



Reflections on Adoption Amendment Act 2017 - Managing contact in foster to adopt placements

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Where to now?



Overview

- Two significant & emerging themes in navigating foster to adopt
- 1. *Infrastructure* of services & *capacity* to support
- 2. Research on maintaining birth parent *contact* post-adoption

Two models of adoption

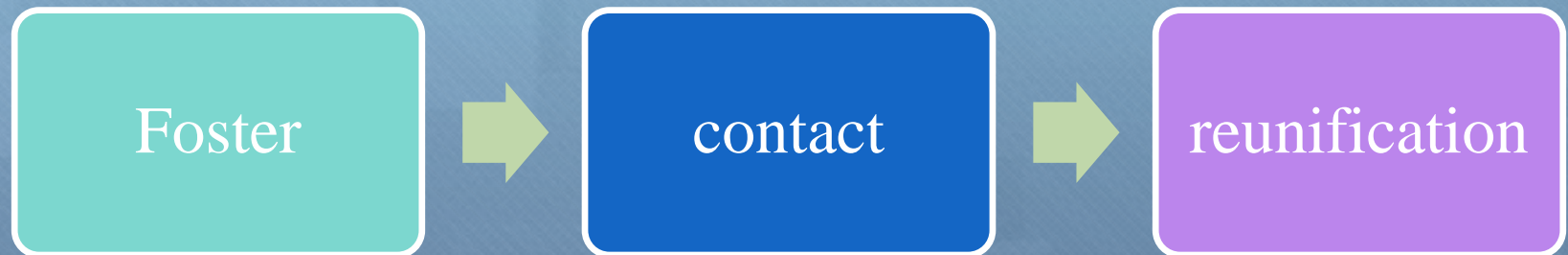
Traditional infant adoption

- Pre-adoptive foster care placement
- Pre-adoptive placement
- Voluntary – ‘consent’
- Possibility of post-adoption contact

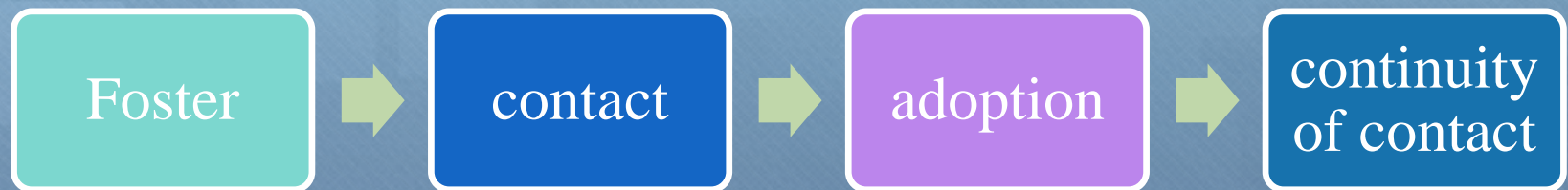
Foster to Adopt

- Concurrent planning – placement into foster to adopt family (permanency/stability achieved sooner)
- Reunification and adoption worked on concurrently
- Contested adoption
- Pre-existing relationships & possibility of post-adoption contact

Contact in concurrent care



Contact in concurrent care



Contact during concurrent planning

(McLoughlin, 2016)

- Rationale - Opportunity for parent to learn & practice skills in meeting child's basic needs
- Parent to build relationship with child
- Opportunity for parent and carers to meet and develop a non-adversarial relationship
- Opportunity to demonstrate parenting capacity so that parenting ability/skills observed/improved

Contd.

- Carers have a very significant role in supporting contact
- Practicalities of contact arrangements
- Distress/upset in child arising from contact

Challenges of avoiding discontinuities (Kenrick, 2010)

- Sensitivities of two sets of parents hoping to parent child
- Conspicuous dynamic (Gitter, 1997)
- Attachment needs of child vs realities of contact
- Managing expectations/containing uncertainty – “you have to learn to keep a lid on your expectations” (Kenrick, 2010)

Statistics from Northern Ireland

(see Children adopted from care in northern Ireland, Department of Health, 2018)

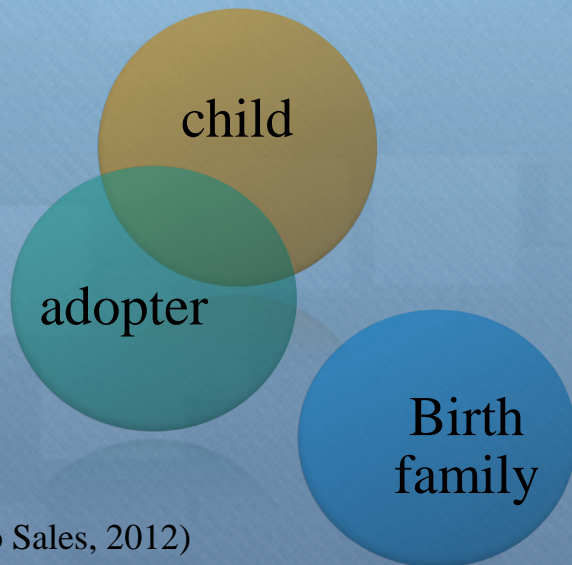
- 120 children were adopted from care during the year ending 31 March 2017, the highest number in recent years
- The average age of children at the time of adoption was 4 years 5 months
- Concurrent carers 23
- Dual approved 67
- In general, children adopted from care in Northern Ireland were on average older and had spent longer time in care than that of children adopted from care in England and Wales.

Support/Contact after adoption

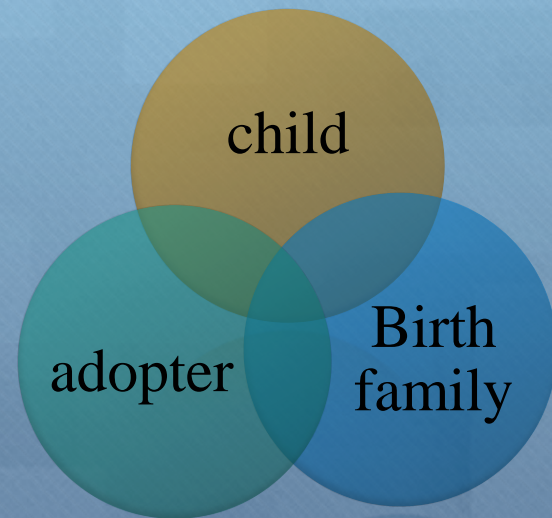
- Wales, Meakings et al 2018; Sturgess & Selwyn (2007)
- 2 Irish studies: McDonald (Northern Ireland), McCaughren (Republic of Ireland)
- Different routes into adoption
- Similar findings & considerations for practice

The Open Adoption Paradox

(McDonald, 2015; Sales, 2012)



(See also Sales, 2012)



Affirming adoptive parenthood

Our experiences of [contact]
have kind of helped us as
parents...we can see where she
is coming from and through that
we've kind of matured. We can
see where Philip (child) is
coming from too

Parameters of Contact

I mean honestly when we had four visits for (son's bm), we had two visits for (son's bf) & then maybe the foster family too, we just started to bring more visits into the equation. All of a sudden...it just becomes all about being adopted and not being a kid

Support for adoptive parents

I think the most important thing we learned was to take the advice of the sw because when you have a bm coming to your house you can be asked thing...you just react without thinking...there is no need to say no. I've learned to say stop, don't jump into agreements you are going to have to break later

Contd.

You need to give them (adoptive parents) guidance, you need to give them somewhere to run...they need support. But like when you are dealing with people's lives and children, it's not good enough having an in tray and an out tray

Challenges

- Realities of difference brought into sharp focus (McCaughren, 2010, McDonald)
- The rule of protection (McDonald, 2015)
- Contact difficult or not possible when placement and adoptive parenthood are contested (McDonald, 2015)
- Contact full of uncertainties



Considerations for practice

- No one size fits all – respecting the individuality and particularities of each adoptive family, child and birth parent(s)
- Contact needs to be supported & resourced
- Facilitation of contact is resource heavy
- Dedicated adoption support unit – researched and resourced
- Access to a planned package of adoption support services – quick and responsive

Otherwise...

- “the end result for adoptive families may prove unsatisfactory – just more tea and sympathy” (Sturges & Selwyn, 2007).

Thank you

○ Any questions or comments

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