

***An extract from the full length Good Practice Guide each participant will receive
at the end of the Contact in Context conference, 20 October 2023***

The Family Futures Neuro-Physiological Framework for Contact Arrangements

We believe based on our clinical experience over the last 25 years that contact assessments and facilitation can occur in all three of these scenarios:

- In foster care, special guardianship or kinship care when there is on-going contact
- In adoption where there is no on-going contact with the possible exception of letterbox
- Where there is unplanned clandestine contact

The same approach and principles apply but may have to be modified to fit the individual situation of each child. In all scenarios therapeutic life story work is vitally important for any form of contact to be meaningful and to help the child to make sense of past and present relationships.

In foster care and special guardianship or kinship care where there is ongoing contact therapeutic life story work (TLSW) with the child needs to be woven around the contact they are currently having. It should address feelings and questions that may arise from contact. The child's historical relationship with the contactee needs to be explained to them as well as the events that surrounded that relationship in the past. At some point when sufficient TLSW has been undertaken then a facilitated contact should occur during which, as outlined later in this paper, the child's wishes and feelings can be expressed.

In the adoption scenario, ideally contact if appropriate and possible, should be a positive outcome of TLSW. This later work again ideally should take place during middle childhood and pre adolescence. The contact then becomes a conduit for the child or young person to express their feelings, ask questions and to feel empowered regarding the nature and frequency of future contact. In this case Family Futures NPP neuro sequential model can be more easily applied as a child or young person will have been helped to feel more regulated and in relationship with their adoptive parents, so that they are more able to access their reflective capacity and begin to make sense of their life story without being overwhelmed by feelings and/or the contact.

In the unplanned clandestine scenario, the approach is likely to be a backwards one. Sometimes facilitated contact can be necessary as an emergency intervention to help the child or young person and their birth relative have a meaningful, honest and open contact. The approach begins with the facilitated contact and the feelings being evoked for all parties. Then later on, when the contact may become problematic and difficult, this is when a TLSW approach can be embarked upon, as a way of enabling the young person to make sense of their feelings and the attachment relationship that has evolved as a result of contact.

*From the good practice guide – Contact for children who are fostered, in special guardianship/kinship care placements or adopted: Family Futures Framework © Family Futures 2023
- to be published in October 2023, available free to all conference participants.*

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