Contact When Children are Adopted from Care

Pain

Power

Potential

Dr Beth Neil
The ‘Contact after Adoption’ study: Face-to-face and indirect contact for children adopted < age 4.

A longitudinal study following adopted children 2, 6 and 16 years post placement (16 yr follow up in progress).

http://www.uea.ac.uk/swp/research/centre/contactafteradoption

The ‘Supporting contact’ study: Face-to-face, agency mediated contact

• 55 adoptive parents
• 39 birth relatives

Neil et al 2011

The ‘Helping birth families’ study

• 73 birth parents and grandparents in compulsory proceedings

Neil et al 2010
Issues of Pain

Child
- Abuse & neglect
- My ‘story’
- Loss

Adoptive Parents
- The ‘other’ family
- Emotions about abuse
- Child’s legacy

Birth Family
- Hostile process
- Loss
- Own history
- Complex needs
Power Issues Before Adoption

Child
- No voice
- Mixed feelings

Adoptive Parents
- Need approval
- A scarce resource

Birth Family
- Early exclusion from contact planning
- Shall I contest?
Power Issues After Adoption

Child
- Changing views
- Assuming control

Adoptive Parents
- Managing risk and responsibility

Birth Family
- Being seen as a risk
- Not wanting to ‘rock the boat’
The Potential of Contact

Child
- Questions
- People
- Openness

Adoptive Parents
- Information
- Talking
- Anxieties
- Closeness

Birth Family
- Mitigating loss
- Anxieties
- Contributing to child’s life
Factors Associated with Beneficial Contact

- Child & birth relative rapport
- Adopters/birth relative rapport
- Birth relative not abuser
- Adopters communicatively open
- Adopter/child closeness
- Child placed very young
- Birth relative supportive attitude
- Adopter/child closeness
- Working contact

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Summary: Planning and Supporting Contact

What are goals/purpose/needs?

Assess strengths/risks

Review

Plan support for contact

Provisional contact plan

How can this contact support this child?

Support suspension of contact

What else?
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The ‘Contact after Adoption’ study
http://www.uea.ac.uk/swp/research/centre/contactafteradoption

‘Helping Birth Families’ and ‘Supporting Direct Contact after Adoption’ studies
http://www.adoptionresearchinitiative.org.uk/study5.html