Contact When Children are Adopted from Care

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

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

- 55 adoptive parents
- 39 birth relatives

Neil *et al* 2011

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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?

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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 supportive attitude
- Adopters communicatively open
- Adopter/child closeness
- Birth relative not abuser
- Child placed very young

Working contact
Summary: Planning and Supporting Contact

What are goals/purpose/needs?

Assess strengths/risks

Provisional contact plan

Plan support for contact

Review

Support suspension of contact

How can this contact support this child?

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