

Ensuring Safety, Permanency and Well-Being: Suggestions for conducting contacts with Birth Parents

Adapted by Rose Wentz and Joan Morse

April 2009

Infants: (0-18 months)

Developmental Milestones

Physical:

0 -3 months

- Sucking, grasping reflexes
- Lifts head when held at shoulder
- Moves arms actively
- Is able to follow objects and to focus

3- 6 months

- Rolls over
- Holds head up when held in sitting position
- Lifts up knees, crawling motions
- Reaches for objects

6-9 months

- Sits unaided, spends more time in upright position
- Learns to crawl
- Climbs stairs
- Develops eye-hand coordination

9-18 months

- Achieve mobility, strong urge to climb, crawl
- Stands and walks
- Learn to walk on his or her own
- Learns to grasp with thumb and finger
- Feeds self
- Transfers small objects from one hand to another

Emotional/Social:

- Wants to have needs met
- Develop a sense of security
- Smiles spontaneously and responsively
- Likes movement, to be held and rocked
- Laughs aloud
- Socializes with anyone, but knows mother or primary caregiver
- Responds to tickling
- Prefers primary caregiver
- May cry when strangers approach
- Commonly exhibits anxiety
- Extends attachments for primary caregivers to the world
- Demonstrate object permanence; knows parents exist and will return (helps child deal with anxiety)
- Test limits

Intellectual/Cognitive:

- Vocalizes sounds (coos)
- Smiles and expresses pleasure
- Recognizes primary caregiver
- Uses both hands to grasp objects
- Has extensive visual interests
- Puts everything in mouth
- Solves simple problems, e.g., will move obstacles aside to reach objects
- Transfers objects from hand to hand
- Responds to changes in environment and can repeat action that caused it
- Begins to respond selectively to words
- Demonstrates intentional behavior, initiates actions
- Realizes objects exist when out of sight and will look for them (object permanence)
- Is interested and understands words
- Says words like “mama”, “dada”

Suggested Well-Being and Permanency Questions for Birth Parents:

What was/is it like for you to care for your child at home? What has been the effect on your family of having this child placed? What did you expect it to be like? Help me understand what it has been like for you dealing with your child/children’s placement in foster care?

What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your life again?

Scaling Question: Thinking about the problems that led to your child's placement, on a scale of 1 -10 with 10 meaning you have every confidence that these problems can be solved and 1 means no confidence at all, where would you put yourself today? What would be different in your life when you make a change?

On a scale of 1 – 10 how much would you say you are willing to work to solve these problems?

Miracle Question: Suppose that one night, while you were asleep, there was a miracle and all the problems that lead to the placement of your child were solved. How would you know they were solved? What would be different?

Could you tell me something you like about parenting your child? What things are not so good about parenting him/her? What might happen if you don't change? How would changing your behavior affect your child and family?

What is the permanency goal for your child? What do you think/feel about this? What makes it okay; not okay? How have you been included in the family conferences/treatment team meetings? What are your responsibilities (things you do such as visits, treatment, getting your house ready for your child to return, etc.) in the case plan? Where you involved in helping to choose the alternative permanent plan (adoption or guardianship) and which family would care for your child?

In order to have your child returned to you, what will be the first sign that things are moving in the right direction?

What services do you need in order to care for your child? What do you think/feel about those?

How have your visits been with your child/children? What types of things do you do together during the visits? What could be done by you or others to improve visits?

What services do you think your child/children will need in order to return home? To whom do you go to when things are going well? To whom do you go to if things aren't going too well?

What is your greatest fear about your child returning home? What is your greatest fear if your child does not return home?

What things do you need to support your continued care of this child?

Describe who your child is. What about your child is easiest and most pleasurable? What was the most difficult aspect of dealing with your child at home? What are the things about this child that will help him/her in the future? What will be harder for him/her?

What were some of the adjustments you experienced in parenting this child?

When your child was at home, did he/she show warmth and affection across a range of interactions and with different people?

When your child was at home, who did they seek comfort from when hurt, frightened, or ill?

What was your child's sleeping pattern at home? What was your child's feeding pattern?

Have you seen any weight changes since your child entered care?

Does your child show preference for a particular adult?

How easy is it to sooth your child when s/he is upset?

Reviewing Safety Concerns with Birth Parents:

Basic Safety

- ✓ Did this child have any serious injuries, either before or since coming into care?
- ✓ Does your child have any chronic health conditions? Do you have all the necessary medication and supplies in your home?
- ✓ Do you have a First Aid Kit in your home?

Check For:

- ✓ TVs and other pieces of standing furniture secured so that they cannot be pulled over?
- ✓ Exposed wires or appliance cords in reach of children?

Preventing Falls

- ✓ Are there child safety window guards on all windows above the first floor?
- ✓ Are safety gates installed at the top and bottom of all staircases?

Sleep Time Safety

- ✓ Please show me where the child will sleep? What will you do if the child has trouble falling asleep? Does your child experience nightmares?
- ✓ When you put your child to sleep in his/her crib, do you put them on their stomach or their back? (sleeping on back is recommended)
- ✓ What type of bedding do you use for the child? (avoid soft bedding or pillows)
- ✓ Do you use pillows or heavy comforters in the crib?
- ✓ Does your child ever sleep in bed with you or with other children?
- ✓ Are there any window blinds or curtain cords near your baby's crib or other furniture?
- ✓ Does your child use a pacifier? Do you attach the pacifier to the child? How? (Should not tie anything to the child using string or ribbon.)
- ✓ Do you ever cover mattresses with plastic or a plastic bag? (No plastics that could interfere with breathing)

Crib Safety

- ✓ Does crib have any missing, loose, improperly installed or broken hardware?
- ✓ Are crib slats more than two and three-eighths inches apart?
- ✓ Are there any corner posts over the end panels of crib?
- ✓ Do the headboards or footboards have any cutout areas?
- ✓ Is paint cracked or peeling?
- ✓ Are there any splinters or rough edges?
- ✓ Are top rails of crib less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the child's height?

Bath Safety

- ✓ What do you do if the telephone or doorbell rings while you are giving your child a bath?
- ✓ What type of bathtub seat do you use? (check for suction cups)
- ✓ Do you check the water temperature to make sure that the bath is not too hot or too cold?

Child care safety

- ✓ Who takes care of your child when you are not home? How do you know this person? How old is this person? Is there a way for your child to reach you when you are away from home?
- ✓ Is there a list of phone numbers for your doctor, local hospital, police, fire department, poison control center and a friend or neighbor near the phone?
- ✓ Does this child go to daycare or pre-school? If so, how many hours per week? How does your child get there? Who is responsible for drop-off and pick-up?

Safety in the Streets

- ✓ Who watches your child when they play out-of doors?
- ✓ Does your child know what to do if a stranger talks to him or her on the street?

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