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Introduction

This guide is produced at a time when Child Appreciation Days (sometimes called Life Appreciation Days) are fast becoming seen as a good practice idea. Child Appreciation Days are frequently but inconsistently used to provide information primarily to adopters about a child or children in order to assist them in addressing the child's needs. This guide builds on this growing area of practice by providing practical guidance to considering, organising and chairing a Child Appreciation Day.

When thinking about potential matches, adopters and foster carers are often provided with a range of information from a variety of formats and sources to assist them in considering a specific child. Written formats include the Child's Permanence Report (in England), Child's Adoption Assessment Report (in Wales) and Form E (in Scotland and Northern Ireland), medical, educational and other specialist reports. Other forms necessary for formalising a match are the Adoption Placement Plan and Adoption Placement Report (UK-wide). Opportunities for prospective adopters to speak with individuals who know the child, including previous carers, supplement and enhance written information and provide the more frequent form of information sharing with adopters (Dance *et al.*, 2010). Other forms of media are also utilised, for example, video or online recorded footage of children (as used on the BAAF website, www.bemyparent.org.uk), and the child's life story book.

Great care is often taken by social workers to provide carers and adopters with information about a specific child and to help them to make sense of it. However, there can be difficulties with the quality and interpretation of available information relating to a child. Whilst most social workers will have direct knowledge of a child through having had significant contact with them, this is not always the case. A social worker with little knowledge of a child could be in the position of relaying and interpreting information without much first-hand experience of them. Equally, it is possible that social workers may have difficulty being objective about a child or children with whom they have developed a relationship. They may therefore temper any information they give to prospective adopters to achieve a desired match,

'possibly due to a well intentioned but misguided attempt to present a positive picture and to avoid raising painful issues' (Argent and Coleman, 2006).

Even if the range of information provided to adopters is extensive, an issue may be the quality of analytical information provided, as it relates to a realistic representation of the child and his or her parenting needs. This is supported to some extent through learning from disruption meetings. Although placement breakdown or disruption is often the culmination of many factors which are hard to determine, the disruption meeting itself provides a format for analytical exchange of information, and it is through this that sense is made and learning sought of the events leading to this point. Argent and Coleman (2006) cite the most common causes of disruption as incomplete or unshared information and inaccurate assessments of children's attachment patterns. Remarkably, the disruption meeting is usually the first occasion when a full range of individuals with significant knowledge of the child are brought together in one place with an analytical focus to plan forward and where, due to the format, essential information may only at this point come to light.

A Child Appreciation Day adapts the disruption meeting format and applies it to the beginning of the process, providing adopters with an opportunity to be "introduced" to a child from a fully informed and *collective* perspective. While the matching process identifies specific carers and adopters who can meet the needs of a specific child, a Child Appreciation Day places the onus on providing adopters and carers with an invaluable opportunity to hear information and direct emotional experience within a factual context; the messages the child has received and gives and how individuals feel and experience the child. A multi-faceted view of the child is obtained through this process.

This good practice guide both provides a historical and legislative framework to the development of Child Appreciation Days, and gives specific, practical advice on convening and chairing these events.