

challenge

Is how she study

Cathy's Column

Author Cathy Glass shares her view on the contact system

I'm writing this to encourage debate and hopefully a review of the contact system which all foster carers work with at some time. Supervised contact allows children in care to see their natural families in a safe and controlled environment, but does the present system work? My own experience of contact centres, also known as family centres, and their staff (contact supervisors) has not always been positive, and I'm concerned by the large number of emails I've received from foster carers who also have complaints about the contact system: "The child (aged four) I am fostering has had five different contact supervisors in two weeks. He never sees the same person twice and finds it very confusing."

"Contact for my little girl is often cancelled by the centre at the last minute as there isn't a supervisor available. She gets very upset and cries all evening."

"Whenever I go into the centre the supervisors are in the office gossiping. It creates an awful atmosphere."

"As a new carer I feel very awkward going into the contact centre. I often hear the contact supervisors talking about the child's family and the foster carers behind their backs."

"When I collect the baby I'm fostering from contact the supervisor meets me in reception with a long list of complaints from the mother about the way I'm looking after her baby. Everyone can hear. My husband says we should stop fostering as I don't have to put up with that."

"I remember the old system where the social worker used to supervise the contact and it was much better. The social worker knew the family and I always got feedback at the end of the contact, now I don't get any."

I, too, remember the old system and agree that it worked much better than the present one. Not only did the social worker know the child and the family, but they also built up a relationship with the foster carer. Feedback was regular, reports were written to a high standard, continuity was maintained, and I can't ever remember a contact being cancelled because the social worker wasn't available; if she was ill a colleague stepped in. Then eight years ago contact was moved into centres, with supervisors often supplied by agencies, where the only qualification seems to be 'some experience of working with children'. Clearly to return the responsibility for contact to the family's social worker would put an additional strain on their time. It could not be considered without reducing the social worker's case load which would result in more social workers being needed. However, much, if not all, of the funding could come from the money at present allocated to the contact centres. I believe to put the family's social worker in charge of contact again would be beneficial to all those involved with the child.

What do you think? Email haveyoursay@fosterfamilies.co.uk.

Bestselling author Cathy Glass has just released her latest book - *Run, Mummy, Run* - through HarperCollins. Based on a true story, this gripping novel tells of one woman's domestic violence hell, and the shocking lengths she must go to to save herself. It is available now at Amazon and all good book stores, priced £6.99.

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the expectations of the education system.

Keeping in touch

We are still in contact, and they visit regularly. They both came

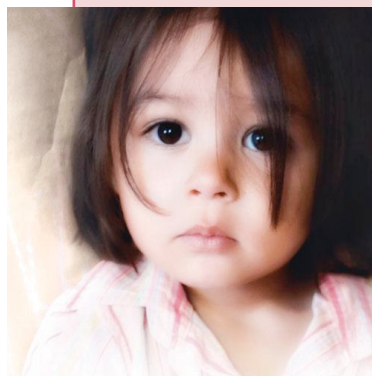
"They stayed with friends as we were 'full'"

home in the holidays during their uni life

as 'normal' children do. The only problem we had regarding this was funding and placements - we were sometimes unable to have them home because we were 'full' with other placements. Yet because they were over 18 they were able to stop with friends within our village. This was the only awkward bit really and we had to seriously consider their needs as well as our fostering position.

Life after university

Unfortunately one of them dropped out of university as it wasn't for him. He is now fully employed and enjoying his work and life as a new dad. The other young person graduated this year as a fully fledged social worker and is now looking to work with looked after children. I am very proud of both my young people.



Cathy Glass

SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Run, Mummy, Run

A NOVEL INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY