

**Family Connections Assessment: Updated Guidance**

**The Family Connections Assessment and Plan** should be completed for all children with brothers, sisters and sibling like relationships. It forms part of Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership’s response to implementing the Promise [**https://thepromise.scot**](https://thepromise.scot)and duties outlined in the Children (Scotland) Act 2020. The National Practice guidance summarises the ambition ‘*that every looked after infant, child and young person lives with their brothers and sisters, where it is appropriate to do so, and sustains strong and positive lifelong relationships with them*’ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/staying-together-connected-getting-right-sisters-brothers-national-practice-guidance/documents/>.

The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 defines sibling as: *‘a person who has at least one parent in common with the other child, and any other person whom the child has an ongoing relationship with the character of a relationship between siblings’*

It’s our policy to carry out assessments for all care experienced children and young people who have brothers, sisters and sibling like relationships regardless of their age or where they live. These assessments should be carried out as soon as possible to ensure planning for children supports relationships and explores whether or not children and young people can be supported to live together. This may require therapeutic interventions to nurture and repair relationships. If this is not possible there should be a clear plan to support ongoing connections. The Plan should be regularly reviewed to account for changing needs. A process map for completing assessment and plans is included on page 2.

Following evaluation of the Family Connections Assessment and Plan pilot there’s a clear message that children also have broader connections that are important to them and we also need to consider how to support these in our planning for children.

The evaluation also demonstrated a need for a two stage approach. Stage one: Brief information gathering to assess who is in a family’s network and what connections the child values.

*Further detail on legal changes is noted at the end of this guidance.*

The importance of connections in transitions planning is also reflected in the Staying Connected Toolkit [Staying Connected Toolkit : Association for Fostering, Kinship & Adoption Scotland (afkascotland.org)](https://afkascotland.org/our-resources/staying-connected-toolkit/).

**Completing the assessment: Family Connections Assessment Process Map**

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| **Stage in Process** | **Action required** | **Purpose** |
| **Stage 1:**Child/YP accommodated (including with family) | Stage 1 of assessment completed for the first My MeetingLife story conversations should start to ensure the child has a natural understanding of their situation and continue throughout (guidance available from FFC Learning and Development). | Complete ecogram with existing information on family and connections.Complete *About Me* with child.Use both to plan family time and maintain connections. Share in planning meeting and at each My Meeting.Support new carers to understand child’s connections.Make a referral to FGDM. |
| **Stage 2 – Assessment and Initial Plan**Complete when thorough assessment of relationships and connections is completed including therapeutic interventions, where appropriate, to assess and support relationships. This should be done as soon as possible and not wait for permanence planning. Progress will be reviewed at each My meeting.However, an up-to-date assessment must be presented to a Permanence Review. | Initial Family Connections Assessment and Plan is completed and given to Service Manager for agreement/ amendment.If a child returns to live with parents or family in the community this provides information to support identity and ongoing connections. | Informing planning at My Meetings and reviews.Maintain relationships or reconnect.Identify where therapeutic interventions are required to support relationships.If living apart is assessed as appropriate the assessment and plan explains why and how to stay connected.Gather views on initial plan.The assessment and plan is included in the Permanence Review paperwork. |
| **Stage 2: Head of Service Approval**To be completed after a Permanence Review.If a Permanence Review took place some time ago this process should be followed as soon as possible.An authorised plan must be completed prior to a linking meeting taking place if the child’s plan is adoption or permanent foster care. | Assessment and plan to be sent as soon as possible after the Permanence Review to the Head of Service who will meet and consider the plan. If in agreement the Head of Service will comment and sign the plan.The Child’s Connection Plan should then be completed including and Head of Service comments and this should be shared with the child, parents, relevant family members supporting connections, brothers, sisters, sibling like relationships, foster carers, adopters, key workers of all the children and young people to ensure everyone understands the plan. | To get Head of Service endorsement of connections for permanence planning/ matching.Clarify the plan and roles.To share with potential carers and adopters as part of the child’s profile to ensure they are committed to meeting these needs.To identify ongoing actions to develop and support the child’s connections.To provide a plan for matching panel that can be regularly reviewed through My Meetings, Post Adoption Support meetings and any relevant forum to react to developing needs and strengthen connections. |

1.The overarching principle of The Promise and The 2020 Act is that brothers and sisters should not be separated unless there is clear evidence that living together does not safeguard and promote the welfare of each child. Where such evidence exists, **a Family Connections Assessment** will be carried out to determine whether it is appropriate for a child to be placed, or reunited, with their brothers and sisters.

This requires a full, detailed and comprehensive assessment of the needs of the child, their relationships, and the strengths and risks involved in living together, or apart from, their brothers and sisters. This will include the impact on the welfare of any other children, for example children already living in the care placement. Another important dimension to consider when placing siblings together is the impact on carers of ‘therapeutically parenting’ two or more developmentally traumatised children and how this might be supported.

*2.A* ***Family Connections Assessment*** *will also look at how a child can spend time together with a brother or sister that they do not live with but are identified as being ‘important’.* The assessment will consider both individual and combined needs and formulate a plan, where appropriate, for supporting the child to keep in touch with brothers and sisters who still live in the family home, who live in other kinship family arrangements, who are older and live independently, or who are also in care settings but cannot live with the child. It should also be noted that **The Promise** makes no distinction between biological and non- biological relationships. Relationships formed through living in the same household are equally assessed for meaning and quality in the child’s life.

3. Children and young people might also have brothers and sisters who have never lived with, or indeed are unknown to them. An assessment of these ‘potential’ relationships will take time to gather information, views and risk assess and an early FCAP is likely to refer to these relationships and outline a brief plan of actions to be taken and proposed time scale.

4.There are times when a child or young person’s relationship with brothers or sisters may not be healthy or safe. In attachment terms, children who have had to fight to get access to the scarce parental resources of attention, comfort and time are caught up in intense rivalry and will have developed their own individual survival and coping strategies. Children with insecure attachment styles are more likely to be in conflict with siblings and lack an emotional connection. Children who have experienced maltreatment, domestic abuse and lack of care may mirror the adult relationships that they have witnessed in their relationships with their brothers and sisters. <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Developmental-Trauma-Close-Up-Revised-Jan-2020.pdf>

Time apart with structured, purposeful contact may allow for the repair of these relationships and at the very least an assessment of their value. The **Family Connections Assessment** in this circumstance will, therefore, consider both individual and combined needs within these relationships and formulate a risk assessment and a **‘keeping connected’** plan to meet the needs identified and support relationships to recover and develop over time.

Assessing the child’s relationships with brothers and sisters is a dynamic and ongoing process and will require an understanding of both neuro typical child development and the impact of ‘trauma’. Often, relationships that are deemed detrimental or risky at the time of assessment will require a ‘repair’ plan that is reviewed and updated regularly. The following resource summarises the key themes in trauma aware practice.

<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/trauma-sensitive-practice-children-care>

5.The quality and meaning of the child’s relationships with brothers and sisters will have been assessed as part of your involvement with the family and should now be discussed at the post accommodation Planning Meeting held within 72 hours or three working days. Stage one of the **Family Connections Assessment and Plan** should be presented at the first **My Meeting.** Stage two should be completed once more assessment has been done to formulate and initial plan. This shouldn’t be left until all aspects of assessment are concluded. This should be a living document which details actions required and is regularly reviewed to update progress**.** and reviewed and updated at each subsequent meeting for as long as the child remains Looked After and beyond in their Post Adoption Support Plans.

6.When children move to another home, they should routinely be consulted about the adults and children who are important to them and **The Family Connections Assessment** updated to reflect their views. Unless it is not in their interests, **family time** with those adults and children should be encouraged and facilitated.

**What will the Family Connections Assessment be used for?**

Assessments function as evidence of the decision- making process. This will form a part of the child’s record, provide vital later life information and contribute to the forming of a coherent understanding of their life story.

The Family Connections Assessment will inform decisions about contact, reunification or separation.

Particularly where the plan involves brothers and sisters living apart from each other, the detail and outcome of this assessment will be crucial to any **Permanence Planning** and should therefore be completed (to an agreed stage) and submitted with the **Permanence Review Report.** These recommendations will then be discussed at the Permanence Review and any recommendations passed to the relevant Head of Service for comment and authorisation after a permanence plan is agreed. The resulting **Family Connections Assessment and Plan** will be included in the child’s **Matching Profile** and **permanence and adoption linking and matching meetings.** The assessment therefore **must** be presented to and signed off by a Head of Service prior to the referral to Families for Children for family finding to ensure that the matching forum and any potential carers are aware of the agreed plan around supporting key connections for the child.

**How will the Family Connections Assessment be carried out?**

This is a holistic, trauma informed, child centred assessment and, first and foremost, should evidence that you have involved the children in a way that is appropriate to their stage of development.

Assessments are strengthened through a collaborative approach with those who know the child well. As well as the views and observations of the children themselves, **The Family Connections Assessment and Plan** should also include information from their parents, family, foster carers and practitioners with whom they have contact. All will have valuable thoughts, insights and contributions to make about the relationships between brothers and sisters, how these have developed, what has impacted on them, and how they can be supported.

**What else will the Family Connections Assessment and Plan achieve?**

Sheila Beckett (Beyond Together or Apart 2018) developed the Charter below for a Scottish context with Stand Up For Siblings. The Charter outlines the information that children need to have about their brothers and sisters both currently and in the future. The Family Connections Assessment will gather and record this information. This Charter provides an effective children’s rights check list for your assessment.

[Charter-for-brothers-and-sisters-February-2019.pdf](https://www.standupforsiblings.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Charter-for-brothers-and-sisters-February-2019.pdf)

**Background to legal changes**

In August of 2020 the Scottish Parliament passed The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 (The 2020 Act). Section 13 of this act amends section 17(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. **The effect is that ‘before making any decision with respect to a child whom they are looking after, or proposing to look after, a local authority shall ascertain the views of siblings and any other person with whom the child has lived and with whom the child has an ongoing relationship with the character of a relationship between siblings.**

The local authority must ascertain these views so far as is reasonably practicable (Section 17(3) of the 1995 Act) and have regard to them so far as practicable (Section 17(4) of the 1995 Act) In practice, this continues to be a shared responsibility involving the Team Around the Child in line with the Getting It Right For Every Child Approach.

Under Section 17(1) of the 1995 Act as amended by the 2020 Act, ‘siblings’ are now included in the category of persons to whom ‘the local authority has a duty to take steps to promote, where appropriate, on a regular basis, personal relations and direct contact. This must be carried out in a manner which has regard to the local authorities’ overarching duties to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare’. This means that, where a child in care does not live with any or all of their brothers and sisters, the local authority must promote and facilitate 'direct contact' between them and their brothers and sisters on an ongoing, regular basis, wherever this safeguards and promotes the child’s welfare. Unless an assessment (which has taken full account of the views of the brothers and sisters concerned) clearly demonstrates otherwise, direct contact should be seen as being appropriate in every case.

The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, as amended by the Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 says that where the local authority is considering placing a child with a kinship carer, a foster carer, or in a residential placement, and any brothers or sisters of the child are also looked after or about to be looked after, the local authority must, where appropriate, place the sisters and/or brothers together (with the same carer or in the same residential placement) or in homes near to one another.

Legislative changes within Sections 14 and 25 of the 2020 Act relate to Children’s Hearings’ consideration and involvement of sisters and brothers. Section 14 creates an explicit duty on Children’s Hearings and on a Sheriff, when making, changing, or continuing a Compulsory Supervision Order for a child, to consider contact between the child and any siblings they are not living with. Section 25 establishes a new way for taking part in Children’s Hearings and the Rules for Children’s Hearings have been changed to say that brothers and sisters must be given the opportunity to participate in their sibling’s Children’s Hearing, if the Children’s Hearing is likely to make a decision significantly affecting contact (or the possibility of contact) between them and their sister or brother.

Further support and guidance can be offered at monthly Permanence Workshops. Nominations can be made by emailing Families for Children Learning and Development FamiliesForChildrenTraining@sw.glasgow.gov.uk