats of abuse to the child, carers, staff or others;
- b. Previous threats to disrupt contact or failure to cooperate with conditions agreed for supervised contact;
- c. Previous incidents or threats of abduction;
- d. Previous incidents of coercion or inappropriate behaviour during contact;
- e. The transient or unsettled lifestyle of the parents;
- f. The child's behaviour and needs, including medical needs.

Where any of the above features in the risk assessment, and supervised contact is to continue, the risk assessment must state the specific measures to be put in place to minimise risks. The assessment must then be approved and signed by the social worker's Team Manager.

Where supervised contact takes place, the detailed arrangements for the supervision must be set out in the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan.

In addition, there should be a written agreement with the parents and other relevant parties having supervised contact, signed by them, which should state clearly any specific conditions relating to the contact and any expectations placed on the parents or relevant parties:

- The agreement should be clear about where the contact must take place and whether any flexibility is allowed for activity or movements within or away from the agreed location;
- It should also be clear about whether the person(s) having contact are permitted to give the child food, drinks, gifts or money during contact;
- It should state clearly the circumstances in which contact will be terminated.

The agreement should state the adults who will be allowed to attend for supervised contact and supervisors should be asked to apply that strictly.

Particular attention should be given to when and how visits are ended. It may be more appropriate that all “goodbyes” take place indoors with the visitors asked to leave before supervisors return children to their placements or carers;

Significant changes to Care Plans, court proceedings and/or decisions made about the frequency of future contact are all likely to be potential tension points so extra vigilance should apply at any contacts arranged around these times.

The staff/carers and any other person involved in the supervision of the contact should have copies of the Child’s Personal Plan or My Life Plan and the agreement with the parents or relevant adults.

Where possible, those supervising the contact should be known to the child and the family before the supervised contact takes place

In the event of problems emerging, the supervisors must be clear who to contact and what details they will need to share.

The supervisor’s observations of the contact must be clearly recorded in the child’s record and shared with the parents.

The supervisor must immediately report to the social worker any concerns about the child or parents’ conduct during the contact. The social worker in consultation with his/her Manager should consider the need to review the risk assessment and/or the contact arrangements in light of the concerns expressed.

4. Social Visits/Overnight Stays

The following procedure applies to social visits or overnight stays away from the home, of up to four days. For normal contact arrangements e.g. over 4 days, see **Section 3, Contact Arrangements including Supervised & overnight stays of more than 4 days.**

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The circumstances in which these situations may arise include the following:

- a. Sleepovers with friends;
- b. Invitations to go out for the day with a friend’s family where the family are unlikely to be back until late;
- c. Invitations to join a friend’s family who are going away for a weekend;
- d. School trips of up to 4 days away;
- e. A child’s authorised day visit with a friend or family being extended if the child cannot return due to bad weather or a car breaking down where there are no known restrictions to an overnight stay taking place.

In order to facilitate such arrangements, it is important that the social worker and, preferably the child's parents, reach agreement at the time of the child's placement as to the circumstances in which the Home can authorise short stays; and that this is set out in the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan.

As indicated in **Section 3, Contact Arrangements including Supervised & overnight stays of more than 4 days** in exceptional circumstances, the Plan may state that the social worker and/or parent must always be consulted.

The more usual arrangement will be that the Home can arrange overnight and short stays without consulting the social worker or parent on each individual occasion.

When considering a request from a child to stay overnight with a friend the decisions should be based on the following factors:

- a. Are there any relevant restrictions in the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan?
- b. Are there any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour to preclude overnight stays?
- c. Are there any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed?
- d. Is the child staying with another child or children, rather than staying solely with an adult?
- e. The age and level of understanding of the child;
- f. What is the purpose and length of the overnight stay?
- g. Whose idea was the overnight stay?
- h. How well is the friend or family known to the child?

Where the Home proposes to agree to the child's stays away, before allowing them to go ahead, certain enquiries must be made by; for example the name of the adult who will be responsible for the child, the means of contacting the adult and the child during the visit/stay and the arrangements for the child's return. There should be clarity about the sleeping arrangements and what the arrangements are.

Prior to the child's stay away, the Home should arrange to meet the adult who will have responsibility for the child unless he or she is already known in which case the prior arrangements can be made over the telephone.

The arrangements for supervising or caring for the child must not compromise the safety of the child or of anyone else; and the following considerations should apply:

- a. Have the arrangements been confirmed with the parent of the friend or the adult who will have responsibility during the visit?
- b. What are the arrangements for the child returning to the home?
- c. Is there a contact number for the household in which the child will stay?
- d. Is the child aware of what to do if he or she wants to return to the home earlier than planned?
- e. Does the child have a contact number for the Home where they can be reached at any time?
- f. Does the child have access to a mobile phone?

g. Does the child take any medication or have any allergies?

In all cases, discussions should be held with the child, dependent on his or her age, as to what, if any, information should be shared with other adults to enable them to look after the child appropriately.

This might include:

- Any specific health care needs of the child; If so, plans to manage any medication must be agreed by social worker, home manager and parents or relatives. Records must be transparent and accurate with any medication administered.
- Any established routines for the child;
- Any behaviour management problems which, if the adult is unaware of, could lead to difficulties during the visit, for example the child may be over familiar with adults or over assertive with younger children.

Any decision to share information should be on a 'need to know' basis and recorded.

If the child refuses to allow appropriate information to be shared, then he or she needs to be made aware that this could affect the decision to allow the child to stay away from home.

If satisfied that it is appropriate to allow the child's stay away, a decision to allow it to go ahead may be made. If not, it may not be allowed.

The decision and the arrangements agreed should be recorded in full in the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan.

Even if it has been agreed that the social worker does not have to be consulted in making these arrangements, s/he must still be informed as soon as practicable afterwards (within 1 working day) and the social worker should inform the parents as appropriate.

With older teenagers, there is greater risk to their safety and wellbeing as they explore and test greater levels of independence. This applies to young people living at home as well as to those who are looked after by a Local Authority and it is inevitable that in some cases, despite the care taken, things will go wrong.

It is the intention of this procedure to protect children and young people and to carry out our duty as reasonable and responsible parents. It is also intended to enable carers and social workers to demonstrate that if something goes wrong, they have taken all reasonable precautions to protect the child and young person.

5. Parental Consent

Wherever possible, parents' views and consent to contact with relatives and friends including any overnight stays away from the home should be obtained at the time of the placement. These views should be recorded including an indication of whether the parent wishes to be notified or their consent obtained every time an overnight stay takes place and if so, whether such consultation and prior consent is required before the contact can go ahead.

It should also be clearly recorded if parents do not consent to any continuing relationships or short stays away from the home, and the reasons for their lack of consent should be obtained.

If it is considered that contact is appropriate despite the parents' views, legal advice may be required and any decision to allow such contact needs to be clearly recorded together with reasons and explained to the parents.

6. Review of Contact Arrangements

The social worker and his/her Manager should keep contact arrangements, including the continuing need for supervision, under regular review.

The risk assessment in relation to the arrangements for supervising contact must be reviewed at least every six months or sooner if any incident or report identifies concerns.

If medical needs are in place for a child, plans to manage any medication must be agreed by social worker, home manager and parents or relatives. Records must be transparent and accurate with any medication administered.

Where the child is the subject of a Child Protection Plan, the contact arrangements should also be reviewed as required in the Child Protection Plan.

Any significant reactions that the child has to contact should be reported to the child's social worker by those observing contact arrangements, for example foster carers, residential staff and/or supervisors of contact.

The contact arrangements should also be reviewed in any Placement Planning Meeting and at the child's **Looked After Review**.

Where a Contact Order is in force and it is considered that the contact arrangements set out in the Order should be altered, the agreement of the child and the parents should be sought and legal advice should be obtained as to the need to seek a variation of the Court Order.

7. Cancellation, Suspension or Termination of Contact

Contact should never be cancelled unless there is a very good reason, e.g. it is deemed that it would not be safe for it to take place or the child/ adult/sibling attending is too unwell for it to take place. Contact should take place in accordance with the Child's Personal Plan or My Life Plan, Court Order and any Court Directions.

Wherever possible, the staff/carer should consult the child's social worker in advance if they consider there is a good reason to cancel the contact.

If contact is cancelled, the social worker or, if the social worker is not available, the staff/carer must ensure that the child and, as far as practicable, the parent or relevant adult is informed in advance and that the reason for the decision is explained. The social worker or staff/carer should arrange an alternative contact.

If contact does not take place and consultation has not been possible with the social worker, the staff/carer must inform the child's social worker as soon as possible and confirm in writing the decision to cancel and the reason.

Contact arrangements must not be withdrawn as a sanction imposed on a child.

Emergency restrictions on contact can only be made to protect the child from significant risk and must be notified to the Placing Authority (child's social worker) within 24 hours.

5.1 Suspending or Terminating Contact

Any proposal to suspend or terminate the contact should be considered as part of the child's Looked After Review, unless the circumstances require an urgent decision to be made, in which case the social worker must be consulted and legal advice should be obtained.

Any such proposal should be made in the context of the overall aims and objectives of the Care Plan.

Even where it is not possible to hold a Looked After Review because of the urgency of the situation, the reasons for the proposal must be explained to the parents and to the child, and their agreement obtained if possible.

Where the proposal is to suspend the contact, the length and purpose of the suspension together with the basis upon which contact will be reinstated must be made clear.

Where the child is the subject of an **Emergency Protection Order**, **Interim Care Order** or full **Care Order**, an application to the Court for authority to terminate the contact will always be necessary if contact is to be suspended for more than 7 days. As soon as such a decision is made, Legal Services should be contacted as a matter of urgency so that the necessary court action can be initiated.

Written confirmation of the decision made and, where relevant, the intended court application, together with the reasons, must be sent to the parents/relevant parties, child (depending on age) and any other relevant person (for example the child's advocate, an **Independent Visitor** or **Children's Guardian**). Staff/carers and other agencies involved with the child's care must also be informed.

Revision History

Date last updated: July 2020

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End

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