

## **Looked after children and young people - Contact with Friends or Family**

### **What is contact?**

Contact is the word used to describe seeing or speaking to members of your family or friends. It can include seeing members of your family (known as direct contact), speaking to them on the telephone, or writing to them by letter or email. It also includes receiving presents, letters or emails.

### **What is a Contact Order?**

- A Contact Order is when the court makes decisions about how often you should see or speak to a particular person.
- This would usually be members of your family but could, in certain circumstances, relate to friends.
- A Contact Order may also say when and where you should see a particular person.
- A Contact Order can also say that you should not see a particular person.

### **What if there is no Contact Order?**

- If there is no Order, then your social worker should make sure that there is reasonable contact between you and members of your family and any important friends.
- Your Care Plan should state who you are going to see and roughly how often.
- You must be consulted about this.
- The amount of visits will depend on your particular case. For example, if your family are very far away, you will not be able to see them as often as if they were nearby.

### **What if you want contact with someone not mentioned in your Care Plan?**

You should discuss this with your foster carers or staff at your children's home. If there is any uncertainty about whether you should have contact they (or you) should contact your social worker.

### **What if your social worker wants to stop contact but you don't agree?**

The social worker will have to go back to court to change contact unless the change is agreed with your parents. If you are unhappy with this, you can speak to your solicitor about going to court.

### **What if the Care Plan says you should have contact with someone but it is not arranged?**

- You should complain to your social worker. If nothing happens then, you should make a formal complaint.
- It might be good to speak to your solicitor about this as well, because it is possible to ask the Court to make sure any Contact Orders are obeyed.
- You can apply for a Contact Order if you do not have one.
- In addition, you need to make sure you mention the problem with contact at your next Review.
- Ask your social worker for an advocate if you do not feel confident to explain how you feel at your review. We have arranged for our children and young people to be able to have advocates from an organisation called the [National Youth Advocacy Service \(NYAS\)](http://www.nyas.net) on 0800 616 101 [www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net)

### **What if your family do not want to see you?**

- Members of your family cannot be made to see you.
- You should discuss how you feel about this with your social worker or carers.

### **What if you don't want to see your family?**

- Your social worker can only stop members of your family seeing you for a maximum of seven days without the court's permission.
- If you want contact to stop for a longer period and your parents insist on seeing you, you or your social worker will have to obtain an order from the court saying that you should not see your parents.
- The court will decide whether seeing your family is in your interests and will listen to what you say about it.
- Your social worker should ask you about what you want.

### **Do you have to see a parent who has been violent to a member of my family but not to me?**

Recently Judges have realised that violence in your family can be very scary even if you are not the one who has been hit. If you feel worried about seeing a parent who has been violent, it is very important that you tell your social worker.

### **Can you be made to see your family?**

- When the court has ordered that you should have contact with particular members of your family, the only way to change this order is to go back to court to ask for the court to make a different order.
- You should discuss any worries about seeing any members of your family with your social worker or your solicitor.

### **What if you are not satisfied with the number of times you can see someone or with the arrangements for seeing a particular person?**

- You should discuss this with your social worker. If you are still not satisfied, you may contact your solicitor and discuss whether you should ask the court to make a Contact Order stating the number of times you may see the particular person or the arrangements for these visits.

### **What is supervised contact?**

- Sometimes the court or social workers may decide that it is better for you to see your family with another adult present. This is called 'supervised contact'
- This may be because they are worried you may become upset during the visit or that your family may say or do something that will hurt or upset you.
- Sometimes another adult will come along just to see how the visits are going, to make sure they are taking place in a way that makes them enjoyable for you.

### **Can you see your family without someone supervising?**

- If you feel uncomfortable having another person present, it is important to talk to your social worker about this.
- When you are on a Care Order and there is disagreement about the need for supervision, you, your social worker or your parents can ask the court to decide what the best arrangements are for your visits.

### **What kind of contact will you have if you are accommodated under Section 20?**

- The court has no power to make contact orders when you are being looked after by a local authority but not on a care order.
- All contact arrangements must be agreed between Social Care and your family and your wishes and feelings about the people you wish to see must be considered.