

A CHARTER FOR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Shelagh Beckett developed the Charter below to draw attention to practical steps that can help agencies develop a “sibling-friendly” service.

The Charter encourages child-centred, relationship-based practice with brothers and sisters. Each of the actions or explanations set out in the Charter focus on children's needs and how social workers and carers can work together to best meet the needs of sibling groups.

In foster care

Information and explanations for separated brothers and sisters in foster care are crucially important. A quality service from the perspective of children might helpfully include the following:

- I know why it wasn't possible to place us together.
- I know where my brothers and sisters are living.
- I know how I can contact my brothers and sisters.
- I know when I will see my brothers and sisters.
- I have photos of my brothers and sisters.
- My social worker has talked to all of us about why we are in foster care.
- I sometimes have/have had life history sessions that include my brothers and sisters.
- My foster carer knows important details about my brothers and sisters.
- I know that I can talk to my foster carer and social worker about my brothers and sisters – including any mixed up, confusing feelings that I might have.
- I know that my foster carer and social worker will help me to maintain links with my brothers and sisters.
- My social worker has written down the dates of my brothers' and sisters' birthdays and given these to me.
- I know that my foster carer knows how to contact the foster carers of my brothers and sisters.
- I know that my social worker thinks carefully about how to help me and my brothers and sisters and wants to make the best plans for all of us.
- I know that my social worker and foster carer will try to help if I have problems or fall-outs with a sibling.
- I know that my social worker works in a department that thinks relationships between brothers and sisters are really important – not just now but for when I'm older.

In permanent placements

In the context of separation by adoption or other permanent placements for one or more children...

- I know the reasons why I am not living with all my brothers and sisters.
- I have information and explanations in my life story book about my brothers and sisters.
- I have met the family who care for my brothers and sisters.
- I know that my family met my brothers and sisters and have photos of us all together.

- I receive news about my brothers and sisters and how they are doing.
- I have recent photos of my brothers and sisters.
- I know when I will see my brothers and sisters (or why I cannot see them).
- I know that I can talk about and ask questions about my brothers and sisters.

Many children who become looked after and require a permanent placement to meet their needs will be young, pre-school-aged children and will have “future needs” for information and explanations to be accessible to them and their family. The importance of planning and addressing these issues requires a life-course perspective, as the decisions that are made will ripple and resonate throughout each child’s journey into and throughout adulthood.

Agencies are encouraged to circulate this Charter to all staff working with siblings and to incorporate it into their care planning policies and procedures.

(Taken from Beckett S (2018) *Beyond Together or Apart*, London: CoramBAAF, pp 5–7)

© Shelagh Beckett 2018