

Information for friends, family, employers and colleagues of Concurrency Carers.

Who is this information for?

You may be aware that your friend, colleague or family member has been thinking about adoption for some time. You may understand adoption but not what adopting by concurrency means.

If someone you know has chosen to adopt via a concurrency route, what does this mean?

This means that they have been assessed and approved as both adopters and foster carers. The plan will be that they will have a young child placed with them for whom they will act as foster carers while assessments on the birth parents take place and the final decisions are made about the child's future. The child may return to live with their birth family if they can prove that they can provide a stable, safe and loving home for the child, or they may remain with the concurrency carers they have been placed with who can then go on to adopt them. It is called concurrency planning as the Local Authority will be working on two plans concurrently – Plan A (reunification with birth parents if possible) and Plan B (Adoption if the child cannot return to their birth parents).

Why might the child go back to live with their birth family?

Children are best brought up within their own families wherever this is safe and possible and this principle is enshrined in English law in the Children Act 1989. Sometimes it can be difficult for birth parents to care for a child and they need additional services to help them meet the needs of their children. For some parents, complex problems and previous parenting histories may prompt the Local Authority to consider other plans for the child's future at the same time as trying to support change in the birth parents. Local Authorities can work on these plans simultaneously. However, unlikely it can seem that the birth parents can change, people can sometimes make drastic changes to enable them to care for a child and they must be given every reasonable opportunity to do so, as long as the time scales they are given in which to change also fit with the needs of the child. Adoption is a very drastic step as it severs the link between the child and their birth family for ever. It is clear from statute and case law that adoption should only ever be seen as a last resort after all other options have been properly considered.

Why not wait until the decision-making is over before placing the child with adopters?

Children need a stable and secure permanent home in which to develop and grow. We know from research that being in temporary foster care is harmful to children and any unnecessary moves can cause further disruption and damage. Children need stability and good quality care, especially in their early years in order to form secure attachments to their primary carers. If children develop a secure attachment to their primary carers this will form their attachment pattern for life. Likewise if they form insecure or chaotic attachments to their primary carers it will be very difficult for them to form more functional positive relationships later in life. Therefore the goal of all child and family social work is to achieve timely permanence for a child, preferably within their birth family but if this is not possible within another suitable family. Concurrency is win-win for the child as it enables the child to form secure attachments to concurrent carers and maintain or develop a relationship with their birth parents. Therefore if the child returns to their birth family they are in a position to transfer their secure attachment to their birth parents and if they cannot return to live with them, they have already had the opportunity to develop an attachment to their permanent carers and will not be required to move again into a permanent home as they are already there.

Isn't this asking a lot of Concurrent carers?

Yes, you are right, it is. However, we know from research and experience that some special people are able to cope with the uncertainty and potential losses that being a concurrent carer entails. Your friend, colleague or family member will have been very carefully assessed and prepared to undertake this role. They will also be well supported by their social worker. If you are very closely involved in this journey as a prospective adoptive grandparent or aunt/uncle hopefully you will have been given the opportunity to attend an information session or some training with the concurrent carers. However, don't worry if this hasn't happened, as it should be possible for you to get to talk to your family member's social worker.

How can I help the person I know who is a concurrent carer?

It is great that you are asking this question as being a concurrent carer is demanding and people undertaking this role with need understanding, support and acceptance from those around them.

Below is a checklist of points that may be helpful. But remember everyone is different so it may be best for you to check out with them what they would find helpful.

- Remember that the child they have living with them IS NOT THEIR ADOPTED CHILD but a child they are acting as FOSTER CARERS for.

- Decide up front with the carers what they want you to tell other people about what is happening: what story do they want you to tell?
- Be perceptive about what they may need your help with – work out what you can do for them and consult with them.
- Encourage them to ask for help but also offer so that they don't have to do the asking.
- Provide them with practical support such as cleaning, cooking and shopping.
- Have a balanced approach to the situation they are in as there is a chance that the child will not remain with them; it is therefore not helpful to be too gushing!
- Find ways to manage your own emotions and be balanced around the carers. Think about how you will achieve this before they have a child placed with them.
- Try not to ask questions about the long term, such as which school or nursery they will attend.
- Accept that the carers may not be as available to you as they were in the past.
- Be flexible, listen and provide reassurance.
- From time to time, remind them why they decided to become concurrent carers.
- Gently help them to stay focussed on the best interest of the child.
- Help them get through on a day to day basis rather than looking too far ahead.
- Provide them with affirmation not criticism.
- Help them to appreciate even small things, for example enjoying the child's milestones and first experiences.
- Spread the word about what you have learnt or know about concurrency to the rest of the support network.
- Provide the carers with a break by going for a walk with them and baby, or by being in their home so that you can make them tea or play with baby.
- The carers will have been told to not refer to themselves as 'mummy' and 'daddy' but to use first names. It would really help for you to do this too.
- Please remember that the child they have living with them has birth parents and is still in a relationship with them while assessments continue.
- Concurrent carers have found it very upsetting to have people congratulate them on becoming a 'mummy or a daddy' when they hear a child is living with them. Please refrain from doing this.
- Because the child they have living with them is in the care system, confidentiality is important and they may not be able to share much information with you. Please understand this.
- When the child is first placed with them your friend, colleague or family member will be focussing on helping the child to build a secure attachment to them. This will mean that they may not seem very sociable to you and

you may feel pushed away. Please understand this in terms of the task they have taken on; the child is not `theirs' and it would not be good for the child's development at this stage to be having contact with lots of different people.

- Being a concurrent carer is challenging. Just `being there' for your friend, colleague or family member can be a great support. Listening, but not asking lots of questions or giving your own opinions can help.
- Your friend, colleague or family member may themselves be struggling with very strong feelings at times. If you have strong feelings triggered by this process, try to get support for yourself so that you don't end up burdening the concurrent carer with your feelings to cope with as well.
- If people wish to send a card or gift send it to the child who can take it with them if they leave.
- Please don't buy 'Congratulations on your new baby' cards
- Refer to yourselves by your first name, you are not the child's Granny/ Grandpa/ Auntie etc.
- Remember that your friend, colleague or family member has chosen to care for a child in this manner and been assessed and prepared to do so. It can help to have and show confidence in them and their coping abilities.

If the child's birth parents are assessed as being able to care for the child they will be returned to their care. It will be a great help for concurrent carers to have compassionate, understanding and supportive friends, colleagues and family members around them to help them cope with the loss of a child they have cared for. But please remember, they have been fostering the child as the point of foster care is that it is temporary if birth parents can make the changes needed to keep the child safe and secure in the future.

If the child's birth parents are assessed as not being able to provide a safe and secure future home for the child the Local Authority will seek a full Care Order and Placement Order at court. If this is granted then your friends, colleagues or family member can begin to think about themselves as the child's prospective adopters. However, if the adoption is contested by the birth parents they may still have a long journey ahead of them until they have an Adoption Order and the appeal period has expired.

If you have any questions about anything in this information sheet please contact your Local Authority Adoption/Fostering Team and ask to talk to someone about concurrent planning, or visit www.first4adoption.org.uk or www.adoptionconcurrency.org

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