

“ A guide to
early permanence
placements ”

What you need to know about
Best for Baby (concurrency)
and Better Beginnings
(fostering for adoption)





Early permanence allows prospective adopters the opportunity to parent a baby or child during the early weeks and months of their lives, offering them love and stability when they need it most and supporting them through key stages of their development. Some of the babies and children in our care are likely to need adopting because there is a high probability of them not being able to return to their birth families. Whilst a significant number of these children will go on to be adopted, there is still a chance they could be reunited with their birth relatives.

There are two types of early permanence plans:

Best for Baby (concurrent placements) - designed to give babies and children under two years old a better start in life. The young children are usually placed with Best for Baby carers in a fostering arrangement from birth or soon after, whilst the court decides on their future. Better Beginnings (Fostering for Adoption) - similar to Best for Baby, but for children of any age including babies. Approved adopters become temporary foster carers for the child or children and they stay together whilst the court decides on their future.

The advantages of early permanence placements

- Babies and children will enjoy a more secure start in life and greater stability and security during the early months and years of their lives.
- Delays and repeatedly moving the children is kept to a minimum.
- They enable babies and children to be placed earlier in a permanent family, whether this is with the birth family or with carers who will become the child's adoptive family.
- If you adopt the child you have cared for, you will have the advantage of having looked after and bonded with them from a young age.
- If it has been possible for you to meet the child's birth parents you will have a better understanding of the difficulties they have faced – this will be beneficial for them and the child as they get older.

To get a better idea of the children we have placed in early permanence read Jack's profile as described by one of our social workers:





Jack

Jack was placed with his Best for Baby carers from birth. Jack's carers act as foster carers, supporting contact with his birth family while court proceedings to decide Jack's future are ongoing. Jack has direct contact with his birth parents three times a week and also has contact with his grandmother.

Jack is the first child of his birth parents, his birth mother has significant learning disabilities and a hearing impairment. Jack's father has been considered a risk to children and vulnerable adults due to previous criminal offences.

It was thought that Jack could have some degree of disability or hearing impairment, however he is now a healthy little boy who loves his milk and has a great little appetite! He is meeting all of his developmental milestones and his regular hearing tests did not raise any concerns.

Court proceedings are due to conclude shortly and it is likely that Jack's final care plan will be of adoption. Some of Jack's family members have come forward during court proceedings and have been considered as permanent carers for Jack. Family members were assessed and unfortunately they were not deemed suitable to care for him.

Jack will be able to stay with his carers who will adopt him, meaning he has been with his adoptive parents from birth. This plan has been 'Best for Jack'.

Following adoption Jack will maintain indirect contact with his birth parents and grandmother.

How is early permanence different from traditional adoption?

In traditional care planning for children, a child is placed with foster carers while the court makes decisions about their future. If the judge agrees that a child should be adopted then suitable adopters will be found and the child will move from the foster carers to adoptive parents through a process called bridging.

Because early permanence carers are approved as both foster carers and adopters, a child does not have to move. They remain with their carers who will become their adoptive parents if this is the decision of the court.

Early permanence placements aren't suitable for all children. They are considered for babies and children of all ages where social workers believe it is highly likely that the child will be adopted.

What our early permanence carers do

Early permanence carers are assessed and trained both as prospective foster carers and adopters. When a child is initially placed with early permanence carers, they act as foster carers for the child, supporting contact with birth family members while the court decides the child's future.

It is important that carers work co-operatively with the child's family and the professionals involved.

If a baby or child has been considered for early permanence, this means there is a strong argument that they will not be returned to their birth family. However, if the court decides that the birth parents are able to meet the needs of the child, their carers would help them return to their birth parents. Early permanence carers will have given the child the love and security that they need as well as helping them to settle back with their family.

Should the child be unable to return to the care of their birth family, early permanence carers adopt the child and become the legal parents.

Read David and Katy's experiences of becoming Best for Baby carers to newborn babies Poppy and then Harry, who they went on to adopt.

David and Katy



We knew from the start that we wanted to adopt a baby through a Best for Baby concurrency placement. We liked the idea that Best for Baby placements aim to ensure that babies and young children will only ever move between two families – birth family and the foster/adoptive family - meaning they will have less upheaval and will benefit from a more secure start in life. We feel Best for Baby is an amazing scheme, because it puts the needs of the baby or young child first. It made perfect sense to us to go down this route, it felt right for our family and we wanted to be a part of it.

Initial nerves

We knew some parts of concurrency would be tough - especially the uncertainty of whether we would be able to adopt the child or they would move back to their birth family - plus we had our five-year-old birth daughter's feelings and vulnerabilities to consider. However, as a family

we completely rose to the challenge and felt extremely privileged to be given the responsibility to look after someone else's child. Our five-year-old amazed us with her resilience and maturity in light of what we were taking on. We were all so proud to be Best for Baby carers and felt that we were making a real difference to a child's life.

Our first Best for Baby placement

In our first Best for Baby placement we had a tiny, precious baby girl called Poppy placed in our care. We met Poppy's birth mum once, prior to her being born, and again in the hospital birthing suite. Poppy was our responsibility from when she was about six-hours old, but we only cared for her for a short while as she was able to return to her birth family. Poppy's time with us was brief, yet we had made a real connection with

her and it was heart-wrenching to say goodbye. Nonetheless, after a period of reflection, our overwhelming feeling was that we had helped make a fairy tale come true. What a privilege to be part of that story!

Our second placement and meeting birth family

After two or three months we felt ready to embark on our next Best for Baby placement, and had a beautiful newborn boy called Harry placed in our care.

We took Harry to have contact with his birth family two to three times a week. Meeting birth family for the first time was nerve-wracking for us, but we quickly realised that they were just as nervous as we were, and we gently felt our way through this strange situation together. They had had a tough life and our hearts reached out to them to make contact times as positive as possible. We built up a really good relationship with birth family, far beyond what we could have ever wished for. Harry wasn't able to return to his birth family and therefore

we went on to adopt him. We thought it was a real benefit to us having developed a good relationship with Harry's birth family from the start. Because of the conversations we had, the information we learnt, the gifts exchanged, the diary we kept, and the photographs we took, we now have a priceless gift to give our son when he grows up.

Best for Baby currency turned our lives upside down in the most wonderful way. There are still some uncertainties regarding Harry's possible future learning needs, but we truly wouldn't change any part of our roller-coaster journey.





The qualities you need to be an early permanence carer

The idea behind early permanence placements is that it's better for the adults involved to bear the uncertainty, so that the child can enjoy more stability and security. They may return to their birth family and there may also be uncertainty about their health and future development. Because of this you need to be:

- Emotionally robust and resilient, to cope with a level of uncertainty about the child's future.
- Willing to adopt the child if this path is decided.

- Able to act as a foster carer and work with the birth family whilst looking after the child, in the case of babies this will involve meeting birth parents about a couple of times a week.
- Prepared for the impact a new baby or child will have on your family, particularly if you have other children.

How to become an early permanence carer

The first step to becoming an early permanence carer is to make an initial enquiry. You can do this by contacting the fostering and adoption recruitment and assessment team.

We aim for early permanence carers to be formally approved as both foster carers and adopters within

approximately six months from the start of stage one of the adoption process, see the adoption process on page 10.

During your assessment you will have the opportunity to attend both the adoption pre-approval training and a specialist early permanence course to help prepare you for the role of a Best for Baby or Better Beginnings carer.

Additionally, you will have access to early permanence support groups. This gives you the opportunity to meet with other Best for Baby and Better Beginnings carers, who will share their experiences and offer peer support.

Throughout your enquiry, application and training, you will be offered a high level of ongoing support and guidance from qualified professionals in the fostering and adoption recruitment and assessment team. A social worker will work with you and carry out your assessment and make sure you are fully prepared for this role.

Once your social worker has completed their assessment this will then be presented to the adoption panel for consideration and approval

as an early permanence carer. For Best for Baby carers they will consider your approval as both adoptive parents and foster carers at the same time.

Support available for early permanence carers

After you have been approved, you will be supported by your social worker. At this stage you will be supported as a foster carer. They will work closely with you through the matching process and placement of a child and will support you with the uncertainties of care proceedings.

Post approval you will continue to have access to the early permanence support groups. You and any child placed in your care, will also be able to attend an early permanence 'stay and play' support group. As an early permanence carer you will also have access to all foster carer training and support groups.

If the court decides the child should be adopted we will support you in formally adopting the child. For us, this is the best outcome for a child who cannot be returned to their birth family.

OUR SIX MONTHS ADOPTION PROCESS

when you're ready

Informal Initial Enquiry Stage

Get in touch with us



We'll speak to you to find out more



We'll give you some time to think things through

If you're going ahead we'll call you again soon and arrange to visit you at home



We'll go through the paperwork if you are going through to the next stage



Stage One

2 months

We'll request statutory references and you'll need to have a medical with your GP



You'll attend pre-adoption training



We'll talk to at least two of your personal referees

We'll do a health and safety check on your home and a pet assessment, if needed



After eight weeks we'll prepare a short report and decide if you can progress to stage two



Stage Two

4 months

Your social worker will visit you and your family over the next three months



We'll speak with your children, if you have any, whether you live with them or not



We'll speak with people in your support network

The adoption report known as the 'PAR' is completed



Your report is considered by the adoption panel - you can attend this with your social worker



Congratulations! You're approved!

The Agency Decision Maker makes the final decision on your approval



Your social worker will consider children who may be matched with you for adoption



The possible matching will go back to panel for agreement

You will meet the child/ren and get to know each other before they move in with you



When they have lived with you for ten weeks you can apply to the court for the official adoption order



This is to give you an overview. If you have any questions just give us a call on 0800 195 1183

6 months




Post adoption support

Once you've adopted don't think you're on your own!

We pride ourselves on the high quality of support we give to our adoptive families during the adoption process and once a child is placed with their new family. We have a dedicated

and experienced post adoption support team that provides advice and support whenever you need it.

You'll find more information about post adoption support in our adoption information pack or by visiting our website.



Want to find out more?

You'll find out more about early permanence placements on our website lancashire.gov.uk/adoption

You can also call us on **0300 123 6723** or **01772 535 196** and speak in confidence to an early permanence placements social worker.

If you'd like to come to one of our **adoption information events** check our website for the date of the next one.

A guide to early permanence placements