

The Safe Contact tool

When a child or children are removed from the care of their family and placed in out of home care, establishing safe and meaningful contact between the children and their family is one of the most critical and immediate issues that the child protection agency must deal with, and it is usually one of the first issues that children and parents want to focus on. The safe contact tool has been developed to support collaborative, transparent, strength-based and safety-centred decision-making about contact.

The safe contact tool is designed to engage all of the significant people in the children's lives, including the children themselves if they are old enough, in ongoing conversations about safe levels of contact between the children and their family. The tool uses a number of key questions to involve everyone in thinking through:

- What needs to happen for safe contact to be established?
- Whether that contact needs to be supervised or unsupervised?
- What would need to be in place or be demonstrated by the parents/family for contact to be increased in the future (including from supervised to unsupervised contact)?

The safe contact tool can be used when children are first placed in out of home care, or as quickly after placement as possible. If workers are able to engage the family and their networks in meaningful and safety-focused conversations about contact or visitation and are able to demonstrate collaborative and transparent decision-making about contact, this can provide an important foundation for working collaboratively with the family in the overall risk assessment and safety planning processes.

Reunification or family restoration

The safe contact tool is also designed to be used with families (including the children) and their networks over the entire period of working with a family to ensure that decision-making about contact continues to be collaborative, transparent and centred on safety, from the moment that the children come into care until the children are safely returned to the care of their family and the case is closed.

For example, in reunification or family restoration practice, decisions need to be made about whether contact can be increased and when and how this increase can happen. This tool is designed to assist workers in ensuring that these decisions involve all the significant people, including the children where possible, and that everyone is able to understand how these decisions are made.

Foster carers and kinship carers

The safe contact tool can also be used with foster carers and kinship carers. If foster and kinship carers are involved in the process of developing safe contact plans, they will have greater understanding of the views held by others and an increased sense of ownership of the contact plans.