Young people’s views of contact

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Young people’s satisfaction with contact arrangements

• 16% were unsatisfied with their contact
• 31% had mixed views
• 53% were satisfied with their contact
• Young people mainly ‘endorsed the familiar’ and most saw some benefits in having contact
• Type of contact (including no contact) did not relate to satisfaction with contact
• High satisfaction with contact linked to better overall adjustment
High satisfaction (n=17)

- 5 had ongoing direct contact, 6 had minimal contact, 6 had indirect contact (4 of these had now met birth family)
- All had stable contact pathways

“I wouldn’t change anything about the contact because its been just right” (sends letters to birth family)

“Its good, I don’t think there is any way that it could be done better” (face-to-face contact)
Mixed satisfaction (n=10)

• Contact had mostly been inconsistent
• Some were unhappy when birth family reduced contact: “If I could get my mum to write to me I would do that.”
• Others reduced contact themselves because they found it hard to cope with

“I used to write quite a lot but I don’t write anymore, my dad writes it and then I read it over...I just wanted to leave it...because I just wanted to get on with my life, because I was in such a state”
Mixed satisfaction

• Some had good contact with some relatives but wanted more contact with others:

“I just want to see him. I want to see him. I want to meet him, and if he’s a horrible person I’ll deal with that then. I’d rather think positive about him because he hasn’t done anything wrong yet, not personally that I’ve experienced”
Low satisfaction (n=5)

• One person had direct and indirect contact, but had stopped this:
  “I was very emotional and I just wanted to focus on one family rather than two. And it was difficult enough with this family, let alone other things...Its weird”

• Others regretted a lack of contact over the years.
I think you should be allowed some sort of contact, even if it's just once a year ... So you can see them instead of having to wait until you’re older. When you start becoming a teenager ... you start thinking more and more into it. I was naughty at school and it might have helped me because it's like constantly on your mind. At 13, 14 I was ready to meet them. And knowing that I couldn't wasn't a good thing. I know they say it's 16 or 18, but sometimes you're ready before that. At 14 I was ready to meet [my birth mother] and it might have helped me out. (Male, 20. No contact with birth mother, met her age 16)
Benefits of contact for adopted young people

- Information Needs
- Relationships
- Openness in Adoptive Family
Who am I like?
Why was I adopted?
Do my birth family care about me?
Where do I come from?
How are my birth family now?

Finding out...
[My parents have] always been really open about it, we don’t have to be scared of ‘can we talk about our birth family in front of them, will they get upset?’

[Getting letters back] makes you kind of feel that that even though we’re not with them, they still care,...they didn’t just completely dismiss us.

It’s nice to be able to see her and have a complete picture of her ...[What I’ve got out of contact is] knowing who she is and what she was like, rather than thinking ‘she could be like this’ - it’s like you can have this whole little fantasy world ..and once you see her, you know it’s not going to happen.
17 year, face-to-face contact with birth mother and grandmother

She was like a proper nan…She’d do stupid little nan things, and even though you only used to see her at this place, I don’t know, I’d go and give her a hug. I really liked seeing her.
Challenges of contact for adopted young people

- Emotional strain
- Managing loss
- Unanswered questions
It’s upsetting to see her how she is, but I like to see that she is okay and that she’s safe.

It is good to know I was being thought of, but at the same time I still feel like they think they know me and I don’t feel like I know them.

I don’t know how she feels. That’s one of the horrible questions that I ask probably on a weekly basis ‘what happens if I get to 18 and she doesn’t like me?’
Practice suggestions from young people

• Contact should be available (even if opportunity is not taken up)
• Life story books are important
• Keep communicating with the child about contact
• Offer support with contact beyond the age of 18
Even if the contact is only brief...social workers should ensure that the option of contact is always left open.

Give the child as much information as you can...in a fun visual kind of way, having maybe two books – so when they’re a child a more visual book and then as they get older a little bit more information written down.

[Social workers] really need to know how the young child feels about it...actually ask them what kind of contact they would like...they need to make the options available for the younger people, but keep the meeting as 18.

Someone could be slightly in contact when you're 18 or 21, rather than you having to go to them.
Planning and supporting contact after adoption

- **What are goals/purpose/needs?**
  - Assess strengths/risks
  - Provisional contact plan
  - Plan support for contact
  - Support suspension of contact
  - Review

- **What else?**

**Start here**

How can this contact support this child?