

kContact: Perspectives of parents, carers and professionals on supervised contact with children in care and parent-child relationships

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kContact: Why we are doing the study

- Lack of research assessing the outcomes and impacts of different models of contact in child protection
- The research evidence is insufficiently strong or developed to allow confident prescriptions about contact (Quinton et al., 1997; Triseliotis, 2010; Taplin & Mattick, 2014)

kContact: Timeline

2014	<i>Development of enhanced model and literature review</i>			
Mar – Oct 2015: Baseline interviews	Intervention sites (enhanced model) (n = 70)		Comparison sites (usual model) (n = 62)	
	Vic	ACT	Vic	ACT
	35	35	39	23
	35	35	39	23
Mar 2016– July 2016: Follow-up interviews	35	35	39	23
Aug – Dec 2016	<i>Analysis of results and revision of model and development of guidelines</i>			

Interviewees: 100 carers, 69 parents, 87 workers.

Parent characteristics

		Parents (n= 68, n = 46 foster placements, n= 22 kinship or other)
Age	Median age	35
Ethnicity	Australian born Indigenous	94% 7%
Education (post high school qualification)		37%
Income source	Centrelink benefits	91%
Type of current residence	Public rented house or flat	68%

Parent risk factor characteristics

Number of children in care	Median	2
Number of biological children	Median Range	4 1 – 8
Age at birth of their first child	Median age Range Number who were teenagers	20 years 14 - 41 years 49%
Financial stressors	At least 1 financial stressor	70%
Lived away from parents as a child	Yes	57%
Mental health	Recent treatment Current medication	55% 45%
Substance use	Alcohol Tobacco Other	48% 63% 19 %

Reason for removal

Reason for removal	Domestic violence	29%
	Substance misuse	15%
	Abuse all types	15%
	Neglect	13%
	Don't know	13%
	Parental capacity	9%
	Historical	6%
	Mental health	4%

Carer characteristics

		Carers (n= 100, n = 75 foster placements, n= 25 kinship)
Age	Median age	51.5
Ethnicity	Australian born Indigenous	81% 2%
Education (post high school qualification)		70%
Number of children in foster care	Median	2
Number of biological children	Median	1 42% have no biological children

Characteristics of contact: Frequency and location

- 43% of parents reported contact occurred quarterly.
- The most common location for visits as reported by all respondents was in the community followed by a contact centre or agency site.

Characteristics of contact: Nature of supervision

“Waiting to hear back about decisions regarding visits with young person and her siblings - can't get straight yes or no answer.” (Parent)

“Hard to know how parents can discipline them and how it will be judged by agency and child protection. Need clearer expectations of what is acceptable, how much of a parent are you allowed to be before it is frowned upon and judged negatively.” (Parent)

Characteristics of contact: Visit Quality

- The majority of parents reported they felt their last visit went very or extremely well.
- Positive interactions between everyone and if the children were happy were key indicators visits were positive experiences.
- Carers and workers tended to have more conservative ratings of visits.

Supportiveness of contact

- Most parents reported the caseworker or carer were helpful or supportive at visits all of the time.
- A large minority of parents reported that carers were not supportive of contact at all.

Perceptions of Parent Child relationships

“ [I] feel more connected to her. There is a sense of love and belonging and part of the contact, she (Mum) sees her as her daughter as she (child) has memories of her.” (Parent)

“It could be better. You could also say “What relationship?” because it's hard to build a relationship when I only see her once per month.” (Parent)

Importance of contact

“Seeing her [my] children to reassure her [me] they are ok. To see how they are doing, getting information about school, sport, general life activities” (Parent)

“Let the children know I am still their mum and I can be there for them. Tell about the family history so they don't forget where they come from.” (Parent)

Importance of contact

*“It's her family. That's where she belongs. Her people. Her story. Her history. They are her future relationships as well, whether positive or negative.”
(Carer)*

“Important that we communicate (mum and I) gives him the ability to see [he] can love and share us both. Not needing to put a show for anyone. Needs to know it will happen regularly and that he can contact her when he wants to and chat.” (Carer)

Conclusions

- There is greater consistency across respondents in views of the quality of contact visits and how the parent child relationship is perceived than expected when the relationship was viewed positively.
- Workers did not seem to perceive the difficulties in the parent-child relationship when parents reported a lack of warmth and closeness, except when parents also reported conflict with their children.

Implications

- Build into practice actively reviewing the quality of contact and the parent child relationship to ensure difficulties that may impact upon both parents and children are addressed.
- Recognise that parents may have differing views on the parent child relationship and what contact is like when contact may be viewed as going well by carers and workers.

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Chief Investigators: Prof Morag McArthur (ACU), Dr Stephanie Taplin (ACU), Prof Cathy Humphreys (UMelb)

Publications

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