



Supervised Contacts



The Appropriate Adult Service offers professional and qualified personnel to supervise contact sessions between parents and children or sibling contacts.

TAAS has been providing supervised contact services since 2001, and to date our clients have been local authorities, solicitors firms or private fostering organisations.

We are able to provide services for both private and public law matters.

TAAS believes that safe and meaningful contact between parent and child is essential to ensure that children develop mentally, physically and psychologically. By providing a safe and secure environment to facilitate these contacts, TAAS can help to promote the relationship between parent and child, or between siblings.

TAAS can work with the local authorities and solicitors to ensure that demands for supervised contacts are met, and that the service provided is of benefit to all involved, this includes parents, social workers, children, foster parents, siblings and solicitors. By providing a service that is flexible and accessible to all, we can help to ensure that those who are able to have supervised access to their children can, and at the same time ensure that the vulnerable children are protected throughout their visits.

The service is entirely independent impartial and cost effective, offering a safe and effective solution to social workers, parents and children.

Our Comprehensive Supervised Contact service

All children involved in either divorce, separation or care proceedings benefit from contact with both parents. It is essential that the contact caters for the needs and safety of the child, as well as the needs of the parent.

Particularly in cases where the child is subject to care proceedings, the court needs to satisfy themselves that the parents are able to meet the needs of the child and care for them in an appropriate way. Often the child has been removed from the family home due to suspected abuse, violence or neglect, and it is paramount to the child's welfare that any contact with their parents is supervised.

However the family social workers are historically not the best people to undertake the supervision, primarily due to the animosity felt by the parents. Any contact time with the social worker, or representative from social services present can be marred by the destructive relationship between the supervising social worker and the parents.

Parents often seek to blame the social worker for taking their child away from them, and can become violent or aggressive towards the worker. This is detrimental to the child as well as placing the social worker at extreme personal risk.



Policy Statement

TAAS will...

...in accordance with the requirements of the Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002, work with the placing authority or referring parties to promote contact between children in care, their families of origin and others who have played an important part in their lives.

TAAS believes...

...that a child-centred approaches to contact are vital. The welfare of the child should be paramount. Multi-agency working is an important part of our service so we ensure that effective partnership working is established and everyone involved in the case is working towards the same aims. We always ensure that our Supervised Contact Service is child centred and we pride ourselves on being committed to impartiality whilst offering a flexible cost effective service.

TAAS will ensure...

...all young people that require a supervised contact session have a contact plan in place so everyone is clear around the whole contact session and that everyone involved in the contact will receive the highest possible quality of care and support to enable them to have a meaningful and enjoyable contact session. This will take into account their cultural heritage, needs and best interests, with their family and other significant people involved in the contact sessions.

TAAS will ensure...

...that the contact plan is an integral part of the contact session for all young people referred to the service. The contact plan will indicate the purpose of contact and inform us about the specific arrangements about the nature and frequency of contact.

TAAS will ensure...

...that the contact plan and arrangements are compiled in consultation with the referring authority.

TAAS will ensure...

...that all contacts sessions are supervised, according to the contact plan and that during the contact, the contact supervisor ensures the safety and promotes the welfare of that young person. The decision and arrangements for the contact will be carefully planned and an analysis of risk to the child will be included in the planning processes.

TAAS will ensure...

...that contact visits are to be observed and recorded accurately and that a full report is sent to the placing authority within 24 hours following the contact.

TAAS will ensure...

...that contact plans and arrangements will be discussed and monitored with each responsible referring social worker, immediately if there are any concerns, or at each case review, steering group and or team meeting. We will always ensuring that particular attention is given to the contact plan whenever the Care Plan is significantly changed or there is a sudden change of circumstances.

TAAS will ensure...

...that contact will only be stopped or refused on a short term basis upon the authorisation of a Service Manager/ Social Worker who is satisfied that it is necessary to do so to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. The young person will be given an explanation appropriate to their age and understanding.

TAAS will ensure...

...that when parents or family members need help or access to resources in order to maintain contact with their child or children, it is assessed and appropriate levels of assistance will be provided.

TAAS will ensure...

...that a child's contact plan is always adhered to and that all sessions are recorded and that the placing authority is kept fully up to date with any concerns or issues that have arisen either before, during or after the contact session. This will be provided in writing, or in the case of an urgent matter by telephone, to all involved.

How The Appropriate Adult Service can help

The Appropriate Adult Service can provide appropriately trained and qualified independent workers to supervise the contact sessions, and then prepare a comprehensive report to the social worker about the contact session.

All of the activities are always child centred to ensure that the contact is a positive experience. This can happen in a contact centre, can be activity based, or in the parent's home. Ensuring the safety of the child is paramount and TAAS will work in partnership with all the parties to ensure that the contact is a positive experience for all. TAAS is able to offer multiple supervisors for large family groups.

TAAS recognises that the purpose of supervising contact with relatives is to protect the interest of the child. If it is considered that contact should be supervised by the Local Authority or court they will have made the decision based upon and will clearly evidenced that either:

- Supervision is necessary to safeguard the child's welfare,
- Supervision is part of a plan agreed and required by the Family Proceedings Court or other family court,
- Supervision of contact is necessary in order to undertake an assessment (not all such cases will be in care proceedings)

When contact is supervised, records of the contact sessions will be written up by the supervisor and sent to the relevant social worker within 48 hours of the contact taking place. The need for supervision will be kept under regular review by the Team Manager and TAAS.

Contact requires very careful management and supervision to prevent any potential disruption to the child's placement. Attention must be paid to children's views of the importance of different family members, and ensuring the child's welfare and safety during contact. Clear boundaries must be set for contact, distinguishing between contact with different family members, for different purposes and different contexts the views of foster carers who are vital in helping children make sense of their family structures must be valued and reported on in the contact report if necessary. Where appropriate, other members of the young person's social support network who could provide care and attention may be identified and involved in the contact.

Flexibility may be required around the timings and venues of the contact session and any variation request should be directed through the child's social worker.

Positive, continued contact can help the looked after child settle in placement, especially if it is respected and promoted during their foster care experience.

Contact, however occasional, will continue to have value for a child even when there is no question of returning to his or her family. These contacts can keep alive a child's sense of his or her origins and will keep open options for family relationships in later life.

Our contact supervisors can transport the young person from their foster placement to the designated meeting place, and then return them to the home. This also ensures that the location of the foster placement remains confidential. In addition, the child will benefit from a period of reflection prior to and following each session.

Our supervisors also have the benefit of not knowing the precise details of the individual case, meaning that the contact is supervised in an entirely independent way. Obviously essential information and any potential risks need to be disclosed, but no other case history needs to be known in order to effectively supervise the contact. They are trained to establish a positive relationship with all parties ensuring that conflict during and after the contact are kept to a minimum.

There can be a number of reasons why contact needs to be supervised, which can include:

- Suspicion of Abuse
- Lack of previous contact with the child
- Lack of parenting skills due to learning disability
- Safety of the child
- Breakdown of relationship between parent and child which needs to be slowly rebuilt
- An Assessment of parenting skills is required
- Contact needs to be in a secure environment due to a violent partner at home

Every Child Matters' placed supporting parents and carers at the heart of its approach to improving children's lives. The bond between a child and its parents can be the most critical influence on a child's life. Parenting in the home has the greatest impact on a child's educational development as well as on their behaviour and mental health.

Contact is an essential part of any child's life, and the experiences of both parents and children throughout court proceedings will have a direct impact on the relationship between that parent and child. It is essential that contact is maintained wherever possible and that the contact sessions are enjoyable for both parents and children. It is also a forum whereby parents can learn new parenting skills, and ask for advice on how to handle certain situations without fear of reprisal.

Unfortunately in cases where supervised access is necessary there has often been some suspicion of abuse or neglect of the child, and it is therefore essential that although contact is maintained, the child is also protected during contact and cannot be subjected to further bad treatment. This is why a supervised contact service that works with the parents, foster carers, social workers and solicitors to provide a comprehensive service is of benefit to all those involved in the contact sessions.



Children's opinions on contact

Contact is a key issue for children.

They often spend a lot of time thinking about their relationship with their family and are often distressed by the thought of contact. Many children think about their families every day.

Research has shown that when children were asked to think of their two most important wishes for their future, a **quarter prioritised seeing more of, or being reunited with, their birth family.**

Children often want **more contact with fathers and other family members**, such as grandmothers and siblings, as well as mothers, even if they are happy in their placement and do not want to return home. Some want contact with particular family members, and not with others, while other children prefer indirect to direct contact.

Decisions will have been made around the different aspects of contact. The child will usually have a number of wishes and feelings on the variety of contact options, these will be recorded in the report.

Contact must always be 'fine tuned', assessing and taking into account any risks.

Birth parent views on contact

Parents often have mixed feelings about having their children in care and this can affect the way they feel about contact arrangements. Feelings can range from:

- relief**
- shame**
- concern that they have 'failed'**
- or can be mixture of all of these.**

Most parents desperately miss their child, want to have contact, and may often find the experience very distressing.

The use of our service means that the contact can be supervised, without the need for social workers to leave their already overstretched workload. It also ensures complete impartiality of reports. Solicitors and Guardians can be assured that the reports submitted are entirely independent.



Our Supervised Contact Staff

Our supervisors have experience in supervising sessions between sibling groups and parent and child meetings. We have worked with a wide range of children from small babies under 6 months to teenagers.

They come from a variety of backgrounds, and most are either undergoing or have completed some form of training in a child care subject, such as NNEB or equivalent. All our supervisors have enhanced CRB disclosures, which include POVA and POCA checks. We have male and female supervisors from various ethnic backgrounds. We are able to supervise contacts in any agreed location across the country.

We do not have our own contact centre currently; however we are able to supervise sessions within the family home, in a public place such as bowling or a fast food restaurant. We are also able to supervise sessions within contact centres, or other pre arranged meeting places.

All our staff undergo a thorough training course before undertaking any supervision sessions alone, and as part of this training course they will accompany experienced supervisors on a minimum of two contacts before being allowed to supervise alone. We will always seek permission from the local authority before sending a trainee supervisor on a contact session.

Our training includes:

- Every Child Matters
- The awareness of the need to maintain role integrity
- Familiarity with relevant legal, welfare and government processes, terminology and requirements
- Familiarity with issues relevant to the need for supervised contact
- Awareness of common issues and problems which may arise and techniques for dealing with difficult situations
- Ability to appropriately assist parents, where necessary, with parenting skills
- Ability to report factually and objectively about the contact sessions
- Familiarity with issues, including supervision issues, relating to child abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse and intense conflict
- Awareness of the policies and procedures of the service
- Awareness of the stages of separation and the issues which may be related to or accompany separation
- Cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity
- Ability to work effectively with adults and children with special needs including those with a disability.
- Familiarity with other relevant services and ability to refer appropriately
- Trainees are aware of their personal values and beliefs
- The ability to manage difficult situations
- The ability to work with and cope with aggressive behaviour
- Diversity training to ensure that everyone is valued and respected
- Court training

Wherever possible we will always retain the same supervisors for the duration of the contact sessions to ensure continuity, and enable the children and parents to build up good relationships with the supervisor.

The idea of the service is to enable social workers and solicitors to have an insight into the parenting skills, interaction and relationship between parents and child, or those being observed. The amount of detail recorded can be determined on an individual basis.



Record Keeping

A full contact report including any significant issues prior, during and following a contact session will be written by the supervisor who will observe the interaction between a parent and child, they will then prepare a written report that will be submitted to the relevant social worker shortly after the session.

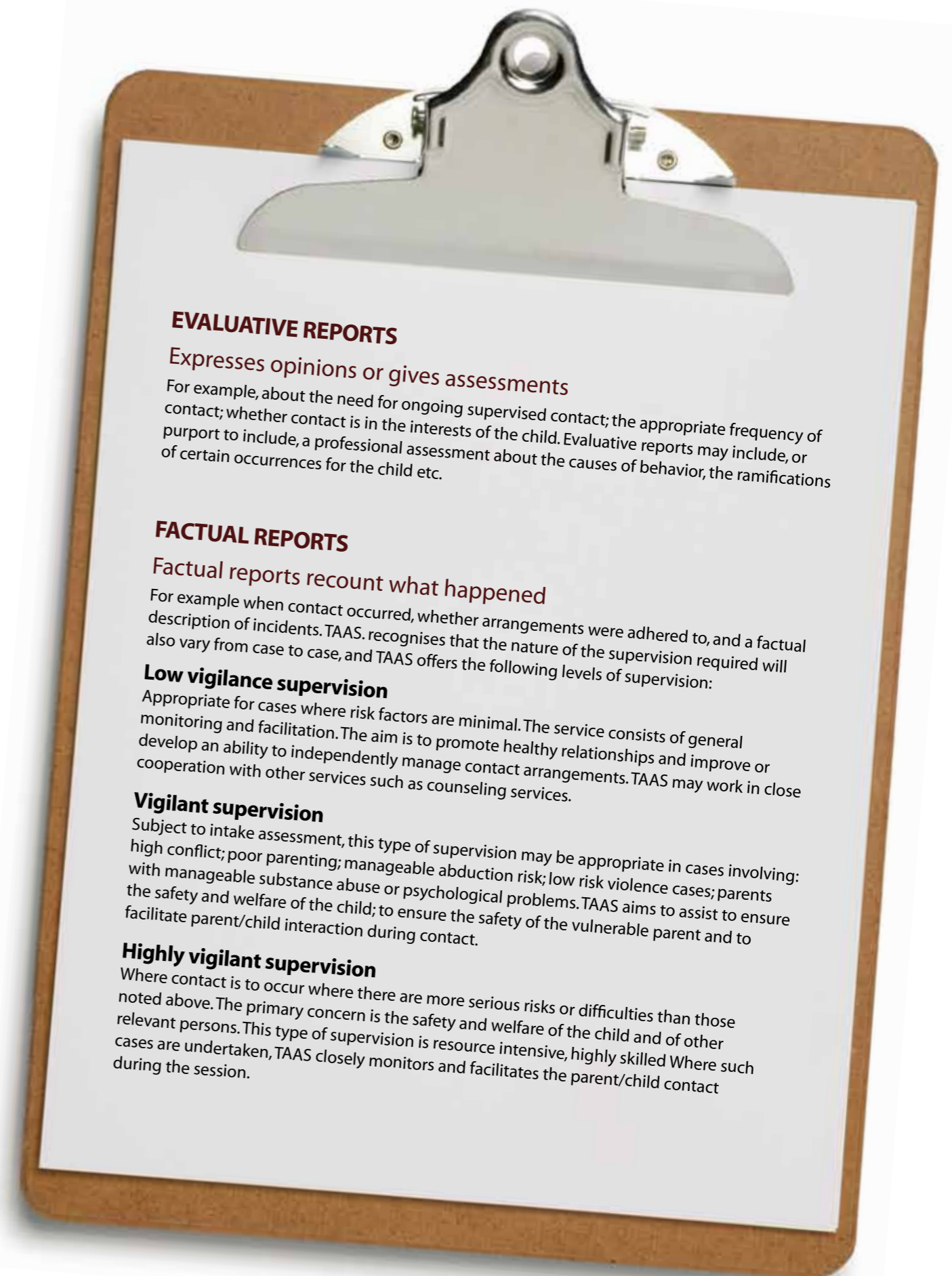
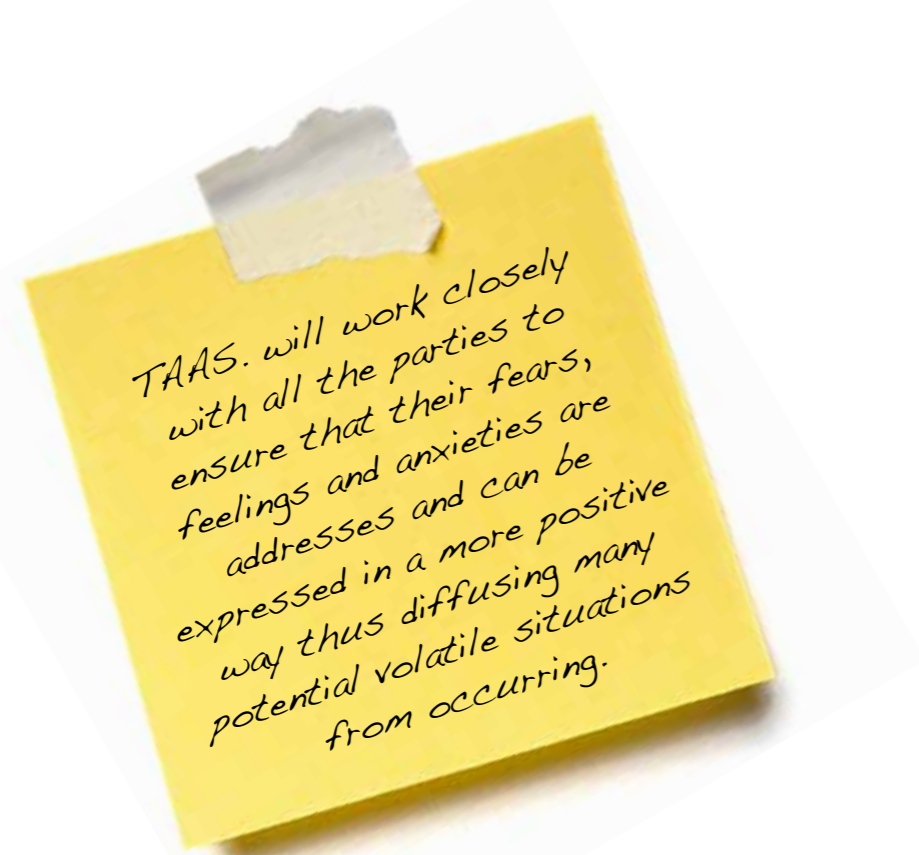
Giving them a clear and precise overview of the session. Partnership working is viewed by TAAS as very significant and to that end TAAS can attend planning meetings and we always ensure that the placing authority is kept fully informed.

Full and clear records are essential to the effective monitoring and management of contact. These will include the reasoning and evidence underpinning the contact plan, a record of the contact sessions and will provide a clear record of the contact sessions and any actions that may have been taken. These will be sent to the placing authority within 48 hours of the contact session although an immediate report will be given either verbally or written if there are any urgent concerns.

Written reports are significant in that they may provide information which is relevant to a court or some other body in relation to a decision which is of importance to the child or some other person. TAAS can provide either evaluative or factual reports, and will be guided by the local authority in each instance as to which report is required. TAAS can then be called to attend court if required.

TAAS are also able to offer an innovative service which involves mediation sessions prior to and following the contact to offer guidance to parents especially where there are conflicts.

This proves especially useful where the relationship between Social Services and the parents has reached a crisis point. We work closely in partnership with all partner agencies that are involved in the particular case. The involvement of our service can often minimise aggression and negativity on the part of the parents and therefore ensures that the child experience of contact is a positive one.



Planning Contact

TAAS feel that it is important to distinguish between the planning of contact which relates to the overall care planning decisions; and the management of contact which relates to the practical logistics and difficulties of each episode of contact

The planning of contact relates to the care planning for a child in care and there should be completed by the placing authority and should give us an assessment and analysis of:

Why is contact important for this child and family?

What is the purpose of contact?

Who should have contact with whom?

Why there is there a need to supervise the contact?

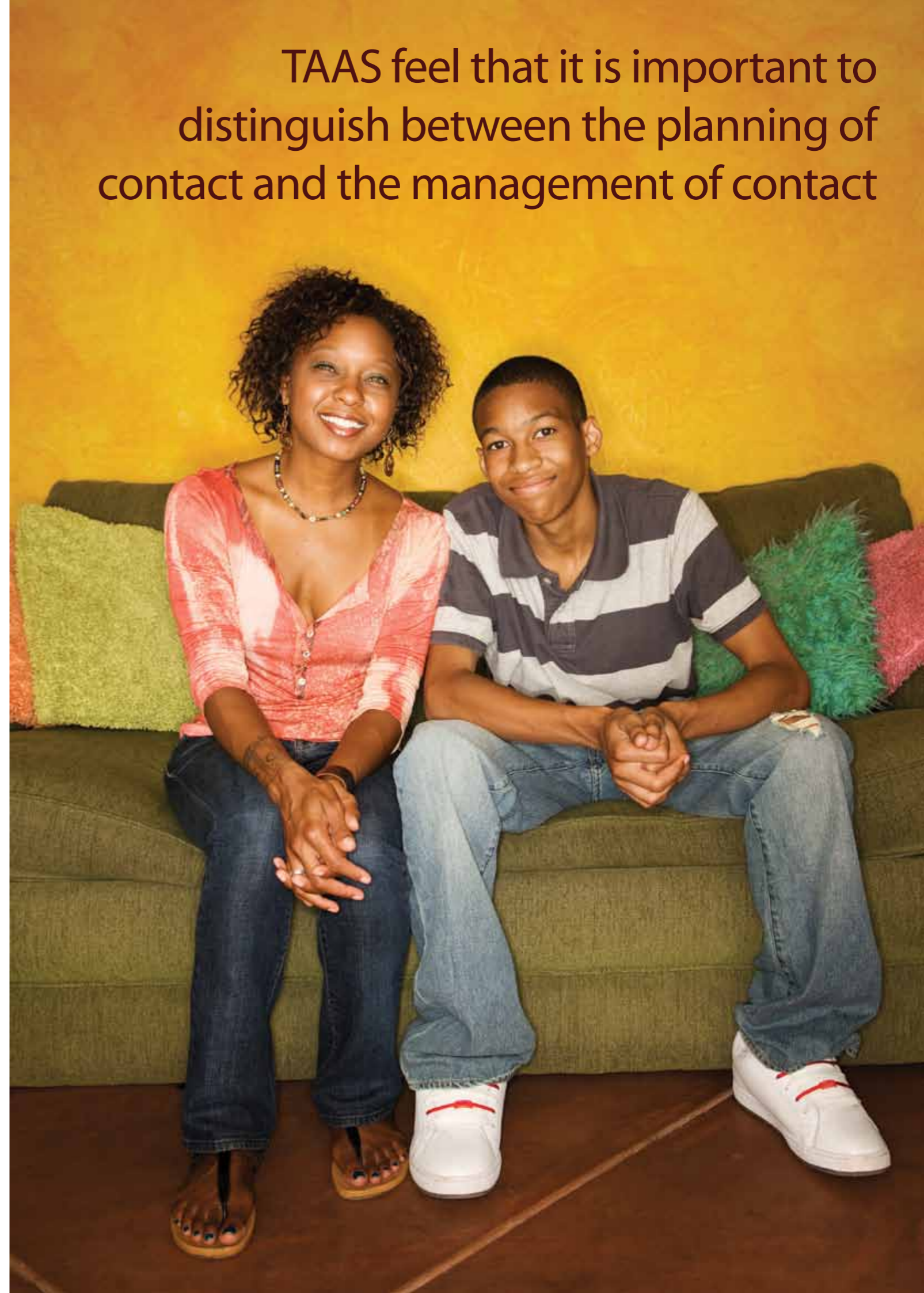
The contact plan given to TAAS should contain:

- The review of the arrangements
- The people involved in the contact session
- Level of supervision required
- Details of dates and times for the contact sessions
- Any limitations that may be placed on the contact
- A risk assessment of all parties involved
- If court reports will be required

TAAS will be responsible for the management of contact sessions relating to the practical arrangements, implementation and monitoring of each episode of contact and will include:

- Ensuring the detailed arrangements have been organised and agreed and are compatible with the purpose of contact.
- All parties involved in the contact have TAAS' 24 hour contact details in case of sickness or emergency
- That a suitably qualified supervisor is available to cover every session referred to the service
- Ensuring that there is always additional staff available to assist if needed during the contact session to ensure the safety of both the young person and participants in the contact session.
- Ensuring that there are contingency plans are in place to cover likely eventualities, and that emergency procedures are known for unforeseen events.
- The recording and monitoring of each episode of contact and who will receive the information.
- Agreeing how regularly the arrangement will be reviewed in addition to any statutory Child Care Reviews and how and to whom significant information will be given in the event of a concern or difficulty arising.
- Establishing the criteria for success (what will be regarded as satisfactory contact) with all of the relevant parties.
- Ensuring that in addition to the contact plan there is a written agreement of the arrangements and that all parties have a copy and accept their role and responsibility.
- Arrangements regarding contact not taking place

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Contract Agreement

A clear and concise agreement will be drawn up, in consultation with the relevant local authority, the young person and the family which all parties will be asked to sign.

The Contact agreements will include:

- The type of contact i.e. contact centre, activity based or within the community .
- The Level of supervision during the contact – i.e.

Supervised: Low vigilance, Vigilant; Highly Vigilant :

Supported : will be held in a neutral or supportive environment is provided to enable parents/family and children to meet in as natural a setting as possible. It should only be as restrictive as is necessary to ensure the child's well being. The supervisor makes suggestions to the parents and assist them during the contact sessions offering help and guidance when required

Assessed: contact is where the contact session is observed and recorded within a structured assessment format agreed by all involved. The specific behaviours or activities and assessment criteria will be agreed with the young person, as appropriate, and the parents/family members. The requirement for assessed contact should be agreed and written into the contact plan.

Direct Intervention: where the contact sessions are used to engage with family members to directly influence family functioning, communication or parenting behaviour. It could be to promote positive parenting, to influence the young person's behaviour or parents' management of the behaviour or to develop particular skills or areas of the child's development. Where the intervention is also being assessed the two functions will remain distinct and may involve the use of more than one supervisor. The requirement for contact to be used for intervention should be agreed and written into the contact plan.

Who will be involved in the contact

Frequency and timing of the contact session including waiting times for non arrival

The venue and transport of the young person

Arrangements for supervision and recording sessions.

Any restraints, limits or expectations placed on the contact sessions.

Acceptable behaviour during the contact session

Contingency plans - anticipating problems or difficulties.

Support arrangements for child and family members.

Arrangements for monitoring each episode.

Arrangements for monitoring the contact plan.

Planning Contact with the Parents

TAAS recognises that all young people in care should be encouraged and supported to maintain contact with their parents in a manner consistent with their Care Plan, which takes account of any Contact Order that may be in force. TAAS will ensure that the arrangements for contact are organised and will abide by the details in the Placement Plan/ Placement Information Record, which will have set out how contact will take place, the venue, the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed.

The primary focus of the assessment of the contact will be the safety and welfare of the child. Depending on the level of supervision during the contact any issues or concerns, in addition to the contact supervisors observations will be clearly recorded and the role of the supervisor or supervisors clearly defined as per the social worker instructions.

A written risk assessment will be completed and approved before supervised contacts begin. This assessment will take account of all factors that could impact on the success of supervised contact; relevant safeguards including:

- Any history of abuse or threats of abuse to the child, other carers or staff.
- Previous incidents of disruption or threats to disrupt contact or failure to co-operate with conditions agreed for supervised contact.
- Previous incidents or threats of abduction.
- Previous incidents of coercion or inappropriate behaviour during contact.
- The transient or unsettled lifestyle of parents, as opposed to long-standing local connections.
- Where any of the above features in the risk assessment, and supervised contact is to continue, the risk assessment must state the specific measures to be put in place to minimise risks.
- Before contact arrangements are set up to take place at the home of a parent, checks on all members of the household should be made with a copy available to TAAS.



Contact with Relatives and Friends

Where relatives and friends are to be included within the contact sessions information regarding any significant relationships and friendships should be obtained, together with the parents' views on the child having contact with such relatives or friends. The plan for these sessions should also include details of how contact will take place, the venue, the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed. Arrangements for contact with significant relatives/friends will take account of any Contact Order that may be in force.

Cancellation of Contact

Where the arranged contact does not take place, there must be a good reason, for example that the child is too ill to attend. TAAS will inform the young person's social worker immediately.

If contact is cancelled, TAAS will ensure that the young person and his/her carers and, as far as practicable, the parent or relative/friend is informed in advance and that the reason for the decision is explained. TAAS will then contact the relevant social worker for them to decide if they are going to arrange an alternative contact.

Review of Contact Arrangements

TAAS will work closely with the social worker to ensure that everyone is kept fully informed of the contact arrangements, including the continuing need for supervision which will may have been under review. If there is a need for any changes in the contact arrangements that need to be made TAAS will immediately implement these changes and inform the relevant parties of these changes should be. The arrangements should also be reviewed at the child's Child Care Reviews.

Suspension or Termination of Contact

Where it is considered that the child's contact with the parents/relatives or friends should be suspended or terminated because of any safeguarding or behaviour issues during the contact session TAAS will remove the young person to a place of safety and immediately contact the Social Worker. These are clearly detailed in our Parent information leaflet that is agreed with the placing authority and the parents prior to the contact sessions commencing.

These may include statements such as :

- If you are late, it is unlikely the missed time will be able to be made up at the end
- If you are not able to make a session, please let us know as soon as possible to reduce the upset to your child(ren).
- Violent or aggressive behavior or language will result in the contact being ended immediately
- If the contact supervisor believes that there is any sort of risk to the child(ren) at any time, the contact will be ended.
- Our contact supervisors cannot give you any information about your case, or likely outcome of a court hearing.
- The contact session will not be allowed to go ahead if you turn up under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- The reasons for the termination of the contact session will be explained to the parents/other relatives and to the young person.

Specialised Supervised Contact Service

We are one of only a very few contact services that is able to offer supervised contacts in an activity based environment with horses, based on the principles of equine facilitated learning.

We are able to supervise sessions whereby both the parent and child can become involved in caring for a pony during their sessions. This will not include riding the horse, but some general horse management type activities. We believe this has a number of benefits to the participants of the sessions. One of these is to provide a basis on which to share an experience and develop a common interest. It is particularly useful in contacts where there is trouble with relationship forming, or the adult has difficulty in communicating with the child in ordinary circumstances.

It has been clinically proven that just being in the vicinity of horses can change our brainwave patterns. Horses have a calming effect which helps stop people becoming fixated on past or negative events, which can give them a really positive experience.

Using the principles of Equine Facilitated Learning has proven to be particularly useful for children with autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD) and bipolar disorders - all of whom may find it difficult to communicate, interact with other people and carry out instructions.

The results are startling.
Even those showing severe anti-social and aggressive behaviour become calmer and more communicative.



How it works

Horses react as a mirror to the person who's with him. He's a prey animal so he wants to feel safe and is always on the lookout for predators. A horse will become very fearful if he's with someone who's aggressive, noisy, disrespectful or too controlling. On the other hand, if the person makes requests rather than demands the horse will begin to cooperate. He is always looking for a leader.

This is why horses are so good to use as therapy for children. A child who is given just a little insight into dealing with a horse in the right way can become the natural leader the horse is looking for. The horse in return feels safe and peaceful and will cooperate with what the child asks of him.

Children, even those with emotional or mental disorders, can often manage a horse more easily and more quickly than adults. Children accept things at face value and are more open to developing an equal relationship rather than trying to control. A horse is looking for simple and clear commands, and a child, with the right encouragement and in the right situation, can carry these out very effectively. "Go, stop, back up, turn this way or that way" is all that's needed.

For children with mental and emotional disorders the positive benefits of getting a horse to carry out these commands are often profound. Children with ADD will focus on the horse for long periods while grooming or leading the horse when usually they can't concentrate long enough to do anything much. Autistic children who are withdrawn and living very much in their own world will begin to express themselves - often using new words or gestures they've never expressed before.

Once children realize what they can achieve their self-esteem increases in leaps and bounds. Imagine what it must feel like to lead an animal through an obstacle course, stopping and starting when you want to, when you usually find it difficult to concentrate, communicate or stay in control?

There are many physiological and psychological benefits documented in people during interactions with animals. These include lowered blood pressure and heart rate, increased beta-endorphin levels, decreased stress levels, reduced feelings of anger, hostility, tension and anxiety, improved social functioning, and increased feelings of empowerment, trust, patience and self-esteem.

We believe by embarking on these sessions together, both children and parents will form a much closer bond and the contact will become a fulfilling and positive experience.

The horses are kept in North Buckinghamshire, and transport can be provided for both parent and child separately if necessary. Due to the specialist nature of this contact, and the fact that animals are involved, it is necessary to have 2 contact supervisors attend these sessions.





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References

These are the Relevant Legislation and Guidance that TAAS considers relevant.
Section 34, Children Act 1989

Contact with Children Regulations 1991

Standard 19, National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

Standard 4, National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes

Children Act 1989, Part IV, Section 34 Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, 2002

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Family Placements (Volume 3 Chapter 6 (6.5 to 6.9)

Definition of Independent Visitors (Children) Regulations 1991 Statutory Instruments 1991 No 892