

Content validity of a Contact Planning Tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents

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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



I, Mari Grobler, hereby declare that I have language edited the research study with the title:

Content validity of a Contact Planning Tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents

for **Linda Clare Coutinho** for the purpose of submission as a dissertation.

Sections A, B and C were language edited. Changes were suggested in the form of comments. Implementation was left to the discretion of the author.

Please contact me, should there be any questions concerning the language editing of this study.

Yours sincerely

Mari Grobler

SATI membership no: 1002808

PREFACE

This dissertation is presented in article format, according to the guidelines set out in the Manual for Postgraduate Studies (2010) of the North-West University.

The article will be submitted to the *International Social Work Journal*. The guidelines for submission to this journal are attached as Annexure 17.

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- For giving me a passion for humanity and for the field of social work.
- For the strength to persevere.
- For surrounding me with such supportive and loving family members and friends.

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SUMMARY

TITLE: Content validity of a Contact Planning Tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents

Keywords: content validity, Contact Planning Tool, social workers, a child in foster care, biological parents.

The amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) provides a comprehensive definition for contact. In Section 23, it also allows for biological parents to apply for contact, and provides factors that a court can take into account when making a decision concerning children. However, information needs to be available for a court to make a decision and social workers assist the court with the decision-making process. South Africa's policies and legislation that should guide social workers in determining contact between a foster child and biological parents is sorely lacking at the moment.

The researcher developed a Contact Planning Tool that can be used to assist her and her colleagues at the Christian Social Counsel (CSC) to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents. The development of the tool was based on practical experience gained from working in the field of foster care and input from international literature sources. The researcher also obtained input from colleagues. This tool has never been empirically verified or researched through a legitimate form of research.

A qualitative approach and a descriptive research design were utilised by the researcher to explore the professional opinions of social workers regarding the tool. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to obtain data. The sample of participants that was used consisted of professional social workers with over five years of working experience in the field of foster care. A total of 11 participants took part in the study. An interview schedule with predetermined questions were used to gain the views and opinions of the participants. The

researcher manually analysed the data and five thematic categories were identified. The findings are represented, according to these five categories. These categories focus on the overall impression of the tool with regard to aspects, such as the child, the biological parents, the foster parents, and the practical aspects of contact. Valuable data were gained on the content of the tool and how great the need is for guidelines to assist social workers in determining contact between a foster child and biological parents.

The orientation of the research is discussed in Section A (Part 1), which focuses on the aim of the research, the problem statement, the research methodology and ethical implications.

Section A (Part 2) focuses on the literature review of the study, which provides an overview of contact, as described in international literature and in terms of the Children's Act (38 of 2005). This section examines the benefits and concerns concerning contact, the role of social workers with regard to contact, and provides comprehensive detail on all of the above-mentioned aspects with regard to contact. Section B forms the centre of the study and is presented in article format. The article provides an overview of the study and presents the findings of the study. Section C provides a critical evaluation of the study, limitations, recommendations and the conclusion of the study.

The results of this study show that a gap exists in the field of social work concerning contact between a foster child and biological parents and there is a need for policies and legislation to assist social workers in decision-making processes regarding contact. In addition, the findings revealed that the proposed tool can be of great value to social workers in the field of foster care. The findings also provide solid data on content validity based on recommendations for the improvement of the tool. Future research can include refining the tool by making use of the recommendations made in this study and testing the tool in the child protection field.

DECLARATION

I, Linda Clare Coutinho, hereby declare that the dissertation titled, **Content validity of a Contact Planning Tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents**, which I herewith submit to the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, is my own work and that all the references used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged in the relevant reference lists.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'L. Coutinho', enclosed within a rectangular border.

Signature

Linda Clare Coutinho

6 December 2016

DEFINITIONS

Designated social workers

Designated social workers are in the service of the Department of Social Development or provincial departments or designated child protection organisations, according to the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005). The social workers in this research study refer specifically to social workers who are working in the field of foster care.

Child

According to the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), a child is any person under the age of 18 years.

Contact

The amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) describes contact as maintaining a personal relationship with a child. Furthermore, it states that if a child lives with someone else, contact can then be described as communication with the child on a regular basis – either in person or by visiting the child or visited by the child. Contact is also described as communication with a child via letters, telephone conversations or any other electronic manner.

Content validity

According to Bollen (1989:185), Patrick et al. (2011:968) and Drost (2011:118), content validity is a qualitative type of validity that is defined by empiric evidence. This evidence demonstrates whether concepts contained in an instrument are appropriate, comprehensive, relative and representative of its intended use.

Foster care

Section 180(1) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) defines foster care as the

placement of a child with an order in the care of persons who are not the parents or guardians of the child.

Biological parents

Biological parents of a child are persons who have parental rights and responsibilities detailed in Section 18 of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), but excludes a biological father of a child conceived through rape or incest with the child's biological mother or a gamete donation for the purpose of artificial fertilisation and a person whose parental rights and responsibilities have been terminated.

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SECTION A

PART I: ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

Orientation and problem statement

Orientation

Children are placed in foster care after they have been found in need of care and protection as stipulated in Section 150 of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005). Foster care is viewed as a temporary placement for children and the aim is for these children to be re-united with their biological parents as soon as possible. Section 18(2)(b) of the Act indicates that the biological parents of a child have the right to "maintain contact with the child" when removed from their care and placed in alternative care. This aspect is stipulated in the Act and makes it a criminal offence if not adhered to. The nature of the decision-making processes of welfare organisations with regard to placing children in alternative care are found lacking. Biological parents and children are unable to be re-united due to a lack of attachment (Schultz, 2002).

Visits between foster children and their biological parents are complex and diverse – varying from case to case. An ideal visitation context should include an emotionally supportive and enriching environment. However, visits are not always "ideal". Although there are complexities associated with visitations, consistent visitations with biological parents are considered an important aspect to preserve families and equally important in developing or maintaining parent-child attachment relationships (McWey, Acock and Porter, 2010).

South Africa lacks policies that can guide the visitation rights of biological parents. Only a permanency plan exists that must be included in the finalisation of a Children's Court report. In view of the best interest of the child principle, Chapter 7(1)(e) of the Act (2005) states that the term "contact" refers to: "... the practical difficulty and expense of a

child having contact with the parents, or any specific parent, and whether that difficulty or expense will substantially affect the child's right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with the parents, or any specific parent, on a regular basis". This Chapter, therefore, emphasises the importance of contact between a child and his/her parents and family of origin. However, the Act does not guide social workers sufficiently when making decisions with regard to contact and the development of a contact plan. It is the responsibility of designated social workers to structure this contact and to make it meaningful and safe for both the child and his/her biological parents. Delfabbro Barber and Cooper (2003) argue that "... it is the case-worker who must decide whether ... on going contact arrangements are suitable and sustainable" (p. 378). Contact planning is, therefore, a key activity performed by and dependent on the opinion of expert social workers. Social workers need scientific accountability for the decisions they make with regard to contact. The use of an available "tool" for planning contact can assist social workers in this process by supporting their recommendations when they have to determine contact in the child's best interest.

Problem statement

Contact plans play a central role in the service that social workers render to children placed in alternative care. Contact plans form part of the "care plan", "placement plan", "placement agreement" or "permanency plan" of children in foster care. Without such a plan, social workers in practice are unable to decide or recommend contact between a child in foster care and his/her biological parents using a scientific base. To facilitate a more structured and systematic planning of contact, the researcher with input from colleagues combined with her practice experience, designed and implemented a Contact Planning Tool to be used by social workers at CSC welfare organisations. Although the design of the tool is novel and innovative, and has attracted attention from fellow social workers, it lacks any demonstrated scientific properties. The tool lacks, for example, a clear theoretical

grounding as it was designed on strength of practice demands and conjoint collegial thinking. In terms of intervention, a design and development methodology (Fraser and Galinsky, 2010) was not preceded by a thorough state of the art analysis. It has also not been subjected to any form of systematic pilot testing as mandated by design & development methodology. Alternatively, and consistent with scale development practices in social work, the Contact Planning Tool most likely lacks face and content validity as part of its early development (DeVellis, 2012). The Contact Planning Tool can be used as a comprehensive guideline for social workers. It was designed to assist social workers in determining appropriate contact for children in foster care. This tool was developed for social workers to use in their foster care cases where children still have living biological parents.

The tool consists of four forms:

- Form A – Determining aspects of contact. Guidelines for the Case Social Worker/Foster care supervision Social Worker (Annexure 13).
- Form B – Guideline for a Reunification Social Worker with regards to contact (Annexure 14).
- Form C – Informational guidance for Foster parents with regards to contact (Annexure 15).
- Form D – Contact plan and contact agreement (Annexure 16).

Steps to use the Contact Planning Tool.

The cover letter of the Contact Planning Tool (Annexure 12) provides detail on how to use the tool. Foster care supervision social workers are described as the case managers of children in foster care – the full responsibility with regard to contact decisions rests on them. These social workers provide the final recommendation concerning contact. It is their

responsibility to manage the process in determining contact between a child and his/her biological parents.

The following describes the steps in how to use the Contact Planning Tool:

- Foster care supervision social workers send Form B to reunification social workers with the request to complete this form with their client (biological parents).
- Reunification social workers complete Form A and C.
- Once the foster care supervision social workers receive all of the complete forms, they can compile Form D, the contact plan.
- A contact plan can then be sent to all of the parties concerned (the social workers and the clients involved) to sign the contact plan agreement.

Form A – Determining aspects of contact.

This form is a guideline for case social workers/foster care supervision social workers who are responsible for children placed in foster care. Social workers are ultimately responsible for the entire process in determining contact and compiling a contact plan.

It is stated that the unique situation of each child should be taken into account and a form should, therefore, be completed for each child (regardless if siblings are placed together).

The form was developed in a table format consisting of four columns:

- The first column is created for numbering. The second column provides details of each aspect and what is expected of social workers to obtain the necessary information concerning these aspects. The aspects in Form A include the following:
 - Aspects regarding children in foster care, such as; age of child, stage of development, attachment and et cetera.
 - Aspects regarding biological parents, such as; the views of the biological parents,

the parents current functioning and circumstances and etcetera. These aspects should be read in conjunction with Form B that provides guidelines for reunification social workers concerning contact.

- Aspects regarding foster parents, such as; the views of the foster parents, their ability to positively support the child and etcetera. These aspects should be read in conjunction with Form C that provides guidelines for foster parents concerning contact.
- An evaluation of aspects concerning the child, biological parents and foster parents.
- Practical aspects in determining contact. These include; purpose of contact, safety aspects, supervision requirement, frequency and length of contact, travel / transportation, location/venue, indirect contact, contact plan and documenting contact.
- In the third column, social workers fill in the information with regard to specific aspects.
- In the fourth column, social workers provide an evaluation in connection to the information provided on specific aspects.

However, each case is unique and some of the aspects do not apply to each case. The form states, therefore, that social workers can delete aspects not applicable. Once social workers have completed Form A, social workers should focus on Form D, in which a contact plan is recorded.

Form B – Guidelines for reunification social workers concerning contact.

Reunification social workers are responsible for completing this form. This form is used to assist reunification social workers in their assessment of contact by providing guidelines to

biological parents to strengthen biological parent-child relationships during contact with their children placed in foster care.

Reunification social workers need to compile a report to provide feedback on their investigation and the use of Form B can be used as a guideline in compiling a final report. Form B does not make provision for reunification social workers to provide an evaluation, conclusion and recommendations. All the sections in Form B need to be completed in order to provide a full understanding of what to evaluate and recommend. Social workers need to take special note of the attitudes of biological parents regarding Section B and C of this form. Reunification social workers will then be able to compile a report adding an evaluation, conclusion and recommendations and Form B should be attached. These reports are sent to foster care supervision social workers to add information to Form A.

Form B is divided into the following sections:

- Section 1: Investigation done by reunification social workers. In this section, reunification social workers may conduct an investigation through telephonic interviews, office interviews or home visits.
- Section 2: Guidelines on contact for biological parents. These guidelines include activities on par with the developmental needs of children that parents can use during contact and include suitable behaviour necessary for parents to display during contact. The information contained in this form was adapted from Scott, O'Neill and Minge (2005) and Bath and North Somerset Council (2010). Reunification social workers can work through this section with biological parents in order to gain their views and attitudes. A copy should be given to biological parents.
- Section 3: Contact agreement with biological parents. This contract is signed by biological parents. By signing this agreement, they state their willingness to adhere to

appropriate behaviour and etiquette with regard to contact with their child.

Form C – Guidelines for foster parents concerning contact.

Foster care supervision social workers work through the information with foster parents with regard to contact and this information should be provided to foster parents. The information contained in this form was adapted from Scott et al. (2005). Form C provides detail on the following:

- The role of foster parents concerning contact.
- The characteristics of foster parents that are beneficial to contact.
- Activities foster parents can perform to help the child placed in foster care to feel connected to his/her biological parents.
- Rules with regard to the behaviour of biological parent's behaviour during contact – these rules should be maintained by foster parents.

Form D – Contact plan and contact plan agreement.

Once foster care supervision social workers have completed Form A and made a conclusion with regard to contact, the details of the contact plan are recorded. A copy of the contact plan should be provided to all of the parties involved: the child, biological parents, foster parents, reunification social workers and case/foster care supervision social workers. This document must be signed by all of the parties involved and should be stored on the case file.

The refinement of the Contact Planning Tool will pave the way forward for further research. Fraser and Galinsky (2010) highlight the importance of intervention research that is needed in designing and developing change strategies. Further research can focus on interventions and techniques to test this tool, based on scientific knowledge. Interventions and techniques can help guide South African social workers in establishing contact on a scientific basis, which can

in turn be used in the Children's Court as evidence-based practice or to form part of a child's care plan and/or permanency plan. Generic social workers, foster care social workers, statutory social workers and their managers can all use this tool to assist and guide them in developing contact plans between biological parents and their child in foster care.

Research Aim

The aim of this study was to validate and provide recommendations to refine the content of the Contact Planning Tool used by social workers working at CSC welfare organisations. A refined Contact Planning Tool can then be used to guide social workers in developing future contact plans with improved scientific validity and can also be tested more rigorously in future studies.

In order to achieve the aim of this research, the objectives were as follows:

- To explore and describe the perceptions of social workers on the content validity of the Contact Planning Tool.
- To make recommendations for improving and refining the Contact Planning Tool.

Both these objectives were achieved and are reported on within the constraints of a single research article, as required for the purpose of obtaining a degree.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this literature study was to bring the researcher up to date with previous research on the topic pointing to general agreements and disagreements with regard to helping relationships between social workers and child clients (Babbie, 2005). According to Babbie (2005), the purpose of a literature review is to update researchers on research topics. It is also useful to indicate areas of limitations and gaps in research and pinpoints information that has been studied previously. The researcher, therefore, conducted a literature search (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006) on the key words of this topic. The following overall topics were

searched: contact, determinations of contact, foster children, a foster parents and biological parents. Over and above these key words, the researcher performed detailed searches of each keyword by using various phrases of a sentence and used subtopics that appear in the four proposed forms of the Contact Planning Tool. In some cases, international terminology differed from South African terms – synonyms were, therefore, also used during the literature search.

The researcher made use of the following databases to search for journal articles and books: EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, Pro-quest, Sage Publications and other various search engines that are available to students through the library of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. Relevant Acts and legislation relating to children were also reviewed.

Research methodology

Approach and design.

In this study, a qualitative investigation was conducted in line with a qualitative approach. The study made use of a descriptive research design in order to perform an intensive examination of the phenomenon (the Contact Planning Tool) to gain meanings (the views and opinions of social workers), which led to in-depth descriptions (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011). Kumar (2014) agrees that qualitative research is used to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations and the feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of people. A qualitative approach was, therefore, used in this study to gain the views and opinions of social workers. A descriptive research design was suitable for this study as this type of design offers a clear road map for research to be able to answer the research question accurately, objectively and economically (Kumar, 2014).

Population and sampling.

According to De Vos et al. (2011), information on a population should provide answers

to questions. A research population can, therefore, be viewed as the individuals/systems that are selected for an intended study.

The researcher made use of social workers experienced in the field of foster care. Social workers who were part of this research population are professionals currently working with children in foster care (rendering a foster care supervision service) and rendering a reunification service to families when their children are in foster care. The research population included social workers working in the Pretoria district. The researcher included social workers from all of the child protection agencies in the Pretoria district, namely the Department of Social Development, Christian Social Council (CSC) Gauteng East, CSC Pretoria North, Suid-Afrikaanse Vroue Federasie (SAVF), Child Welfare Tshwane, Ondersteuningsraad, Catholic Women's League (CWL), the Mental Health organisation and the Kungweni welfare organisation.

The researcher conducted the study in the Pretoria district due to its urban character and the various welfare organisations that are representative of most of the welfare organisations in the country and who were willing to participate in this study. The data obtained can be applied to other smaller or bigger urban areas in South Africa.

A sample comprises of elements or a subset of a population considered for actual inclusion in a study. It can also be viewed as a subset of measurements drawn from a population in which researchers are interested (De Vos et al., 2011). For the purpose of this research study, the researcher made use of purposive sampling. According to De Vos et al. (2011), this type of sampling is based entirely on the judgement of researchers and this type of sample is composed of elements that are characteristic of the population that serves the purpose of a study best. Babbie (2014) states that a population and sample are based on the purpose of a study, the knowledge of a specific population and its elements. According to Silverman (2000), purposive sampling allows researchers to choose a study in which

they are interested in. A sample of 12 participants was recruited from the population. However, only 11 participants took part in the study. The 11 participants were social workers who fell within all of the elements of the inclusion criteria and did not meet any of the exclusion criteria.

Participants and recruitment process.

The researcher appointed a mediator, Dina Bosch – a social work supervisor and manager – who signed the confidentiality agreement (Annexure 5) and facilitated the process of obtaining participants and she negotiated with the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers for this study were either managers, directors or people in high positions within their welfare organisation. All of the gatekeepers were in the position to provide permission to be part of the study. The mediator approached all of the gatekeepers at the Department of Social Development, CSC Eastern Gauteng, CSC Pretoria North, the SAVF, Child Welfare Tshwane, Ondersteuningsraad (Rata), the CWL, the Mental Health organisation and the Kungweni welfare organisation. Only one gatekeeper, the manager of the CSC Gauteng-East organisation, agreed that the study can be conducted at their organisation (Annexure 4).

The mediator then filtered through all of the social workers in the CSC Gauteng East organisation by means of the inclusion and exclusion criteria and identified the participants within the organisation that fit the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Social workers with at least three years of experience in the field of foster care, working with parented children in foster care and determining contact between children in foster care and their biological parents.
- Senior and experienced social work managers/supervisors of social workers rendering a foster care service and determining contact between foster children and their biological

parents.

- Statutory social workers who provide a foster care supervision service, a foster care reunification service or who are managers of social workers who render these services.
- Social workers who work at the following organisations in the Pretoria district: The Department of Social Development, CSC Gauteng-East, CSC Pretoria North, SAVF, Child Welfare Tshwane, Ondersteuningsraad, CWL, Mental Health or Kungweni welfare organisation.
- Female or male social workers who are fluent in Afrikaans or English.
- Social workers who gave permission to be audio-recorded during their semi-structured interview.
- Social workers who provided their written informed consent to take part in the research study.

The exclusion criteria for this study were as follows:

- Social workers with no experience in foster care placements.
- Social workers who are working in private practice and for non-child protective agencies and not for child protection agencies as mentioned above.
- Social workers who are not registered at the South African Council for Social Service Professions.
- Student social workers.

The mediator gave a letter of invitation (Annexure 6) to all of the prospective participants along with an informed consent form (Annexure 7). Once the participants agreed to take part in the study, the mediator and the researcher went through the consent forms with each participant and appointments were scheduled for the researcher to conduct the semi-structured

interviews at the office of each of the participants. Twelve participants were recruited and agreed to take part in the research study. Only 11 participants were able to participate in the study.

Data collection.

The researcher made use of semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The researcher first ran a pilot test at work and made use of one of her colleagues to determine approximately how long a semi-structured interview is going to take. It took longer than three hours for the participant in the pilot test and for the researcher to complete all of the forms contained in the Contact Planning Tool. In order to keep to the time that has been agreed on with the participants, the researcher asked the participants to choose if they are going to provide their opinions as a foster care supervision social worker (Forms A, C and D of the Contact Planning Tool) or as a foster care reunification social worker (Form B of the Contact Planning Tool). The researcher went through the forms they chose before the interviews were conducted. The researcher kept to the agreed time as agreed with the participants in the informed consent letter. All of the semi-structured interviews were conducted within the specified time constraint provided in the informed consent letter. Before the data were collected, the researcher gave a copy of the Contact Planning Tool to each of the participants a week before the actual semi-structured interviews took place. Each of the participants had enough time to go through the tool and to prepare for their interview. The researcher developed an interview schedule to assist the participants during the semi-structured interview process. The interview schedule was in the form of a written questionnaire that guided the interviews (Greeff, 2011). The schedule (Annexure 8) comprises of information on what semi-structured interviews are, why these interviews are used. Information concerning the topic and points of discussion was also included in the schedule. The schedule used contains both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

Before conducting a semi-structured interview (Annexure 9), the researcher first completed an informed consent document with each of the participants. After each of the participants consented to being recorded during the interview session, the researcher went through the interview schedule (Annexure 10) with each of the participants. The researcher explained what a semi-structured interview entailed and was expected from each of the participants. The researcher provided an overview of the Contact Planning Tool (Annexure 12), then conducted the interview and closed each interview by thanking each of the participants and gave them a token of her appreciation. The researcher generated a discussion by making use of a questionnaire (Annexure 9) in order for the participants to provide their feedback, evaluations and opinions with regard to the tool and to correlate the comments made by each of the participants on the hard copy of the tool. De Vos et al. (2011) state that “carefully formulated and sequenced questions based on the purpose of the study are necessary to elicit a wide range of responses” (p. 369). All of the interviews were recorded. The researcher made field notes, and allowed the participants to make notes on their copy of the tool. The raw data were collected at the end of each interview and filed away in a secure place until the data analysis occurred.

Data analysis.

A data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organising the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Creswell, 2013). Once the data were collected, the researcher performed a “preliminary analysis” by going through the data just after the information was collected on site. Notes were made by the researcher after each of the interviews while the information obtained was still fresh in her mind. During the note-making process, all of the recorded information was checked.

In evaluating the performance of questions with regard to the answers provided, cognitive

testing was used to examine the question-response process. This process is conceptualised by Tourangeau's model that consists of four components (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000): comprehension (the understanding of questions by participants); retrieval (participants search their memory for relevant information); judgment (participants evaluate and/or estimate responses) and response (participants provide information in the format requested). These four components consider the degree of difficulty participants experience as they formulate accurate responses to questions.

The researcher asked each of the participants to provide opinions on each section of the tool in the form of a rating. The participants provided a rating out of three: Agree totally, 2; Agree to a certain extent, 3; and Disagree with the item, 1. The researcher asked the participants to comment on each section and to elaborate and motivate each rating. Their motivations made it easier for the researcher to analyse the results and served as a guide in making decisions about keeping, deleting or modifying items.

The researcher continued to conduct interviews with the participants and repeated the same process as discussed above until data saturation was reached. When all of the data were gathered, the researcher transcribed the data and made visual presentations of the combined data and relevant information that pertained to the concept of the research study and recommendations were developed for the further refinement of the tool.

Trustworthiness.

Qualitative data should be measured in terms of precision and trustworthiness to ensure that the findings are of a high quality. Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research and credibility is the primary criterion when evaluating qualitative research (McMillan, 2011). Lincoln and Guba use the following model to assess and ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data and this model focuses on the following four aspects:

credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (De Vos et al., 2011). The researcher aimed at ensuring trustworthiness by applying the model of Lincoln and Guba and it is summarised in Table 1-1:

Table 1-1: Four strategies to ensure trustworthiness.

Epistemological standards	Strategies	Application
Truth value	Credibility can be defined as the extent to which the data, data analysis and conclusions are believable and trustworthy (McMillan, 2011). The goal is to demonstrate that the research was conducted in such a manner to ensure that the phenomenon was accurately identified and described (Shurink, Fouché, & De Vos, 2011).	The researcher asked all of the participants the same questions. Field notes were taken during each interview. All of the interviews were recorded. The participants also made notes on the tool and handed these notes to the researcher to ensure accuracy and triangulation of the data.

Consistency	Dependability: “Reliability is the extent to which what is recorded as data is what actually occurred in the setting that was studied” (McMillan, 2011, p. 278). The procedure followed in a study should be described in detail in order to ensure reliability. However, it should also be kept in mind that each situation is unique and this implies that even if research data are reliable or replicable, the data still need to be adapted to the needs of individuals within a specific social context (Shurink et al., 2011:419).	The researcher ensured that the research process followed was logical, well-documented and audited. The data were collected by making field notes and all of the interviews were recorded.
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Applicability	Transferability Transferability occurs when one set of findings can be transferred to another context and is viewed as an alternative to external validity or generalisability (Shurink et al., 2011).	The researcher ensured that the findings of the research study could be transferred from one specific context to another. Transferability was addressed by the provision of a thick and rich description of the research findings. The researcher made use of purposive sampling and data were collected until data saturation occurred.
Neutrality	Confirmability is achieved when the results of a research study are confirmed by another study (Shurink et al., 2011).	The researcher kept detailed records of the findings so that these findings can be audited on request

Ethical implications.

The researcher is a registered social worker and is bounded by the code of ethics as set out by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). The Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, approved the research study. The ethics number is NWU-00364-15-S1.

The Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics, Potchefstroom Campus, approved this study due to its low ethical risk according to human research risk levels. The participants in the study were not considered as vulnerable. The

ethical protection of the participants was ensured through actions discussed in the following section.

Informed consent.

The researcher appointed a mediator to recruit participants for the research study. The mediator contacted all of the identified gatekeepers. One of the gatekeepers responded and the permission letter to conduct the study was signed by this gatekeeper at the CSC Gauteng East organisation. The mediator identified prospective participants within the organisation who fit the inclusion criteria of the study. The mediator provided all of the prospective participants with a letter of invitation (Annexure 6). Once participants agreed to take part in the study, the mediator gave each of the participants an informed consent letter (Annexure 7). The mediator and the researcher went through the consent forms with each of the participants and appointments were scheduled for the researcher to conduct a semi-structured interview at the office of each of the participants. The informed consent documents were signed by all of the participants, the mediator, the researcher and a witness.

Avoidance of potential harm and risks to participants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the office of each of the participants as a data collection method. The offices were comfortable and familiar and provided no physical discomfort to the participants, because they conduct their daily work in their office. The offices provided confidentiality and contributed to putting the participants at ease – knowing that no other person was able to hear what was discussed during a session.

The participants experienced no emotional harm during the data collection process. It was made known to them that if they experience emotional discomfort, a debriefing session will be made available to them by an experienced social worker/supervisor.

Voluntary participation.

The researcher respected the choice of the participants to voluntarily participate in the study. Participant 2 completed her informed consent form and was willing to participate in the study. After the researcher started the semi-structured interview, the participant was unable to continue, because she had to attend to a work crisis. She was unable to reschedule the appointment and she did not, therefore, participate in the study.

To keep to the time agreed on in the informed consent form, the researcher asked the participants to select the forms of the Contact Planning Tool before an interview took place. The participants answered questions pertaining to the selected forms of the tool.

Gatekeeping and mediating.

The researcher appointed a mediator to help facilitate the process of obtaining participants and to gain permission from the gatekeepers. The mediator is a social work supervisor with over 26 years of experience in the field of social work. She is adequately trained on the topic of foster care and is able to provide the necessary level of skills in all the tasks required of her. She was adequately equipped to recruit and obtain informed consent from the participants. She also understood the importance of the study and felt that this study will make a valuable contribution to the field of social work. She agreed to be a mediator and she signed the confidentiality agreement (Annexure 5).

The mediator approached all the gatekeepers at the Department of Social Development, CSC Gauteng-East, CSC Pretoria North, the SAVF, Child Welfare Tshwane, Ondersteuningsraad (Rata), Catholic Woman's League, Mental Health and the Kungweni welfare organisation. Only one of the gatekeepers agreed to allow the study to be conducted at their organisation and the permission letter was signed (Annexure 4).

Deception of the participants.

The researcher did not withhold any information, offer incorrect information or deliberately misrepresent facts during the research study. Accurate and complete information was given to the participants in connection with the purpose of the research study.

Confidentiality and anonymity.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted anonymously and the names of the participants were not used on the interview schedule. Each of the participants was allocated a number. During the interviews, the researcher did not write down any of the names of the participants.

Competence of the researcher.

The researcher has a Bachelor degree in Social Work and is registered at the SACSSP as a social worker with registration number 10-26865. The researcher has seven years working experience in the field of social work, specifically in the field of foster care. She has also completed her modules for the Master's Degree in Child Protection, which includes a module on research methodology. In September 2015, the researcher completed a course on conducting research interviews at the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The course consisted of two parts – a theoretical component and a practical component. The researcher completed both components and acquired the necessary theoretical knowledge and skills to conduct interviews. The professors and lecturers presenting the course passed the researcher and she obtained permission to conduct interviews. The researcher always acted in a professional manner for the entire duration of this research study.

The researcher has been assisted by a study leader, Dr Malan. She is currently running the Child Protection Master's degree programme at the North-West University, Potchefstroom

Campus.

Remuneration for the participants.

The participants received no immediate benefit from taking part in the study. All of the participants stated that this research is valuable and will add value to their working environment if they can access this tool.

The participants received a token of the researcher's appreciation for their participation and contribution to the research study.

Storage of data.

The researcher kept the data secure and safe during the study. The data were saved on hard copies placed in a file and locked in a cabinet at the research entity of the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences, COMPRES, at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The electronic data (voice recordings) were encoded and are kept on the researcher's computer password protected and saved under coded names. This data will be stored for a period of five years, and will then be destroyed, according to regulations.

Provisional Chapter Division

Section A (Part 1): Introduction and orientation to study Section A (Part 2): Literature review

Section B: Journal article to be sent to the International Journal of Social Work

Section C: Overall summary of research including conclusions and limitations

Section D: Annexures

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SECTION A

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The amended South African Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005) refers to the term "contact" in the following way: "... the practical difficulty and expense of a child having contact with the parents, or any specific parent, and whether that difficulty or expense will substantially affect the child's right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with the parents, or any specific parent, on a regular basis". The Children's Act provides more detail in how the Act stipulates orders regarding contact in Section 23. However, South Africa lacks firstly, policies that can guide visitation rights of biological parents and secondly, policies and guidelines to assist social workers in proposing recommendations to a court with regard to contact, based on the information in Section 23. The Act emphasises the importance of contact between a child and his/her biological parents and family of origin. However, the Act does not state sufficiently how social workers should be guided when making decisions regarding contact and in the development of a contact plan. It is the responsibility of designated social workers to recommend and structure contact to make it meaningful and safe for both children and biological parents. In South Africa, there is also no literature available to guide social workers on how to establish suitable contact arrangements for children placed in foster care and biological parents. However, there is a variety of international literature available that describes the process of contact between a child in foster care and his/her biological parents.

Delfabbro, Barber, & Cooper, (2003) argue that "... it is the case-worker who must decide whether ... on going contact arrangements are suitable and sustainable" (p. 37). Contact planning is, therefore, a key activity performed by and dependent on the opinion of expert

social workers. Social workers need scientific accountability for the decisions they make with regard to contact. The use of an available tool for planning contact can assist social workers in this process and support their recommendations with regard to determining the kind of contact that is in the child's best interest.

Definition of Contact

“Contact refers to all links between a child and their families of origin and friends, regardless of the form and frequency of these links” (Medway Fostering Service, 2007, p. 2).

The Family Rights Group (2014) refers to contact as the way in which children and their families keep in touch. In the amended Act (2005) “contact” in relation to a child, means:

- (a) maintaining a personal relationship with the child; and
- (b) if the child lives with someone else:
 - (i) communication on a regular basis with the child in person, including: (aa) visiting the child; or
 - (bb) being visited by the child; or
 - (ii) communicating on a regular basis with the child in any other manner, including:
 - (aa) through letters or
 - (bb) by telephone or any other form of electronic communication.

Section b(i) and (ii) of the Act describes the types of contact between a child in foster care and his/her biological parents – direct contact or indirect contact.

Prasad (2011) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) describe in their policy on contact for children in care, respectively, the types of direct contact as face-to-face contact, telephone calls, telephonic messages, emails and types of indirect contact as photographs, postcards, videos/DVDs, mementos and life story books. Direct contact can

either be supervised or unsupervised. If supervised, supervision can take place by a social worker, a neutral person, a foster parent or a safe and reliable significant person (a person is significant when that person has a relationship with the child concerned).

Benefits and Concerns of Contact

Benefits.

The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) in England, is a council that governs the area of Bath and North Somerset. The council states in their policy on contact for children in care that contact between children and biological parents not only benefits children concerned but also the biological parents and foster parents. The benefits for biological parents are: “helping ease their sense of loss, maintaining relationships so that reunification remains a possibility, assessing and developing parental skills” and helping the children come to terms with their long-term placement, and providing a link to their past. Benefits experienced by foster parents, include an understanding of the family and past of the children and this understanding can help them perceive the behaviour of these children; and it also provides foster parents with opportunities to assist children with their needs; and in some contact situations, biological parents may provide foster parents with permission to care for their children.

The following authors and bodies all agree that contact can have benefits for children in alternative care:

- The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) states in their policy that contact can help children ease their sense of loss.
- In the United Kingdom (UK), the document of the Department for Education on contact arrangements for children (2012), argues that contact can help children make sense of their lives.
- Prasad (2011), Taplin (2005) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) all

agree that contact assists, encourages and maintains family relationships so that the reunification of children with their family can occur. Contact sessions can be used to assess the quality of the relationship between biological parents and their child placed in alternative care and whether a reunification is possible.

- The UK Department for Education (2012) further states that “well-organised and purposeful contact can also play a role in assessing whether a child can return home” – if a child can be reunited with his/her family.
- According to Prasad (2011) and Taplin (2005), contact supports, maintains and encourages attachment to biological parents.
- Taplin (2005), Prasad (2011) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) are of the opinion that contact assists in and enhances the psychological well-being of a child in alternative care. The well-being of a child includes emotional, behavioural and intellectual development.
- Taplin (2005), Prasad (2011), the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) and Scott et al. (2005) maintain that contact with biological parents can assist children in maintaining links with their race, religion and culture of origin (cultural identity). A cultural identity can contribute to a positive identity formation, their self-esteem can be enhanced and can also contribute to the development of resilience.
- Taplin (2005) and Prasad (2011) highlight that contact prevents an idealisation of biological parents. The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) argues that having contact with their biological parents can provide children with an opportunity to acquire knowledge and understanding with regard to their circumstances and their personal and family history. According to the UK Department for Education (2012) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010), contact can help children to come to terms with

their past and what has happened to them.

- Contact can link the past of children with their present and can help to ease the sense of loss they experience and can provide a reassurance of well-being with regard to their biological parents. In some cases, the acceptance of biological parents of alternative care givers can assist children when they experience loyalty conflict (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010).

Concerns regarding contact/harmful contact.

According to the UK Department for Education (2012), a concerning factor with regard to contact is that even though children in alternative care tend to look forward to contact with their biological parents, they are often upset by these contact sessions.

Taplin (2005), Prasad (2011) and Baker et al. (2013) further argue that contact can cause children to develop multiple attachments, which can create confusion. Contact can cause loyalty conflicts, which entail feelings of guilt, stress or shame.

Taplin (2005), Prasad (2011), the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) and the UK Department for Education (2014) state if a child is placed in alternative care, it likely means that the biological parents have an inadequate parenting capacity. Contact arrangements can, therefore, be difficult due to possible risks that can cause the child harm. If the relationship between a child and his/her biological parents is not positive, contact can be experienced as harmful. Harmful contact then becomes a replay of negative relationships experienced by the child and he/she can feel rejected is exposed to harmful behaviour harmful (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010). In situations where parents are rejecting their children or when they act neglectful, unreliable or inconsistent and when there are serious risks of harm regarding biological parents to their children – especially during unsupervised contact – children can be re- traumatised and this can then be considered as

harmful contact. Social workers should keep in mind that “harmful contact is associated with particular people and not with contact in general” (Department for Education, 2014).

Taplin (2005), Prasad (2011) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) agree that in situations where contact with biological parents is experienced as harmful:

- it may have a negative impact on the child’s attachment with his/her alternative caregivers.
- distress experienced by a child can have a direct impact on the psychological state of the alternative caregivers and it can be more difficult for the child to settle in and thrive with alternative caregivers.
- it may perpetuate previous difficult situations and trauma rather than allowing the child to positively move on.

In these situations, contact undermines the placement of children in foster care and possible placement breakdowns can occur.

Moreover, the view of alternative caregivers of contact can also have an impact on how contact affects the child (Prasad, 2011) – either positively or negatively.

Purpose of Contact

Prasad (2011) and Barnardos (2013) are of the opinion that it is important when making decisions about contact to clearly identify the purpose of contact for a child. The purpose of contact should be made very clear to all of the parties involved (the child, foster parents and biological parent/s) before contact commences.

The UK Department for Education (2014) states that when the purpose of contact is established, one should also consider the well-being of a child, his/her development and the care plan that is used.

According to Scott et al. (2005) and Barnardos (2013), the primary purpose of contact can be divided into three sub-sections. Firstly, contact should promote and prepare children for reunification with their biological parents by supporting the bond children has with their parents. Secondly, contact should preserve and support family connections and should help children recognise their past identity while not interfering with their current need for belonging when they are in long-term placements. Thirdly, contact should provide a space to therapeutically assess contact between children and their biological parents and/or to help improve parent-child relationships.

The Role of Social Workers in Determining Contact

In Section 23 of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), the assignment of contact and care to an interested person by order of the court, states the following:

1. Any person having an interest in the care, well-being or development of a child may apply to the High Court, a divorce court in divorce matters or the Children's Court for granting an order to an applicant on such conditions the court may deem necessary:
 - (a) contact with the child; or
 - (b) care of the child.

This Section, therefore, allows biological parents of a child placed in alternative care to approach a court to obtain an order with regard to contact with their child. Section 23(2) goes on to provide aspects that a court must take into account when making a decision whether contact can occur or not.

2. When considering an application contemplated in Subsection (1), a court must take the following into account:
 - (a) the best interests of the child.

- (b) the relationship between the applicant and the child, and any other relevant person and the child.
- (c) the degree of commitment that the applicant shows towards the child.
- (d) the extent to which the applicant contributes towards expenses in connection with the birth and maintenance of the child.
- (e) any other fact that should – in the opinion of a court – be taken into account.

Section 23 does, however, not provide details as to the type of contact that should occur. This Section does not provide guidelines for practical aspects with regard to contact, for example the frequency of contact, supervision requirements and at what venue should contact occur. It seems as though a court is just considering aspects in Section 23(2) in order to make a decision on whether or not contact may occur or not. It seems as though this information should be available when a court makes a decision concerning contact. Delfabbro et al. (2008) maintain that it is social workers who should decide on contact arrangements. In these cases, social workers should investigate matters fully to provide a court with a detailed report and recommendations pertaining to the kind of contact children in alternative care and their biological parents should have.

Section 7(1)(n) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that any actions or decisions that can circumvent or minimise further legal or administrative proceedings in relation to a child on foster care can be considered in the child's best interest. This statement reinforces the idea that social workers should make a decision about contact before biological parents approach a court requesting contact with their child.

According to Taplin (2005), making decisions concerning contact – whether the amount of contact that is beneficial to a child or if contact should not occur – are issues that are inter-related and dynamic. Social workers need to remember that when contact is determined, the

process should be handled carefully and with sensitivity and this process involves expert planning (Department for Education, 2012). When considering contact, each case should be considered individually on a case-to-case basis, and should reflect the unique and individual aspects of a specific case (Prasad, 2011; Taplin, 2005). Contact arrangements should be made in line with the needs of the child and with his/her best interest in mind (Children's Act, 2005; Department for Education, 2012).

Contact plan.

An important role of social workers in determining contact is to create a contact plan. The establishment of a contact plan is very important, because it provides clarity on contact for all of the parties involved (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010). A contact plan reduces the possibility of difficulties and problematic situations with regard to contact (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010) and a contact plan ensures that contact is experienced positively by a child (Prasad, 2011).

According to the UK Department for Education (2011), Prasad (2011) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010), a contact plan needs to be dynamic and flexible in order to adapt to any changes in circumstances and to remain relevant and appropriate.

The UK Department for Education (2014; 2012), the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) and Barnardos (2013) all agree that social workers should constantly review a contact plan and should make changes if and when circumstances change with regard to any of the relevant parties. According to the UK Department for Education (2011), the Medway Fostering Service (2007) and Scott et al. (2005), a contact plan should be reviewed / updated / changed when the following circumstances occur: the needs of a child change with time and when the situation of biological parents change and a reunification is possible. A contact plan needs to be adapted and if difficulties arise and cannot be resolved, a contact plan should be

significantly altered.

In this research study, the content validity of a Contact Planning Tool was tested by designing the tool to assist social workers in determining appropriate contact for children placed in foster care. The Contact Planning Tool is a comprehensive guideline for social workers to use when establishing a contact plan.

It is also important for social workers to involve all of the parties in the process of determining contact. It is beneficial and necessary that a contact plan is drawn up along with a contact plan agreement signed by all of the parties involved (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010). When signing a contact plan agreement, all of the parties are fully aware of important aspects with regard to contact and they should follow the contact plan diligently. Moreover, the general principals of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states in Section 6(3) that the child's family must be given the opportunity to express their views with regard to contact. If all of the parties are involved in the process of determining contact and were made part of the process, they are more likely to cooperate concerning the aspects of a contact plan.

Another aspect that is important during contact and in a contact plan is the monitoring of contact. According to Roemer (2008), Scott et al. (2005) and the Medway Fostering Service (2007), the following should be documented after each contact session:

- The child's behaviour and emotions before a contact session.
- The time at which a contact session started.
- The time the biological parents arrived.
- The length of a contact session.
- How the child and biological parents welcomed each other.
- The interactions that occurred between the child and the biological parent.

- The extent of parental capacity.
- Was intervention of the foster parents or the social worker needed.
- What happened at the end of a contact session.
- The child's reactions after a contact session.
- Areas of progress and areas of concern should be highlighted.

All of the parties involved are welcome to report back to the social worker concerning contact. This is necessary for social workers to gain a full understanding of the experiences the child and biological parents had during a contact session and to identify potential situations where contact needs to be reviewed.

Support services.

Social workers should have a full understanding of their role, functions and responsibilities as detailed above with regard to contact, because poorly planned contact arrangements can be badly managed and harmful to children (Department for Education, 2012). By understanding their role and functions, social workers will be able to provide more efficient services to children, biological parents and foster parents.

According to Prasad (2011), social workers should allow biological parents to play an active role in the planning process of contact – cooperation creates a sense of a meaningful partnership. The UK Department for Education (2014) states that it is the role and responsibility of social workers to provide practical and emotional support to foster parents, before and after contact, especially when difficulties and challenges arise.

Aspects with Regard to Contact

The UK Department for Education (2012), the Family Rights Group, advice sheet 14 (2014), the Family Rights Group, advice sheet 13 (2014), the Council of Bath and North Somerset

(2010), the UK Department for Education (2014), Taplin (2005), Barnardos (2013) and the Medway Fostering Service (2007) provided extensive information on elements regarding contact. The researcher reviewed the literature and found themes and categories similar to the elements concerning contact. These themes and categories relate to the Contact Planning Tool. Literature describes various aspects relating to the role of each person and aspects regarding contact. The researcher linked the themes to the main aspects of the Contact Planning Tool, namely:

- Aspects regarding the child.
- Aspects regarding the biological parents.
- Aspects regarding the alternative caregivers/foster parents.
- Practical aspects.

The four main identified aspects are discussed.

Aspects regarding the child.

The amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), Section 23(2)(a), states that a court must take "the best interest of the child" principle into account when issuing an order for a child to have contact with his/her biological parents. This means that it is of the utmost importance that matters regarding the child are assessed when contact is determined for a child in foster care. The aspects mentioned below are contained in Form A of the Contact Planning Tool.

The child's age and level of understanding.

Section 7(1)(g)(i) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that the best interest of a child should be established when contact is considered and the following factors are important: the child's age, maturity and his/her stage of development. The child's age and

level of maturity are relevant elements when contact is determined.

The child's wishes/feelings/opinions on contact.

Every child has the right to be heard. United Nations Human Rights 1989 states the following on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 12(1) and (2) that: States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

A child must, therefore, be provided in particular the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting himself/herself, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

In Section 10 of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), child participation is discussed. This Section states that every child that is of an age, maturity and stage of development to be able to participate in any matter concerning himself/herself, has the right to participate in an appropriate way and views expressed by a child must be given due consideration.

Taplin (2005) explains that it is sometimes difficult for children to articulate their wishes and needs with regard to contact. This is especially true when one considers the age and level of maturity of children. It is, however, still important to allow children the opportunity to state their views, feelings and opinions in the format they prefer – either on a therapeutic level or during an assessment or talking to a social worker.

It is also important to note that “when the wishes of the children cannot be met, the reasons need to be explained to them [by the social worker] and recorded on the file” (Medway Fostering Service, 2007).

The child's developmental needs.

Section 7(1)(f)(ii), (g)(i), (h) and (k) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) highlight the importance of a child's stage of development when determining the best interest of the child with regard to contact. Section 7 (g)(i) refers to the child's stage of development, (f)(ii) refers to the child's need to maintain a connection with his/her family, culture or tradition, (h) refers to the child's physical and emotional security and his/her intellectual, emotional, social and cultural development, and (k) refers to the need of the child to be brought up within a stable family environment and when this is not possible, in an environment that closely resembles a caring family environment. All of these factors are relevant and play an important role in determining contact.

When deciding on contact, the developmental stage of children is important for social workers to establish the children's developmental needs. This information can help guide social workers to select age-appropriate contact. Hess & Proch (1988) list the age of a child, the developmental stage and developmental-related activities that biological parents can initiate during contact sessions with their child, see Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Developmentally-related visit activities.

Age (years)	Developmental tasks	Contact session activities
Infancy (0-2)	Develop a primary attachment. Develop object permanence. Basic motor development (Sit, reach, stand, crawl, walk). Work recognition Begin exploration and mastery of the environment.	Meet basic needs (feeding, changing, holding, and cuddling). Play peek-a-boo games. Help with standing and walking by holding hands, play “come to me” games. Name objects, repeat name games, read picture books. Encourage exploration; take walks, play together with colourful, noisy, moving items.
Toddler (2-4)	Develop impulse control. Language development. Imitation and fantasy play. Small motor coordination. Develop a basic sense of time. Identify and assert preferences.	Make and consistently enforce rules. Read simple stories and play word games. Play “let’s pretend” games; encourage imitative play by doing things together such as “clean the house” or “go to the store”. Play together at a park; assist in learning to ride a tricycle; dance together to music. Draw together; string beads together. Discuss contact sessions and contact activities in terms of “after breakfast”, “after lunch” or “before supper”. Allow choices in activities, clothes worn, foods eaten.

Preschool/Early School (5-7)	Gender identification. Continual development of conscience. Develop ability to solve problems. Learning cause-effect relationships.	Be open when discussing boy-girl physical differences. Be open when discussing the child's perceptions of gender roles; read books about heroes and heroines together. Make and enforce consistent rules; discuss consequences of behaviour. Encourage choice in activities. Point out cause-effect and logical consequences of actions.
	Task completion and order of things. School entry and adjustment.	Plan activities with a beginning, middle and end (such as prepare, bake cake, clean up). Play simple games, such as "Candyland, Go Fish". Shop for school clothes together; provide birth certificate, medical record required for school entry; go with the child to visit his/her school and the playground prior to his/her first day; accompany the child to school.

School age (8-12)	Skills development (at school, in sports, special interests). Peer group development and team play. Development of self- awareness. Preparation for puberty.	Help with homework; practice sports together; demonstrate support of special interests, such as help with collections; attend school conferences and activities; work together on household tasks. Involve peers in contact activities. Attend team activities with the child. Be open when talking to the child.
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The Contact Planning Tool reflects the information mentioned in this table. Social workers can use this information to provide guidance to biological parents during contact and to identify parental capacity.

The child's relationships and attachments.

Section 7(1)(a)(i) and (ii) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that the nature of the personal relationship between the child and the biological parents, and between the child and any other caregivers (foster parents) is relevant when establishing the best interest of the child. Social workers need to explore the nature of these relationships (bonds and attachments) the child has with his/her biological parents and foster parents.

Bonds and connections differ from attachments. Children may have a close bond with their biological parents but also an insecure attachment to them. Children can have an insecure attachment to their parents, for example, but they may share common interests with their parents – feelings of a close bond are experienced. To determine if a child has a secure attachment with his/her parents, a professional assessment is needed (Taplin, 2005), such as a socio- emotional assessment. Not all social workers are trained in performing assessments and cannot provide a professional opinion on attachment. In this regard, the

Contact Planning Tool requests social workers to note the type of attachment and relationship between the child and his/her biological parents.

Section 7(1)(a)(i) and (ii) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) also refers to the relationship between a child and his/her foster parents. Too many bonds and various attachments can cause confusion for a child and can create loyalty conflicts (Taplin, 2005). This statement proves true with children in foster care. They create bonds with their foster parents and also maintain loyalty and bonds with their biological parents. It, therefore, seems fitting that the Contact Planning Tool should request social workers to make a note of the length a child has been in alternative care. Social workers are also requested to comment on the bond established with foster parents, but also to note how long a child has not been in the care of his/her biological parents.

The behaviour of a child.

A child's behaviour also links to other aspects, such as the amount of previous contact, the child's reactions to contact and the quality of contact. When these aspects are combined, alternative questions should be considered when contact is determined. It is important to note how a child behaves after a contact session, because a child may find it difficult to settle in and thrive in alternative care due to contact sessions with his/her biological parents. Contact can perpetuate previous difficulties rather than supporting the child to positively move on (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010). One way in obtaining information about the child's reaction to contact is asking the foster parents if there is a change in the child's behaviour after a contact session. Wilson and Sinclair (2004) are of the opinion that foster parents can observe various types of reactions from children following contact sessions with their biological parents and reactions can include:

- Rudeness

- Childish behaviour
- Nightmares
- Comparing foster parents to biological parents and playing them off against each other

Wilson and Sinclair (2004) state that foster parents should interpret the behaviour of children after a contact session. Either the children need more contact or they feel pressured into contact they cannot handle. Obtaining this valuable information can assist social workers in knowing when contact is beneficial or harmful for children and can guide social workers in determining future contact for children and this guidance is reflected in the Contact Planning Tool

Aspects regarding the biological parents.

In terms of Section 18(2)(b), maintaining contact between a child and his/her biological parents is highlighted. Biological parents not only have the right to maintain contact with their child, but they also have a responsibility and should establish contact responsibly. In order to form an overall picture of how to develop contact between a child and his/her biological parents, aspects regarding biological parents need special attention: their opinion of contact; their parental capacity (before removal and currently); their current functioning; and their availability for contact. These aspects are addressed in Form B of the Contact Planning Tool.

The wishes, opinions and needs of biological parents with regard to contact.

In Section 6(3) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), the best interest of a child is highlighted. A child's family should be given the opportunity to express their views in any matter concerning their child. The Act also states in Section 7(1)(b)(i) and (ii) that the attitude of biological parents towards their child and the exercise of parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child are important to consider with determining the best interest

of the child.

It is, therefore, important for social workers to allow biological parents with an opportunity to voice their opinions regarding contact. If biological parents know that their views and opinions matter with regard to contact, their attitude may change positively concerning foster care and contact planning. Scott et al. (2005) explain that if parents have a positive attitude and are cooperative when a contact plan is developed, contact is enhanced and can be a positive experience for a child.

Another aspect that social workers should take note of is the ability of parents to put aside their possible feelings of frustration and shame during contact (Roemer, 2008), because negative feelings can have an impact on the child's experiences of contact. Social workers should also keep in mind that the needs and views of biological parents are secondary considerations when contact is established (Barnardos, 2013), because the needs and views of biological parents may clash with the best interest of their child.

Social workers should note the attitudes, views and opinions of biological parents concerning foster parents. This can have a real impact on whether contact is beneficial or harmful for a child. Scott et al. (2005) maintain that if biological parents are constructive and cooperative towards foster parents, contact with their child will improve greatly. The views and opinions of biological parents regarding foster parents can affect their behaviour during contact. The behaviour of biological parents during contact can significantly influence a child.

The Contact Planning Tool provides provisions for social workers to record all of the above- mentioned valuable information.

The behaviour and parental capacity of biological parents with regard to contact.

When determining contact and maintaining the best interest of a child with regard to

contact, Section 7(1)(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that the capacity of biological parents in providing for their child – including emotional and intellectual needs – needs careful consideration.

Taplin (2005) states that the reliability of the behaviour of biological parents during contact should have an impact on decisions regarding future contact with their child. If biological parents display negative behaviour during contact sessions, such as being late, being distant, acting unreliable and inconsistent, additional stress can be placed on their child, which is very harmful (Prasad, 2011). Scott et al. (2005) purport that the reasons why biological parents behave in a certain way needs to be investigated. If negative behaviour displayed by biological parents during contact cannot be modified, social workers should take serious note of this when making further decisions on contact so that social workers can alleviate further disappointments experienced by their child and to avoid re-traumatisation.

According to Section 7(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), whenever a provision of this Act requires that the best interest of a child must be applied, the capacity of biological parents in providing for the needs of their child – including emotional and intellectual needs – must be taken into consideration. Moreover, Roemer (2008) argues that it is important for social workers to assess the strengths and parental capacity of biological parents in order to make accurate decisions regarding contact. Social workers need to investigate not only the current parental capacity of biological parents, but also their parental capacity before their child was removed from their care. The capacity of parents in meeting the needs of their child prior to removal is of the utmost importance, especially when assessing whether or not future contact may expose their child to possible negative parental abilities that can cause re-traumatisation. Social workers should investigate and state the reasons why a child was removed from the care of his/her parents. These reasons can provide guidance when contact is established.

According to Taplin (2005), when the current parental ability of biological parents is assessed, social workers can examine the way in which parents are able to adapt to the developmental needs of their child. The current parental capacity of biological parents can predict how parents will behave during future contact sessions. It is important for social workers to note whether or not this capacity is beneficial or harmful to their child. Social workers can use the information in Table 1 as a guide to observe/evaluate whether biological parents are meeting the child's developmental needs during contact and can, therefore, assess the current parental capacity of parents.

Roemer (2008) states that contact can also be an opportunity for biological parents to practise their parental capacities and skills during meal times, bed times, school events, doctor appointments and during recreational outings. Social workers can use actual contact sessions to observe and assess parental capacities.

The current functioning of biological parents and their circumstances.

Section 23(2)(c) and (d) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that when a court considers an application for contact, the degree of commitment that the applicant shows towards the child and the extent to which the applicant contributes towards expenses in connection with the birth and maintenance of the child, play a role. These two mentioned factors form part of the functioning and circumstances of biological parents.

Another valuable aspect is the availability of parents for contact. It is important to take note if biological parents are available even when work commitments make contact difficult. The financial situation of biological parents should also be considered. Can biological parents afford travelling to contact sessions and if a contact session takes place at a restaurant, are biological parents able to afford refreshments for themselves and their child. Social workers should ensure that costs and locations are not barriers to contact (Barnardos, 2013) – especially

when biological parents are living in low economic circumstances.

Social workers should also note if biological parents show commitment to their child by making the effort to attend contact sessions that are most suited to the needs of their child (Barnardos, 2013), as this is an indication of their insight and priorities.

Aspects regarding the foster parents.

Foster parents play an important role in the child's life. It is, therefore, important to note aspects regarding foster parents as these aspects can have an impact on the contact a child has with his/her biological parents. In the following section, aspects are discussed that should be considered when contact sessions are planned. These aspects are also highlighted in Form A and C of the Contact Planning Tool.

The views and opinions of foster parents regarding biological parents.

Barnardos (2013) states that both the needs and views of biological parents and foster parents are secondary considerations with regard to contact. Nevertheless, social workers should record the views and opinions of foster parents. The best interest of the child should be a core value of foster parents, but sometimes this core value is not in line with what foster parents think or feels concerning contact. The UK Department for Education (2014) states that foster parents generally have mixed views on contact – they find contact sessions very stressful but they view contact as important. Scott et al. (2005) is of the opinion that the impact that contact has on foster parents is a great concern. Contact can affect the family life of foster parents. It is, therefore, always important to know what the views of foster parents are regarding contact. Perhaps they view contact as an alternative way in adding value to the life of the child – foster parents should feel like they have been heard and are involved in the planning of contact. Social workers should discuss contact with foster parents to clarify misconceptions and to provide meaningful information and guidance with regard to contact.

If a situation arises where foster parents do not want to be involved in or they do not want to see/meet the biological parents, the child is placed in a loyalty conflict situation. Such a situation forces the child to deal with complex emotions regarding his/her biological parents and a situation can be created in which the child and his/her foster parents do not talk or find it difficult to talk about the child's past and his/her biological parents (Prasad, 2011). Prasad (2011) goes on to mention that it is, therefore, important for foster parents to create an environment in which the child is able to talk about and explore this/her identity, background and birth family.

The views and opinions of foster parents can have a direct impact on the child's behaviour towards his/her biological parents. It is important for social workers to work through the opinions and views of foster parents and to clarify issues and concerns. In some cases, it is important for social workers to reiterate the purpose of contact for foster parents and to provide necessary information concerning the current functioning of biological parents. The Contact Planning Tool makes provision on this and also helps foster parents to formulate a clear idea on the placement of a child, their expectations and purpose of contact.

The ability of foster parents to positively support the child.

When determining contact and the best interest of a child with regard to contact, Section 7(1)(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that the capacity of caregivers to provide for a child – including the emotional and intellectual needs – should receive special attention.

Taplin (2005) posed the question: "How supportive are foster parents?" It is important to note the ability of foster parents to cope and work through the child's emotions and behaviour before and after contact. Scott et al. (2005) question whether foster parents communicate openness, if they are sensitive and empathetic towards the child, and if they have a reflective

capacity and social cognition? It is unrealistic to expect of foster parents to possess all of these skills on a professional level, but they should have the capacity to avoid additional traumatisation of the child and they should not influence the child negatively.

Social workers can enhance the ability/capacity of foster parents to positively support the child through the process of contact, but social workers should also provide support to foster parents. Supporting foster parents can be done through the use of Form C of the Contact Planning Tool.

The ability of foster parents to facilitate contact and their availability for contact.

The UK Department for Education (2012) states that it is important for foster parents to work through the emotional context of contact between the child in foster care and the biological parents in order for the contact to be a positive experience for the child. In some cases, foster parents are required to monitor or supervise contact or perhaps if it is in the best interest of the child, contact should occur in an environment that is comfortable for and familiar to the child – even at the home of the foster parents. It is, therefore, important to note how such an arrangement can influence the foster parents, and if they are able to cope emotionally with such an arrangement. It is important to take note of the availability of foster parents for contact. Their availability can have an impact on the practicalities relating to where and when contact occurs.

Practical aspects.

When considering contact and the best interest of a child, the practical aspects of contact are important. Section 7(e) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states the following in this regard:

... the practical difficulty and expense of a child having contact with the parents, or any specific parent, and whether that difficulty or expense will substantially affect the child's

right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with the parents, or any specific parent, on a regular basis.

When determining contact; social workers need to take practical matters into consideration. Practical matters can include: the purpose of contact; safety aspects; supervision requirements; the frequency and length of contact; travel/transportation; and the location/venue. These practical matters are addressed in Form A of the Contact Planning Tool.

Purpose of contact.

According to Scott et al. (2005) and Barnardos (2013), the primary objectives of contact are:

- To promote and prepare for a reunification with biological parents by supporting the child's bond with his/her biological parents.
- To preserve and to support family connections of children in long-term placements, and to help the child to embrace his/her past identity while not interfering with his/her current needs to belong.
- To provide room for assessments of contact between the child and his/her biological parents and/or to help improve parent-child relationships.

When deciding the purpose for contact, social workers need to review other aspects, such as parental circumstances, behaviour and wishes. A review will provide social workers with an indication whether a placement should be short term or long term. Social workers also need to check if biological parents requested contact, when was the last contact, the time periods between contacts, how the previous contact went and the circumstances of biological parents to determine the purpose of contact. It is important to determine whether a foster care placement is for the short term or long term, because adoption should also be discussed when contact is established.

Safety aspects with regard to contact.

Section 7(1)(l)(i) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) stipulates the need to protect a child from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by subjecting a child to maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exploitation or degradation or exposing a child to violence or exploitation or other harmful behaviour that may occur during contact. The child's welfare must be safeguarded and promoted at all times during contact (Department for Education, 2012). The Council of Bath and North Somerset (2010) states in their policy with regard to contact that children can re-experience high levels of stress and emotional distress – especially in situations where there has been past abuse. In some cases, contact can lead to the re-traumatisation of a child. The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) further argues that this kind of harmful situation can also lead to a child feeling as if his/her current foster parents are unable to provide him/her with safety and security.

Social workers need to evaluate the circumstances of biological parents to determine the level of risks with regard to the safety of their child. Three types of risks can be identified: a high level of risk, a medium level and a low level. A high level of safety risks can be situations in which biological parents have not yet addressed their behaviour, such as: the behaviour that has caused their child to be removed; parents who are not stable, sound of mind or in a healthy state when visiting their child; when parents display harmful behaviour towards their child by inflicting harm to their child; where contact is likely to re-traumatise the child; and when parents are not likely to show up for contact. The content of the Contact Planning Tool makes provision for reunification social workers to comment on possible risks a child is exposed to.

Medium level risks can be situations in which the parental capacity of biological parents is low, where parents are unable to meet the needs of their child and where parents are likely to be late for contact. Low level risks can be situations in which biological parents have a

medium to high parental capacity, they are consistent in attending contact sessions, are willing and cooperative with regard to the best interest of the child and when they display positive and loving behaviour towards the child.

Supervision requirements during contact.

The UK Department for Education (2012) states that contact should never be unsupervised if it was found that the biological parents abused their child. Abusive behaviour can include maltreatment, neglect or exploitation. The Council of Bath and North Somerset (2010) and Medway Fostering Service (2007) agree that in order to determine the level of supervision required, social workers need to review the purpose for contact and perform a risk assessment regarding the safety of a child. Once the safety of a child is determined, then social workers can focus on the types of supervision required for contact. The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) and Barnardos (2013) discuss different types of supervision:

- *When no supervision is needed:* when no third party needs to be present when contact occurs. The following contact falls under this category:
 - When biological parents take their child away from foster care for a day visit.
 - When the child stays overnight, for a weekend or during the holidays at the home of his/her biological parents.
 - When a telephone conversation takes place without the phone being put on speaker mode.
- *Minimal supervision:* when non-professional persons, such as foster parents, can monitor contact. The following contact falls under this category:
 - Contact sessions conducted at the house of the foster parents.
 - Contact sessions taking place at a restaurant, park, or a shopping mall with foster

parents present.

- *Supervision by non-professional persons:* when persons, such as foster parents are present during contact. The following contact falls under this category:
 - An hour or two hours contact with the foster parents present at all times, regardless of the location.
 - When a telephone conversation takes place and the phone is put on speaker mode.
- *Supervision by social workers:* Social workers must supervise contact. Supervised contact sessions with a social worker present are not longer than two hours, and always take place at the office of a social worker.

Frequency and length of contact.

The Office of the Family Advocates in South Africa provides a table (Table 3-1), which they use as a guideline in determining contact between a child and biological parents in divorce cases. Table 3-1 provides information regarding the age of a child and the frequency of contact, as recommended by family advocates:

Table 3-2: Suggested age-appropriate access.

Age of child	Frequency and duration	Overnight stays	Vacation without contact with primary parents
0-6 months	Longer periods if contact is regular. If weekly, three hours per visit. If shorter, more frequent periods of contact are suggested, two to three times per week.	No	No

7-19 months	The same as for 0-6 months.	No	Not really.
18-36 months	Weekly contact. If during weekends, a portion of a weekend or both days. Long weekend visits are not recommended. Acceptable for three-year-olds.	Possibly. Acceptable for three-year-olds.	Possibly. Many factors play a role. One week or less for older children in this age group.
3-5 years	Predictable contact is important. Weekly contact. Full weekends or two week days and nights at this stage.	Yes, usually	Yes. Possibly longer than a week for younger children. A limit of two weeks for older children.
6-12 years	The same as above. An additional overnight stay is applicable for this age group.	Yes	Yes. Two weeks or longer. It is possible to exchange the primary residence during holidays with reversed time sharing.
Adolescence	Focus should be on the needs of adolescents while parental responsibilities and supervision are maintained.	Yes, optional.	Yes. Increased sensitivity regarding activities and schedules for this age group (possible work or organised sport).

Source: Bregman and Moodley (2016) and Family Law (2016).

The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) provides similar guidelines. The council defines the frequency of contact by taking the age of the child and the purpose and context of contact into account.

The purpose of contact seems to be the driving element with regard to the frequency of contact. Scott et al. (2005) and Prasad (2011) highlight this aspect time and time again and they are of the opinion that the frequency of contact should be considered when the following were taken into account: the purpose of contact; the age of the child; the geographical distance; the financial position of biological parents; and the safety of the child during contact. The information provide in the above table provide sound guidelines for social workers to determine the frequency of contact between a child in foster care and his/her biological parents.

Travel and/or transportation.

According to Barnados (2013), traveling during contact should not cause stress to the child or to the foster parents. Foster parents should transport the child to and from contact sessions as this will “provide valuable opportunities to understand the child’s experience and to debrief the child” (Barnados 2013). Although Scott *et al.* (2005) state that in cases where it is a short- term placement, the child is likely to be reunified with his/her biological parents, and contact takes place more frequent – it is the responsibility of the biological parents to do most of the travelling to reach the child. Social workers should also consider the financial circumstances of biological parents: are they able to afford to travel to and from visits and are they able to make use of public transport if they do not have access to their own form of transportation.

Location and/or venue.

The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010), the UK Department for Education (2013), Roemer (2008) and Scott et al. (2005) all agree that the venue and/or location where contact takes place should be:

- Suitable for the needs of the child

- Child-friendly
- Stimulating
- Safe
- As close as possible to the home of the foster parents to avoid lengthy journeys for the child.

The UK Department for Education (2012) and the Family Rights Group, advice sheet 14 (2014) are of the opinion that determining contact proves logistically difficult, because the venue where contact takes place can affect the quality of contact. Barnados (2013) argues that depending on the purpose of contact, it is beneficial for biological parents to show their commitment to their child by making an effort to attend a venue most suited to the child. The location of contact can depend on the purpose of contact; safety aspects regarding contact; supervision requirements; the financial situation of biological parents; the developmental needs of the child; the type of contact; and aspects regarding travel and transportation.

It is important for social workers to logistically determine if it is in the best interest of the child when contact takes place at a neutral environment or in a familiar environment. Locations where contact can take place are at the office of a social worker; the home of foster parents; the home of biological parents; in a public area; a restaurant; a park; a shopping mall or at the school of the child.

Summary

The literature review highlights that the establishment of a contact plan is very important. A contact plan provides clarity for all of the parties involved and reduces the possibility of difficulties and problematic situations with regard to contact (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010). A contact plan ensures that contact is a positive experience for a child (Prasad,

2011). It is, therefore, necessary that a contact plan should be drawn up along with a contact plan agreement signed by all of the parties involved (Bath & North Somerset Council 2010).

Both the UK Department for Education (2012) and Taplin (2005) agree that in determining contact, there is no “one size fits all” approach. The UK Department for Education (2014) states that determining contact is a balancing act for social workers – they need to weigh the risks and benefits of contact. Contact should focus on the child and although the needs of biological parents and foster parents are important, these needs are secondary to the needs of the child (Barnardos, 2013). The primary objective when contact is established should always be “the best interest of the child”.

The reviewed literature focused on the fact that a contact plan forms part of the “care plan”, “placement plan”, “placement agreement” or “permanency plan” of children placed in foster care (Scott et al., 2005; Prasad, 2011; Family Rights Group, 2014; Medway Fostering Service, 2007; Barnados, 2013). Only international literature is available and literature highlights the importance of a contact plan.

In South Africa, the amended Children’s Act (38 of 2005) is the only guiding tool that refers to a permanency plan. In terms of Section 157(1)(iii), documented permanency plan is of importance, as well as taking into account the child's age and developmental needs. These all need to be documented and set out in a way that is aimed at achieving stability in the child's life. In addition, it is a requirement to submit a permanency plan as part of the Form 38 report that social workers need to submit to a court. However, the permanency plan does not state specifically that a contact plan must be developed to form part of a permanency plan. Form 38 provides guidelines on how a report should look like: social workers are required to comment on contact between a child in foster care and his/her biological parents. However, no guidelines are provided on how social workers are meant to evaluate and determine what kind of contact is in the child’s best interest. A gap was, therefore, identified in the

Children's Act and an additional gap was identified in literature in the field of social work in South Africa regarding contact planning for children in foster care and their biological parents.

Contact plans play an important role in the service that social workers render to children in alternative care. Without a contact plan, social workers are unable to make a solid, scientifically-based decision or recommendation regarding contact for children in foster care with their biological parents. Social workers also need to be professionally accountable concerning the decisions made by them with regard to contact. Social workers are, therefore, in need of scientific sources that support their recommendations to determine contact in the best interest of a child. A contact schedule with a scientific basis can be used in the Children's Court as evidenced-based practice.

The Contact Planning Tool developed by the researcher is well-rounded in terms of Section 7 of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), but can be criticised when Section 23(2) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) is taken into account. The Contact Planning Tool should recognise the weight of these aspects in the eyes of the Children's Court and should incorporate these elements. Overall, international literature seems to support most of the aspects mentioned in the proposed tool. The tool seems to be a good place to start when it comes to determining contact for children in foster care with their biological parents.

The general aim of this study was to validate the Contact Planning Tool and to provide recommendations in order to refine the content of the Contact Planning Tool. This tool was designed and implemented by a social worker with input from colleagues and can be used to facilitate the systematic planning of contact. A refined tool will help to guide South African social workers to develop a contact plan with a more scientific basis, which can be used in the Children's Court as evidence-based practice or to form part of a child's care plan and permanency plan. Generic social workers, foster care social workers, statutory social workers

and their managers can all use this tool to assist and guide them in developing a contact plan between biological parents and their child in foster care. The elements of the literature study are captured in the Contact Planning Tool.

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SECTION B: ARTICLE

Content Validity of a Contact Planning Tool for Social Workers to Determine Contact Between a Foster Child and Biological Parents

Abstract

South Africa lacks policies that can guide contact between biological parents and their children in alternative care. To facilitate a more structured and systematic planning of contact, the researcher (a social worker by profession) with input from colleagues and her experience in social work practice, designed and implemented a Contact Planning Tool to enhance contact between biological parents and their children in foster care. Obtaining content validity on this tool opened up the way for further research to refine and test this tool.

It was the aim of the researcher to explore and describe the perceptions of social workers on the content validity of the tool by means of a qualitative study. Recommendations for the improvement and refinement of the tool were made. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Data were collected from 11 participants.

The findings indicate that the tool can greatly assist social workers with regard to foster care cases of non-orphaned children. Comments concerning the tool were overall positive. The participants provided valuable suggestions on how to make the tool even more effective.

Keywords: content validity, Contact Planning Tool, social workers, children in foster care, biological parents

Introduction

Children placed in foster care did not only experience trauma with regard to abuse or neglect, but they often face additional chronic stressors, including a separation from siblings, friends and their community; possible maltreatment in a foster care setting; and uncertainty about future plans; and a possible reunification with their parents (Conradi et al., 2011). Schultz

(2002) states that an attachment to biological parents should be encouraged in cases where children had secure ties with their parents before they were removed and when they are old enough to maintain a clear vision of their parents and remember them. When contact with biological parents is maintained, children are able to deal with their grief and they can feel secure with foster parents. The duty to arrange contact is the responsibility of social workers who should always ensure that contact is in the best interest of children. Proper planning and structure regarding contact are, therefore, important and form an integral part of an overall contact plan for foster children. Children in foster care may experience a need to be visited by their parents and visits should then be arranged with specific goals in mind.

“Contact refers to all links between a child and their families of origin and friends, regardless of the form and frequency of these links” (Medway Fostering Service, 2007). The Family Rights Group (2014) identifies contact as the way in which children and their families keep in touch. Contact is the international form of communication between children and their biological parents (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1997).

In South Africa, there is very limited research available on contact. The amended Children’s Act (38 of 2005) of South Africa describes “contact” in relation to children as maintaining a personal relationship with children; and if children live with someone else, contact is viewed as communication on a regular basis with children in person by visiting or being visited by their biological parents – a direct form of contact. The Act also states indirect forms of contact, namely communication on a regular basis with children through letters, telephone conversations or any form of electronic communication.

According to Prasad (2011) and the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010), direct contact can happen face-to-face, via telephone calls, telephonic messages and emails. Indirect contact, includes photographs, postcards, videos/DVDs, mementos and life story books. “The line between direct and indirect contact is becoming blurred, particularly now that ‘Skype’

conversations are becoming more common” (Bullen, Taplin, Kertesz, Humphreys & McArthur, 2015). Direct contact can either be supervised or unsupervised. If it is supervised, supervision can be done by social workers, neutral persons, foster parents or safe reliable significant persons (persons are significant when they have a relationship with children concerned).

Gobind (2013) states that available research provides contradictory findings on the topic of contact – contact can have a beneficial or non-beneficial impact on children, thereby creating doubt and uncertainty. Various parties involved in contact offer different benefits (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010). For biological parents, it includes “helping ease their sense of loss, maintaining relationships so that reunification remains a possibility, assessing and developing parental skills”. For children, contact helps them to come to terms with their long-term placement and eases their sense of loss, it provides a link to their past and can help children make sense of their lives (Department for Education, 2012). Contact assists, encourages and maintains family relationships in order for reunification to occur. Benefits of contact for caregivers (foster parents), include helping foster parents understand the family and past of children, helping foster parents understand the behaviour of children, providing foster parents with opportunities to assist children in their needs. Moreover, biological parents may give foster parents permission to care for their children (Bath & North Somerset Council, 2010).

According to Prasad (2011) and Taplin (2005), contact supports, maintains and encourages attachment with biological parents. Contact can assist in and enhance the psychological well-being of children in alternative care. Well-being of children includes the emotional, behavioural and intellectual development of children (Taplin, 2005; Prasad, 2011).

Taplin (2005) and Prasad (2011) are of the opinion that contact with biological parents can assist children in maintaining links with their race, religion and culture of origin (cultural

identity). A cultural identity can contribute to a positive identity formation, can enhance their self-esteem and can contribute to the development of resilience. Contact can prevent children from creating unrealistic idealisations of biological parents. By having contact with their biological parents, children have an opportunity to acquire knowledge and an understanding of the circumstances of their personal and family history, and can help children come to terms with their past and what has happened to them (Taplin, 2005; Prasad, 2011).

Literature provides information on concerns regarding contact and harmful contact. Baker, Metha and Chong (2013), Taplin (2005) and Prasad (2011) maintain that contact can cause children to develop multiple attachments, which can cause confusion. Contact can cause loyalty conflicts, which entail feelings of guilt, stress and shame. If children are placed in alternative care, it likely means that the biological parents have an inadequate parenting capacity. Contact arrangements can, therefore, be difficult and can cause harm to children.

Harmful contact can enhance negative relationships. Children can feel additional rejection and can experience their biological parents as neglectful, unreliable and inconsistent. In some cases, where children are exposed to harmful behaviour – especially in unsupervised contact – harmful contact can lead to the re-traumatisation of children. Social workers need to keep in mind that “harmful contact is associated with particular people and not with contact in general” (Department for Education, 2014). Prasad (2011), Taplin (2005) together with the Bath and North Somerset Council (2010) argue that in situations where contact with biological parents is experienced as harmful to their children, contact can have a negative impact on the attachment of children with their alternative caregivers, can cause children anxiety and these negative aspects can lead to a direct impact on the psychological state of alternative caregivers, it can be more difficult for children to settle in and thrive at alternative caregivers, and it can perpetuate previous difficult and traumatic experiences rather than allowing children to move on in a positive manner. Harmful situations can lead to contact undermining placements and possible

placement breakdowns. According to the UK Department for Education (2012) another concerning factor around the concept of contact is that, even though children in alternative care tend to look forward to contact with the biological parents, they are often upset by it.

The Department for Education (2012, p. 6) states that “well-organised and purposeful contact can also play a role in assessing whether a child can return home” – if children can be reunited with their family. The Bath and North Somerset Council (2010), Taplin (2005) and Prasad (2011) purport that contact can be used to assess the quality of the relationship between biological parents and children in alternative care, and contact can also be used as a tool to assess whether reunification with biological parents is possible. Contact plays an important role in concurrent planning of children in foster care. While frequent contact allows biological parents to show their motivation to get their child back and to demonstrate new skills, contact can also provide evidence when biological parents are not making progress towards case goals. When biological parents, for example, do not attend scheduled visits or fail to make required behavioural changes during contact sessions, this information can help a court to decide more quickly to order an alternative permanency plan for children (Jordan Institute for Families, 2000).

Determining contact is a process that needs careful and expert planning combined with sensitivity (Department for Education, 2012). Contact arrangements that are poorly planned and badly managed can be harmful to children (Department for Education, 2012). When planning contact, each case should be considered individually on a case-to-case basis. A contact plan should reflect the unique and individual aspects of a specific case (Prasad, 2011; Taplin, 2005). Contact arrangements are made in line with the needs of children and their best interest should always be kept in mind (Department for Education, 2012). The “best interests of the child” principle is of paramount importance (South Africa, 2005). In order for social workers to determine contact in the correct manner – based on scientific practices – they are

in need of assistances and guidance.

Although international literature exists regarding guidelines for contact between foster children and their biological parents, there seems to be a lack of information in South Africa. There also seems to be no specific protocol or scientific instrument or tool available in international literature specifically designed to assist and/or guide social workers in determining contact.

To facilitate a more structured and systematic planning of contact, the researcher with input from colleagues combined with her practice experience, designed and implemented a Contact Planning Tool for use by social workers at the Christian Social Council (CSC) welfare organisation. The tool consists of a range of forms that should be completed by social workers. This tool assists social workers in investigations and recommendations regarding contact between foster children and their biological parents. The content of this tool has not yet been validated to determine if this is the best possible tool to use in determining contact. With this research, the researcher aimed to validate and refine the content of the tool.

According to Patrick, Burke, Gwaltney and Leidy (2011) and Drost (2011), content validity is qualitative validity defined by empiric evidence. Empiric evidence demonstrates whether concepts of an instrument are appropriate, comprehensive, relative and representative with regard to its intended measurement and use. In other words, validity in qualitative research tests “whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure” Golafshani (2003). Drost (2011) provides two ways of assessing content validity. Firstly, by posing questions to participants about a tool (by requesting them to provide a rating: if they agree/disagree to an extent). Secondly, by gaining the expert opinion of participants (allowing them an opportunity to provide comments to support their rating and also to state if the tool is appropriate for a study and to provide changes they deem appropriate). This was the aim of the study, and the research question was,

therefore, formulated as follows:

What are the professional opinions of social workers regarding the content of the Contact Planning Tool that is used to determine contact between foster children and biological parents?

This question refers inherently to the establishment of content validity of an instrument in preparation for its future use and testing in practice conditions.

Research Methodology

A pure qualitative research approach was utilised to achieve the aim of the study.

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011), a qualitative research approach is used to gain a better understanding of a topic – rather than explaining a topic – in a natural setting that is sensitive to observing people and places, rather than using a controlled measurement. De Vos et al. (2011) also refer to a qualitative research approach as obtaining an understanding of how participants experience a phenomenon and the significance of this phenomenon. A qualitative approach was suitable for this research study, because an in-depth study was performed to gain the views and opinions of social workers.

In line with a qualitative approach, the study utilised a descriptive research design.

Descriptive research refers to a more intensive examination of a phenomenon and a deeper meaning leads to a thicker description. Descriptive research presents a picture of specific details of a situation and focuses on the “how” and “why” (De Vos et al., 2011). The researcher made use of “how” and “why” questions by exploring the perceptions of social workers regarding the Contact Planning Tool, as initially designed by a social worker working at CSC (De Vos et al., 2011) maintain that qualitative research, rather than quantitative research, aims to discuss social phenomena by comprehending how individuals understand their social worlds. A descriptive research design was utilised to gain rich descriptive data

regarding the Contact Planning Tool to obtain content validity in order for the tool to be refined for further research.

Participants and sampling.

According to Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi and Wright (2010), there are two guiding principles to follow in qualitative sampling, namely appropriateness and adequacy. The population of this study was social workers experienced in the field of foster care, working at a child protection agency in the Pretoria district. A sample size of 12 participants was identified by a mediator by making use of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling includes preselected criteria for the selection of participants (De Vos et al., 2011). Purposive sampling provides specific inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to prescribe the participants who participate in a study. All 12 of the participants met the requirements listed in the inclusion criteria. The sample was convenient, because the participants are working with children in foster care and they were willing to participate in the study. (Driedger, Gallois, Sanders and Santesso, 2006) are of the opinion that a minimum of 11 interviews is needed to create stability amongst the views collected in a sample and to reach data saturation. Only 11 participants took part in the study. One of the participants was unable to complete the interview due to unexpected work demands and the participant was unable to reschedule the interview.

Data collection.

De Vos et al. (2011) maintain that data gathering is the process in which collected data is structured and assigned meaning. For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of semi-structured one-to-one interviews to collect data from the participants. The researcher developed an interview schedule containing a set of pre-determined questions (Greeff, 2011) that was used during the interviews to obtain valuable information from the participants. The participants were asked to rate the content of the forms with a 1 if they agree, a 3 if they agree

to an extent, and a 2 if they disagree. They were also asked to provide comments to support their opinions, to state if the information provided contributes to the goal of the study and to provide information on whether additions or changes need to be made. The interviews were guided rather than dictated by the schedule. The researcher was flexible and followed particular avenues of interest that emerged during the interviews (Botma et al., 2010; Greeff, 2011). All of the interviews were recorded. The researcher also made field notes and allowed the participants to make notes on their copy of the tool. All of the raw data were collected at the end of each interview and filed away in a secure place until a data analysis occurred.

The aim of the study was to gain content validity for the Contact Planning Tool by obtaining the views and opinions of social workers by making use of semi-structured interviews. Content validity is the extent to which an instrument measures the important aspects of concepts developers or users purport the instrument assesses. The researcher made use of cognitive interviewing to refine the items, instructions and response options of the tool in order for the participants in the target population to understand and can ultimately confirm that the final instrument was appropriate, comprehensive and understandable in the target population. Structured individual cognitive interviews are recommended with a broad range of participants from a target population using techniques, such as “think aloud” (Tourangeau, Rips & Rasinski, 2000) and/or verbal probing (Conrad & Blair, 2009) to ascertain exactly how an item is interpreted and a response is formed.

Data analysis.

De Vos et al. (2011) point out that professional research can be analysed manually or by a computer. The data collected in this research study were analysed manually by the researcher. The goal of analysing cognitive interview data was to reveal problems the participants experience with (a) the survey context; (b) understanding questions; (c) retrieving and integrating information used to answer questions; and (d) communicating answers in order to

revise or repair questions (Ryan, Gannon-Slater & Culbertson, 2012). These elements were valuable in obtaining content validity for the Contact Planning Tool. The researcher made use of audio-recordings and field notes to collect the data. The analysing of the interview sessions included the transcripts of the interviews, a summary of the interpretations of the participants with regard to the items of the tool and the identification of problems concerning the tool, and decisions whether to keep, modify or delete items. The results include “think aloud” or verbal probing quotations for each questionnaire item or concept. The results of the analysis were used as evidence to guide decisions about keeping, deleting or modifying items. Items that were comprehensible and consistently interpreted by all of the participants were retained while others were modified or deleted.

Ethical implications.

The researcher obtained ethical permission to conduct this study from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The ethics number is NWU-00364-15-S1. The study complied with ethical standards as set out by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). Informed consent forms were signed by all of the participants. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. No information was withheld from the participants. The identities of the participants were protected and they were identified by a unique code. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded. They were given the right to object if they did not want their interview to be audio-recorded. The researcher also explained to the participants how the information provided would be protected.

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research and credibility is the primary criterion when evaluating qualitative research (McMillan, 2011). The researcher ensured trustworthiness by applying the model of Lincoln and Guba throughout the research process.

The model of Lincoln and Guba focuses on following four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (De Vos et al., 2011).

Description of the Contact Planning Tool

The Contact Planning Tool was developed by the researcher and is a comprehensive guideline for social workers to assist them in determining appropriate contact between children in foster care with their biological parents. The tool was developed for social workers to use in all of their foster care cases in which children still have living biological parents.

The Contact Planning Tool consists of four forms:

- Form A – Determining aspects for contact. Guidelines for case social workers and/or foster care supervision social workers.
- Form B – Guidelines for reunification social workers.
- Form C – Guidelines for foster parents with regard to contact.
- Form D – Contact plan and contact agreement.

The tool assists social workers in obtaining the necessary information to make decisions about contact. These forms provide room where social workers can write down their evaluations with regard to the information obtained and with these written evaluations social workers can create appropriate contact, according to the best interest of children.

Steps on how to use the Contact Planning Tool.

In the Contact Planning Tool, a covering letter provides detail on how to use the Contact Planning Tool. Figure 1 describes the Contact Planning Tool and responsible social workers who should complete the respective forms.

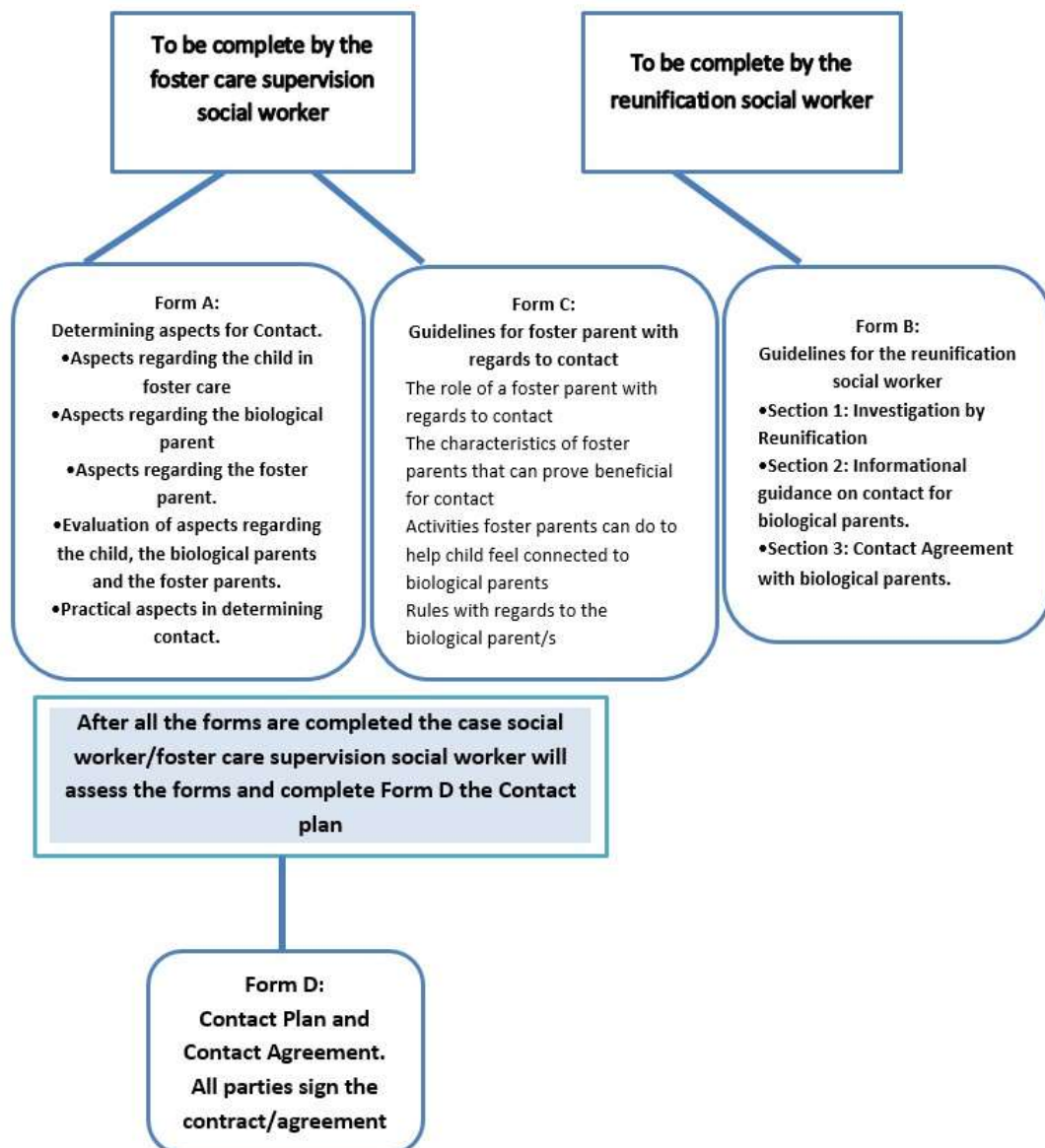


Figure 1: Steps on how to use the Contact Planning Tool.

In the following section, the four different forms are discussed, how each form should be completed and the responsible person who should complete a specific form.

Form A – Determining aspects for contact.

This form is a guideline for case social workers and/or foster care supervision social workers who are responsible for foster care cases. Foster care social workers are ultimately responsible for the entire process in determining contact and to compile a contact plan.

Form A is the guideline social workers use to evaluate the outcomes of each aspect in order

to determine what is in the best interest of children. This form states that case and/or foster care supervision social workers should take the unique situation of children into account and should, therefore, complete a form for each child (regardless if siblings are placed together).

The form is in a table format that consists of four columns and is divided into sections, namely:

Aspects regarding children in foster care:

- Aspects regarding biological parents (these aspects should be read in conjunction with Form B. This form should be completed by reunification social workers who supply information to biological parents regarding contact).
- Aspects regarding foster parents (these aspects should be read in conjunction with Form C that supplies information to foster parents regarding contact).
- Aspects regarding children, biological parents and foster parents that should be evaluated.
- Practical aspects in determining contact.

Form B – A guideline for reunification social workers with regard to contact.

Reunification social workers are responsible for completing this form and is used to assist reunification social workers in the assessment of contact, in providing support to biological parents and to provide guidance to biological parents in the form of information.

Form B is divided into the following three sections:

- *Section 1:* Investigations performed by reunification social workers. Reunification social workers should conduct an investigation by making use of telephone interviews, office interviews and home visits.
- *Section 2:* Information guidance for biological parents concerning contact. This section provides information on activities on par with the developmental needs of children that

biological parents can initiate during contact sessions and appropriate behaviour of parents during a contact session.

- Reunification social workers can work through this information with biological parents in order to gain their views and attitudes on contact.
- *Section 3: A contact agreement with biological parents.* This is a contract that should be sign by biological parents. They state that they are willing to adhere to appropriate behaviour and etiquette with regard to contact with their child.

Form C – Guidance to foster parents with regard to contact.

Foster care supervision social workers can provide a copy of Form C to foster parents and should discuss necessary information with them. Social workers should record the outcomes and attitudes of foster parents in Form A. Form C provides information on the following:

- The role of foster parents with regards to contact.
- The characteristics of foster parents that can prove beneficial to contact.
- Activities for foster parents to help children feel connected to their biological parents.
- Rules with regard to the behaviour of biological parents during contact sessions – observations foster parents can report on.

Form D – A contact plan and a contact plan agreement.

Once foster care supervision social workers have completed Form A, they are able to make recommendations with regard to contact, and they can complete Section A and the contact plan in Form D in which social workers recorded details of the contact plan between children and their biological parents. Social workers can then complete Section B, the contact plan agreement in Form D, and they should provide a copy to all of the parties involved – the children, the biological parents, the foster parents, the reunification social worker and the case

and/or foster care supervision social worker. Each of the parties should sign the document and the document is stored on the case file.

Research Findings

In this study, the expert opinions of the participants were obtained regarding the proposed Contact Planning Tool. During each of the interviews, the participants were asked if they agree, agree to an extent or if they disagree with the aspects contained in the Tool. The participants were also given an opportunity to make comments and to recommend possible changes or additions and to state whether these aspects achieve the goal of determining contact.

The participants agreed to almost all of the aspects, as described in the tool. The data collected on aspects of the tool to which all of the participants agreed, are not reported on in this article. The researcher reports on the following research findings: the comments of participants and the aspects they agreed to and aspects they disagreed on. Findings are substantiated by literature.

The Contact Planning Tool was too long for each participant to complete in the agreed time of an hour and a half. They were asked which of the sections of the tool they would like to complete. A total of 11 participants took part in the study – 7 participants completed Form A, C and D while 4 participants completed Form B.

The thematic categories were based on the overall impression of the Contact Planning Tool, and on each of the aspects of the tool, namely aspects regarding children, biological parents, foster parents and practical aspects.

Category 1: Overall impression of the Contact Planning Tool.

The participants were asked to comment on their overall impression of the tool. From their answers, the researcher linked similar ideas together and created subthemes for each category.

Sub-category 1: The importance of a Contact Planning Tool.

All of the participants commented positively on the overall impression of the tool. Ten of the participants felt that there is definitely a need for this tool and that the Tool will assist them in doing their work successfully and efficiently. One of the participants mentioned that she is currently dealing with a case and she is struggling to determine contact, the tool would have helped her to create a contact plan.

Some of the participants agreed that the tool is valuable – especially when social workers have to complete extension orders and when biological parents obtain legal representation and take their case to court. One of the participants stated that she will only use the Contact Planning Tool if the child was going to be reunified with his/her parents. She felt that it was not necessary to use this tool if she had a child in long-term foster care. Research done by Haight et al. (2001) confirms the comments of the participants and highlights the importance of continually looking at the historical and/or contextual factors of each case and the physical and social contexts of contact when determining any kind of contact. A visiting plan, as described in Hess (2003), is viewed as highly important and is a requirement in 78.4% of the states in the United States of America.

Sub-category 2: The length of the tool.

Morrison, Mishna, Cook and Aitken (2011) found that social workers – and the participants in this study – feel that even though determining contact is a lot of work, they still feel that it is their responsibility. The participants in this study felt that although this tool requires a lot more effort, it will definitely help them as social workers to determine contact and will assist them in addressing all of the aspects so that possible complications and problems can be ironed out. Participant 3 stated that although the Tool is long “*all the information in the tool is important and should be gathered by social workers anyway*”. Participant 9 indicated that *social workers*

forget a lot of these important things that are in the tool when they arrange contact, they just jump right in and just say when contact will happen. Participant 7 was of the opinion that this tool assists social workers in making sure that *all the necessary information is gathered in a structured and logical way.* Participant 6 responded: *... the more the social worker uses the tool, the easier it will become to complete it.*

Sub-category 3: Involving all of the parties in the process of contact.

All of the participants in this study agreed that if all of the parties are involved, they will feel part of the process and forming an agreement in which all of the parties play a role is beneficial in the process of determining contact. The participants were specifically referring to their comments made on Form D – the contact plan and contact plan agreement. Two of the participants agreed that in Form A – the evaluation of aspects regarding children, biological parents and foster parents – are necessary in the process of determining contact.

Bullen et al. (2015) support these comments when stating that “when parents, foster parents and children are all included in the decision making about contact arrangements, and information is shared with all parties, they feel much better supported to manage contact and the complex relationships involved”.

Sub-category 4: Information to be included in the tool.

The participants agreed that social workers would benefit if they can obtain information from the school of a child. Participant 3 advised that the *use of schools and other professionals like an educational psychologist (if applicable) and an occupational therapist (if applicable) as a resource to gain information about the child.* It seems that involving schools and other professionals in a child’s life can help with not only obtaining additional information, but also to gain a perspective of the current state of a child.

Participant 1 stated that *a network meeting can also be helpful with this process* Meeting

with relevant parties at any stage in the process can also be beneficial – this proves true especially when the signing of a contact plan agreement occurs (Form D).

Category 2: Aspects regarding children.

The findings of this category were obtained from comments made about Form A that focuses on determining aspects for contact.

Sub-category 1: Children with special needs.

Two of the participants recommended that the tool should include *a section on whether the child has any special needs or disabilities*. This statement is supported by Section 7(i) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), which states that the best interest of children should be considered – any disability that a child may have needs to be taken into consideration.

Participant 11 recommended that Form B should have a section on whether or not biological parents can *accommodate the child's special needs* and the *parents' opinions* regarding the child's special needs.

Sub-category 2: The age of children.

Participant 7 stated that the tool *should rather categorize the child's age groupings in that of Piaget stages of a child's [cognitive] development and not in the age groupings that appear on the form as this does not make sense*. Two of the participants felt that *a list/check list* of the developmental stages of children should be included in the form to help guide social workers when the development of children is discussed with foster parents. Myers (2013) created a summarised table of Piaget's stages of development. This summary can prove a valuable addition to the tool, but should also be added to the form to make the necessary changes with regard to the age of children into age groupings.

All of the participants agreed that knowing when children reach an age of maturity is *important*, but participants 6 and 7 stated that it is *difficult for a social worker to determine the*

child's "age of maturity". Participant 7 suggested that there *should be a list or a checklist* in Form A to assist social workers in determining the age of maturity of children.

Sub-category 3: The emotional state of children.

Participant 3 felt that the tool should include *a section for the social worker to get information on where the child feels safe to have contact*. Kiraly and Humphreys (2015 p. 113) support this statement and they are of the opinion "that children need a greater say in whether, when and under what circumstances they should have contact".

Three of the participants recommend that it is important for social workers to look at the *child's emotional state*. They felt that the tool should include *the impact of the abuse on the child*, and *whether the child experienced any trauma because of it*. Participant 3 spoke of *re-traumatization* – if children have worked through trauma, contact can then be viewed as either *a secondary trauma for the child or a trauma trigger* for them. This statement can be linked to the evaluation of aspects in Form A where social workers can recommend that children should firstly address their trauma and/or emotional state before continuing the process of determining contact.

Two of the participants agreed that children between the ages of 16-18 are *too old for socio-emotional assessment* as they can *manipulate it*, they should rather be sent for a *psychological assessment*.

Sub-category 4: Attachments and/or relationships.

"Social workers, however, should be aware that parental visits do not offer an ideal environment for assessing parent-child relationships" (Haight et al., 2003, p. 204). Most of the participants stated that an *interactional analysis* can prove beneficial to gain information on the bonds and/or attachments between children, their biological parent and foster parents.

Participant 7 stated that the tool lacked guidance on how social workers should gain

information of relationships and/or attachments between children and their foster parents.

Sub-category 5: The behaviour of children.

Participant 7 recommended that with regard to “alternative behaviour”, there should be some examples or a list of alternative behaviour. A list can assist social workers when interviewing foster parents. The Office of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh offers an example of symptoms children can experience before a contact session and after a contact session. Examples of these symptoms are listed below in Table 4-1.

Table 4-3: Symptoms of children before and after a contact session – aged 1-5 years.

Symptoms before a contact session:	Symptoms after a contact session:
Foster children can be affected by knowing that a contact session with their biological parents is approaching. Here are some of the symptoms that may be evident in children before a contact session:	Foster children can experience a variety of feelings after a contact session with their biological parents took place. They also may behave in ways that are difficult to cope with. Feelings and behaviours that may be observed from foster children after a contact session can include:
• Nightmares and sleep disturbances • Unrealistic expectations about how the contact session will go • Anxiety	• Nightmares and sleep disturbances • Crying, sometimes excessively • Sadness • Disappointment • Acting out, such as stomping feet, displaying antisocial behaviour and

	ignoring foster family members • Anger • Ambivalence • Withdrawal • Anxiety
When to seek help:	
Changes in the behaviour of children after a contact session do not necessarily mean the session hurt the children. A change may, for example means the children have a secure attachment with their biological parents and they are upset about having to leave their parents again. However, if behaviour changes are severe or overly disruptive to a foster family, professional help is necessary, and the situation should be brought to the attention of the social worker.	

Beyer (2008) mentions that it is normal for children in foster care to have reactions to contact. Participant 11 agreed with this statement and mentioned that the Tool should have room for social workers to note that if the *child's alternative behaviour is occurring after repeated contacts or just isolated contacts*.

Category 3: Aspects regarding biological parents.

These findings were obtained from the comments of the participants on aspects regarding biological parents in Form B.

Sub-category 1: Parental capacity/behaviour of biological parent towards children.

The participants agreed that it is relevant for social workers to note the capacity of biological parents to meet the needs of their children prior to the removal of their children.

This statement is supported by Haight, Kagel and Black (2003) who are of the opinion that it is always important to consider aspects of parenting when determining contact.

Participant 1 felt that there should be a *checklist of developmental physical and emotional needs* of children to assist social workers when they have to comment on whether or not biological parents are meeting the needs of their children. Two of the participants agreed that concerning parental capacity, social workers should *ask the parents' opinion of their parental capacity* before removal and *why they think their child was removed*. One of the participants requested that *more activities need to be added to the table in Form B* where it is stated that activities that biological parents can initiate during contact sessions should be on par with the developmental needs of children. Participant 1 recommended that Section 2 of Form B – the behaviour of biological parents with regard to contact – should be *changed to a more diplomatic tone*, to not offend biological parents. Two of the participants recommended that Section 3 of Form B – the contact agreement with biological parents – should be included that *the biological parents should not give the child expectations for reunification during contact*.

Sub-category 2: Current functioning of biological parents.

Participants 1, 11 and 12 agreed that all the aspects regarding the current functioning of biological parents in Form B are valuable and important, although they recommended the following changes to the form:

- Home circumstances should also include the state and care of pets and plants.
- Financial aspects should also include asking biological parents for their bank statements. Social workers should obtain information regarding the current or previous employment of biological parents after they received permission to do so.
- Where the health of biological parents is concerned, the form should state if it is necessary for biological parents to obtain a certificate from a health practitioner.

- Where the psychological health of biological parents is concerned, the stipulations of the form are ideal, but cannot be realised. There are a lack of resources for biological parents to be evaluated. If there are serious reasons to believe there are concerns regarding the psychological health of biological parents, social workers should send biological parents for a psychological assessment before a reunification is considered.

Sub-category 3: Degree of commitment.

Two of the participants stated that the forms should include room where social workers can make a note of the attitude of biological parents regarding contact and the *extent and willingness of the parents with regard to contact*. This statement can be linked to Section 23(2)(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), which states that when a court considers an application for contact, the degree of commitment that the applicant shows towards the child plays an important role. The tool, however, does not include aspects with regard to the degree of commitment shown by biological parents.

Category 4: Aspects regarding foster parents.

The participants reported on the aspects regarding foster parents, as discussed in Form A and the comments made regarding Form C that includes guidelines for foster parents with regard to contact.

Sub-category 1: Roles and responsibilities of foster parents.

Most of the participants stated that the tool should contain more information on the *foster parents' roles and responsibilities*, as stated in Section 188 of the Children's Act (38 of 2005). The *legal obligations of the foster parents*, especially foster parents involved in contact, should be added to the tool.

Form C explain the rules with regard to the behaviour of biological parents during contact. The behaviour of foster parents should also be reported on. Participants 3, 8 and 7 stated that it

is very difficult to hold foster parents responsible for *watching out for these things*, because the form does not state what foster parents should do when they encounter the behaviour of the biological parents and the biological parents should be aware of this responsibility the foster parent has. This responsibility is only applicable if foster parents are required to supervise contact sessions or if they are present when biological parent collect their child for a contact session.

All of the participants agreed that the sentence: “building birth parents’ confidence, supporting their efforts to change and teaching child care to birth parents” – as stated in Form C: The roles of foster parents – are *not roles of foster parents and should be deleted*.

Sub-category 2: Characteristics of foster parents.

Participant 7 stated that a good characteristic of foster parents is to accept biological parents, but to *limit their relationship to that of a “professional” one*.

Participants 4, 6, 7 and 8 reported on the characteristic “Recognise the reality of the parents’ current situation and present this reality to the child without negativity” – stated in Form C – that foster parents do not always have the capacity to communicate this correctly to foster children. Morrison et al. (2011) state that when foster parents experience negative feelings regarding contact, these feelings can be communicated to the children and can cause anxiety and loyalty conflicts in children. Participant 4, 7 and 9 commented that the social worker should rather instruct the foster parent on what information he/she may tell children and *give tips* on how it should be done to eliminate possible bias and ignorance when information is shared with children.

Sub-category 3: Support provided to children.

Most of the participants stated that it is difficult for social workers to provide support to children due to *high caseloads and time constraints*, especially with regard to preparing and

debriefing children. Social workers *rely on the foster parent* or therapists to provide support to children.

Two of the participants recommended that there should be *a check list* in the tool on how to practically *prepare, support and debrief the child* regarding contact and if social workers are unable to do this, they should ask foster parents to prepare, support and debrief children. Haight et al. (2002, p. 27) support this recommendation by stating that “many foster mothers may require education and training to adequately support children whose responses to visits are intense and problematic”. The UK Department for Education (2011) states that a minimum standard with regard to contact is that foster parents must be provided with practical help to support and manage contact.

Participant 4 stated that Form C should form part of the process of *screening the foster parents*, as such a measure can prevent less *foster placement breakdowns*.

Category 5: Practical aspects.

The results on the practical aspects relating to Form A are discussed below.

Sub-category 1: The purpose of contact.

All of the participants felt that it is *extremely helpful* to determine the purpose of contact to establish the type of placement (short-term, long-term or long-term placements with the aim to adopt). One of the participants stated that it also benefits foster care placements *if all parties know what type of placement it is*.

One of the participants requested that *short term foster care placement* should be defined as a placement in terms of *Section 159 of the Children’s Act (38 of 2005)*, and a *long term placement* should be defined as a placement in terms of *Section 186 of the Children’s Act (38 of 2005)*.

Sub-category 2: The frequency of contact.

Most of the participants felt that children in long-term placements should only have contact with their biological parents *once a month for an hour* – no matter their age. One of the participants mentioned that contact should be kept to a minimum of *every second weekend*. The overall view of the participants was that the table of frequency *was good*, but the amounts of *visitations are quite extensive*, and it is logically and *practically difficult* to implement these frequencies.

In a study conducted by Hess (2003, p. 17), she found various differences and gaps in how the various states in the United States of America who participated in her study responded to frequency – she states that the frequency of contact sessions is a critical issue and “define standards for visit frequency” and “good policy” are, therefore, necessary.

Discussion

The findings provide an exploration of aspects in the Contact Planning Tool. In this study, it was of value to contextualise the findings and to highlight the context of the participants. The participants are all experienced professional social workers who have experience of more than five years in the field of foster care. These social workers have never before had access to guidelines or a tool to assist them when making decisions concerning contact.

Unfortunately, data saturation was not reached due to only four participants who provided input on aspects regarding biological parents. It was, therefore, difficult for the researcher to gain a true reflection of the opinions of social workers with regard to the Contact Planning Tool. Only three of the participants agreed on most of the aspects within Form B and added valuable comments to add or change content. One of the participant felt that she would only use the tool if she was handling short-term placements with the aim of a reunification, but she at least provided comments regarding biological parents in relation to short-term foster care

placements.

The amended Children's Act aims to "set out principles relating to the care and protection of children" (Children's Act, 2005, p. 1). The researcher used these principles to conceptualise the Contact Planning Tool within a child protection environment. The amended Children's Act provides a definition on contact and an opportunity for biological parents to approach a court in requesting contact in Section 23. The aspects discussed in the Contact Planning Tool provide more practical guidelines for social workers to establish contact in the best interest of children – Section 23 and Section 7 (South Africa, 2005). Section 23(2)(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) states that when a court considers an application for contact, the degree of commitment that biological parents show concerning their child is taken into account. This specific consideration of a court is linked but limited to Form B, aspect 1.4.3, where it states "Do the parents financially contribute to the child in foster care?" The researcher is of the opinion that the Contact Planning Tool is limited in this regard and more detail should be provided regarding the content of Section 23(2)(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005). Some of the participants mentioned that social workers often overlook aspects regarding foster parents, but after going through the forms, the participants highlighted the value and crucial importance of this tool in determining contact and the success of placements.

In conceptualising the Contact Planning Tool within the context of child protection, the results of this study contain valuable information that can aid the field of child protection. This study highlighted the importance and the need of a tool like this and how social workers in child protection agencies are limited when they should make important decisions concerning the future of children.

In terms of future research, it would be beneficial to refine the tool with the information gathered in this study, and to test the tool in the field of child protection. By making the tool

available to social workers, the field of child protection benefits. The findings of this study can also be viewed as a preliminary step in the refinement of the tool and a best-practice approach to determining contact between children in foster care and their biological parents.

The results of this study need to be contextualised with several limitations. Some of the limitations the researcher experienced were a lack in the variety of participants, the fact that the sample size was quite small and the length of the planned semi-structured interviews was too long and, therefore, shortened. This had a negative impact on the amount of participants who took part in providing comments on Form B.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlighted the need and benefit of a Contact Planning Tool for South African social workers. Ten of the eleven participants agreed that determining contact is a difficult task and if a Contact Planning Tool is available, it will help them immensely in their everyday work. The Tool can prove beneficial for successful foster care placements and can eliminate common problems that arise in foster care placements. A critical element that should be included in the tool is contained in Section 23(2)(c) of the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) which states that when the court is considering an application with regards to Care, the court must take into account "the degree of commitment that the applicant has shown towards the child".

This study provided information and detail on how to improve and refine the Contact Planning Tool and recommendations were provided on how to adapt the Tool. However, further content validity research should be conducted on Form B as a variety of perceptions still need to be gained in order for an overall consensus of opinions and for data saturation to be reached. Once these goals are reached, further research can be done on the tool, such as testing its validity in the field.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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SECTION C

Critical Evaluation, Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

Section C provides a critical evaluation of the results of the study and compares the results to the aims and objectives of the study. The research design, methods of data collection, data analysis procedures, the trustworthiness of the results and the experiences of the researcher are also examined in this section. This section also provided more detail on the limitations of the study, recommendations and conclusions.

Critical Evaluations of Study

The research question of this study was “What are the professional opinions of social workers regarding the content of the Contact Planning Tool that is used to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents?” This question referred inherently to the establishment of content validity of an instrument in preparation for its future use and testing in practice conditions. Child protection agencies that render a service in the field of foster care were identified as the environment in which the population of participants works. A mediator was appointed by the researcher and she contacted the gatekeepers of the child protection agencies to determine whether they want to participate in the study. Only one of the gatekeepers responded and gave permission for the study to take place within their organisation. The researcher made use of purposive and sampling to identify a sample of 12 social workers who met the inclusion criteria. One of the participants was unable to participate due to unexpected work responsibilities and 11 participants participated in the study. All of the participants were informed of the details of the study and they voluntarily provided their consent to take part in the study. The researcher used coding while the data collection and analysis were done to protect the identities of participants. The identities of the

participants were kept confidential.

A qualitative research approach with a descriptive research design paved the way for the research question to be appropriately answered. The participants provided comprehensive opinions regarding the Contact Planning Tool, and were allowed the freedom to elaborate on their opinions. The participants provided suggestions with regard to possible changes and elements that needed to be added and or taken away in the tool. The participants also stated whether they agreed, agreed to an extent or disagreed concerning the relevance of aspects in the tool and they were allowed an opportunity to justify their answers.

Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. The aim of the study was to gain the professional opinions of social workers and to explore and describe the perceptions of social workers on the content validity of the Contact Planning Tool. The researcher sent a copy of the tool to each of the participant a week prior to the scheduled interviews. The researcher also sent the interview schedule to each of the participants that explained what a semi-structured interview is and what was expected of the participants. The interviews were done individually and lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and a half – depending on how much each of the participants contributed during an interview. The researcher went through each section of the Contact Planning Tool and allowed time for each of the participants to provide a rating on the content of the section they chose and to make recommendations. This process made it easier for the researcher to analyse the results and served as a guide in making decisions about keeping, deleting or modifying items. After each of the participants and the researcher went through each form of the Contact Planning Tool, the participants provided an overall impression of the content of the forms. The participants chose prior to their interview which of the forms they wanted to evaluate due to time constraints during these interviews. Data were gathered from seven participants on Form A, C and D, and four participants commented on Form B.

The researcher analysed the data manually. During the data analysis, data were identified and categorised into five main categories. These categories were directly linked to the aspects of Contact Planning Tool: 1) The overall impression of the Contact Planning Tool; 2) Aspects regarding the children; 3) Aspects regarding the biological parents; 4) Aspects regarding the foster parents; and 5) Practical aspects. A total of 17 sub-categories emerged.

The researcher used literature to put the analysed data into perspective. This assisted the researcher in gaining a boarder understanding of contact between children in foster care and their biological parents. International literature and the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) were used to substantiate the aspects in the Contact Planning Tool and the results of the study. Other than the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005), there is a lack of literature concerning the concept of contact in South Africa.

The literature contextualised contact between children in foster care and their biological parents in South Africa. The literature also provided a relevant base on which the validation of the content of the Contact Planning Tool took place – especially with regard to specific aspects that were identified as gaps in the Contact Planning Tool, namely the degree of commitment shown by biological parents towards their child. The researcher did not impose any of her own ideas and understandings on the participants when the data were gathered to ensure trustworthiness.

The Experiences of the Researcher

The researcher has been employed as a generic social worker for over nine years with a passion for statutory work in the field of child protection. For the three years before she commenced with her Master's degree, the researcher searched for a Master's degree in her field of interest. The North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, is the only South

African university offering a Master's degree programme in Child Protection. During her work, the researcher is often exposed to several challenges relating to contact between children in alternative care and their biological parents. The researcher conversed with colleagues and they seemed to experience the same challenges. The Contact Planning Tool seemed to offer a wonderful solution to the challenges experienced in the field, and the researcher, therefore, decided to pursue this research study.

Although the colleagues of the researcher were very interested in this topic and thought the study beneficial, some of the social workers were reluctant to participate in the study. The general feeling was that they do not have the time to participate and that participation would add more work to their already high work load.

Most of the participants of the study stated that they wanted to start using the tool immediately. They felt that it would really add value to the current challenges they are experiencing. They also stated that it was a shame that this tool needed further research before it can be used in evidence-based practice – it would delay them in using the tool to solve their current challenges.

Another interesting element the researcher picked up, was how few of the social workers relied on the advice and guidance of their managers or supervisors. One of the social workers believed that how she arranged contact was how all of the other social workers arranged contact. When her semi-structured interview was conducted, she stated that the reason why she is arranging contact in a certain way is because their manager and other colleagues arrange contact in the same way and “that it just the way it is”.

It was also interesting for the researcher to note the way in which social workers overcome challenges when determining contact. Normally, they ask their managers for guidance and network discussions take place. It is evident that social workers are in need to

discuss matters with other social workers to reach a final solution – determining contact is complex and important decisions that need to be made and social workers seem reluctant to make these decisions on their own.

It was also evident that there is a standardised belief about how contact should start between children in foster care and their biological parents – regardless of the circumstances of each case. It is believed that children should have supervised contact sessions first – under the supervision of a social worker. Some of the social workers limit their contact sessions to only supervised visits unless a reunification was possible.

The researcher felt her professional history with the participants' added value to the study. It provided the participants with an opportunity to link case examples to their explanations that the participants and the research shared.

Limitations of the Study

The study sample was small. Even though the mediator maintains good relationships with the gatekeepers at the various welfare organisations, they did not respond positively to the invitation to participate in the study. Only a limited number of social workers met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate due to only one organisation who provided consent to participate. The reason the other organisations provided for not responding was that they did not want to add to the work load of their already overworked social workers.

The timeframe scheduled for the semi-structured interviews was a limitation, because not all of the participants could validate the content of all the forms of the Contact Planning Tool. The researcher conducted a pilot study and during this interview it became evident that the researcher was not going to have the time to go through all of the forms with each participant within the scheduled timeframe of an hour and a half. The participants could then choose which forms they wanted to evaluate. This impacted on the amount of data collected

on all of the forms. Limited data were collected concerning Form B (aspects of biological parents).

At the moment, there is no other Contact Planning Tool available in South Africa to determine contact between children in foster care and their biological parents for social workers to compare the content with.

Recommendations

The findings of this study can serve as the groundwork for any related professional or academic undertaking. A suitable undertaking will be a follow-up study using the results of this study to refine the Contact Planning Tool. The researcher also identified technical and language mistakes that also need to be corrected. It will definitely benefit the tool, if the forms can be language edited. It is important to note that the researcher recommends various adjustments and that the forms should be refined. Recommended changes are discussed separately. Once the refinement is complete, further research can be done to test the tool in practice. The tool can be given to social workers to use in some of their foster care cases. They can provide feedback on their experiences of the tool. Feedback can help guide future research to further refine the tool and to test its effectiveness in the field.

Form A.

This form is the longest of all of the forms. In this form, all of the detail of contact are assessed and evaluated. The outcomes of Form B and C are recorded in Form A. Form A is the actual guideline social workers use in order to evaluate the outcomes of each aspect in order to determine what is in the best interest of children. The participants responded positively that this form covers almost every aspect and is crucial in determining contact. The participants raised important facts that are not included in the form. One specific reference referred to in Section 7(1)(g)(iv) and (1) of the amended Children's Act (38

of 2005) is important with regard to the tool: in order to determine the best interest of the child with regard to contact making, a note of the child's disability and/or relevant characteristics should be made.

The researcher is of the opinion that the results obtained from the participants added valuable contributions to the improvement of the form. It is also recommended that adjustments should be made to the form with regard to the results obtained in the study. A valuable recommendation was that a checklist of details needs to be added to the form for various aspects. This will definitely help social workers. However, this checklist should not be too long and/or perhaps this checklist should be an addendum/attachment to the Contact Planning Tool. Form A is already 16 pages long and a checklist will make the form too long and not user-friendly.

The researcher values all of the recommendations made by the participants and agreed that the form will be adjusted accordingly. The checklist should be presented as an attached document to the form.

Form B.

This form focuses on aspects regarding biological parents. One of the participants felt that this form is not necessary for social workers to determine contact. The opinion of the participant made it difficult to provide a clear guideline as to how this form should be adapted for future use. Although the results obtained – according to the researcher – were valuable and relevant, the researcher is of the opinion that no adjustments can be made to this form. Further testing can be done to achieve content validity.

Form C.

This form provided informational support for the foster parents. The researcher agreed with suggestions and comments made by the participants regarding this form and feels

that their contributions do add value to the research topic. Most participants were not comfortable about some of the words used, and some sentences used in this aspect. It is therefore recommended that that specific words and sentences should therefore be omitted from the report. Form C, Sub Category 4 talks about the rules with regards to the parents' behaviour parents' – things a foster parent should look out for, this topic was a controversial one for the participants. It is evident that the category needs to be clarified further in terms of if it is the responsibility of the foster parent, and if it is, it is being asked how the foster parent is to respond if they do come across any of these scenarios where the parent will display the behaviour detailed in form C. It is also recommended that this responsibility needs to be communicated to the biological parent. These recommendations need to be adjusted in this form as well as also in the Contact Planning Tool as a whole.

Form D.

Form D focuses on the final contact plan arrangements and the contact plan agreement that all of the parties should sign. The overall response of the participants on this form was very positive. The only recommendation pertained to changing a sentence in the form from “may be referred to in court” to “it can be made an order of the court”. The researcher recommends that this sentence should be changed accordingly.

Conclusion

This study succeeded in addressing a vital gap in current research. The study answered the research question. In South Africa, the amended Children's Act (38 of 2005) provides minimal guidance as to important aspects a court focuses on when contact is determined. Limited literature is available in a South African context regarding contact. There is definitely a need for more research concerning contact and how contact should be determined. This study assists in filling a large gap in the field of child protection in South

Africa.

This research study achieved the aim and objective, which was to gain the opinions of social workers on the content validity of the Contact Planning Tool. The study aimed to provide recommendations to refine the tool. The results of this study provided reliable evidence to validate the content of the Contact Planning Tool.

The study provided solid recommendations for the further refinement of the tool. Further studies will definitely add value to the content of the Contact Planning Tool.

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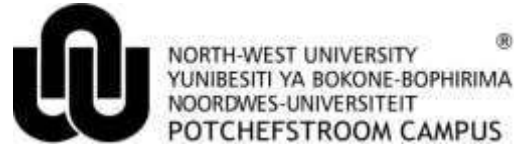
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SECTION D: ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1 – ETHICAL APPROVAL



Private Bag X6001,
Potchefstroom South Africa
2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Ethics Office

Tel: 018-299 2092

Fax: 018-299 2088

Email:

Minrie.Greeff@nwu.ac.za

19 November 2015

Dr H Malan Social Work

Dear Dr Malan

HREC'S FIRST RESPONSE TO YOUR APPLICATION

Ethics number: NWU-00364-15-S1

Kindly use the ethics reference number provided above in all correspondence or documents submitted to the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) secretariat.

Project title: Content Validity of a Contact Planning Tool for foster children and biological parents

Project leader/supervisor: Dr H Malan Student: LC Coutinho Application type: Full

Single Risk level descriptor: Minimal

The abovementioned application has been reviewed and discussed by the Health Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) at a meeting held on 19/11/2015.

HREC Decision category:

Approved with minor changes		Provided your amended application is accepted by reviewers, your application will be approved and ethics approval certificate will be issued.
Approved with several changes	X	Provided your amended application is accepted by the reviewers, your application will be approved and the ethics approval certificate will be issued.
Deferred		Your proposed project and ethics application requires major revisions. Please revisit the application and attend to the comments below. Your application will have to be resubmitted for full review by the HREC.
Disapproved		Your proposed project has to be seriously revised and resubmitted by the HREC and reviewed in full.

Attached find four reviewers' reports that indicate the requested changes required for your application in order to adhere to the legal requirements as specified in Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures (2nd ed., 2015). You will also receive, within the next two week period, a summary of the HREC's discussion pertaining to your application. Would you be so kind as to address all requested changes as indicated in the aforementioned reviewers' reports? When you are ready to submit your rebuttal, please do so by including:

- a. A rebuttal letter indicating what changes have been made and where the changes were made to address the requested changes
- b. All associated application documents should be attached with the changes made in the documents, highlighted in yellow.

Please ensure that the full set of application documents is included with the rebuttal letter. We wish you well with this process and you are welcome to contact us should you have any queries or comments.

Yours sincerely



Prof Minrie Greeff HREC
Chairperson

Current details: (13210572) C:\Users\13210572\Documents\HREC\HREC - Letter templates\Updated HREC reviewer response form_04 Sep 2015 2.docm 19 November 2015

File reference: 9.1.5.3



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

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South Africa, 2520

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Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee

Tel: +27 18 299 4849

Email: Ethics@nwu.ac.za

2016-05-23

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF STUDY

Based on approval by **Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC)** at the meeting held on **19/11/2015**, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Content Validity of a Contact Planning Tool for foster children and biological parents.																																				
Study Leader/Supervisor: Dr H Malan																																				
Student: LC Coutinho																																				
Ethics number:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>3</td><td>6</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Institution</td> <td colspan="3">Project Number</td> <td colspan="3">Year</td> <td colspan="3">Theme</td> </tr> </table>									N	W	U	-	0	0	3	6	4	-	1	5	-	A	1	Institution			Project Number			Year			Theme		
N	W	U	-	0	0	3	6	4	-	1	5	-	A	1																						
Institution			Project Number			Year			Theme																											
Application Type: Full Single Application																																				
Commencement date: 2016-05-23					Expiry date: 2017-05-22			Risk: Minimal to Medium																												

Special conditions of the approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the HREC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the HREC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The study leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC via HREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, and upon completion of the study
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
 - Annually a number of study may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader must apply for approval of these amendments at the HREC, prior to implementation. Would there be deviation from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC via HREC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC and HREC retains the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected,
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the HREC or that information has been false or misrepresented,
 - the required amendments, annual (or otherwise stipulated) report and reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately,
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- HREC can be contacted for any report templates Ethics-HRECApply@nwu.ac.za or 018 299 1206.

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC or HREC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Linda du Plessis

Digitally signed by Linda du Plessis
DN: cn=Linda du Plessis, o=NWU,
ou=Vaal Triangle Campus,
email=Linda.duplessis@nwu.ac.za,
c=ZA
Date: 2016.05.23 09:39:42+0200

Prof Linda du Plessis

Chair NWU Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (IRERC)

**ANNEXURE 2 – COMMUNITY PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH SCIENTIFIC
COMMITTEE - LETTER OF APPROVAL**



Community Psychosocial Research

Private Bag X6001 Potchefstroom
South Africa
2520

Date: 5 November 2015

Dear Prof Minrie Greeff

Candidate: Linda Clare Coutinho

Student no. 25799754

For the degree: MSW in Child Protection

Title: Content Validity of a contact planning tool for the assessment of foster children and their biological parents.

Supervisor: Dr H Malan

Co-Supervisor: -

The above project proposal was reviewed by the Scientific Panel of COMPRES during a review meeting on 14 October 2015. It was accepted and found adequate for submission to HREC.

The COMPRES review panel consisted of: Proff K Botha, E Van Rensburg, M Weyers, and CC Wessels; Dr W De Klerk, Mrs S. Jacobs

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'WJH Roestenburg'.

Signed: Prof WJH Roestenburg Chairperson: COMPRES Review Panel

ANNEXURE 3 – PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT STUDY



North West University

Faculty of Health Sciences

School of Social Work

RE: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT STUDY

I, Henda vd Merwe (full name of gatekeeper at child protection agency), Director (position/job description at child protection agency) at CMR (name of child protection agency) hereby give my permission for Linda Clare Coutinho to conduct her research within the parameters of this Child Protection Agency.

Signed at Pretoria on the 19 day of September 2016



 Signature

ANNEXURE 4 – PERMISSION LETTER FROM SITE OF RESEARCH

Director of: CMR Gauteng- East

Tel: 012361 4613

Email: info@cmroos.co.za

RE: INVITATION FOR YOUR ORGANISATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

The researcher of the study would like to invite your child protection agency to participate in a valuable contribution to the field of social work.

One social worker (if possible a manager/supervisor) from your organisation is needed to participate in this study. The researcher kindly requests a social worker, working in your organisation to assist in the study for a maximum of 2 hours, during his/her working hours. They will be involved in an interview providing their valuable professional opinion regarding the topic.

With your assistance, this research study aims to refine a contact planning tool for social worker's. This tool will assist social worker's in making decisions about contact between a child in foster care, and their biological parent/s.

Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions or queries. Kind regards

Linda Coutinho

Researcher/student at NWU/Social worker 0731740546

Letter head of child protection agency

North West University Faculty of Health Sciences School of Social Work

RE: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT STUDY

I, _____(full name of gatekeeper at child protection agency), _____(position/job description at child protection agency) at _____(name of child protection agency) hereby give my permission for Linda Clare Coutinho to conduct her research within the parameters of this Child Protection Agency.

Signed at _____on the _____ day of _____2016

Signature

ANNEXURE 5 – MEDIATOR’S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

RE: Mediator’s confidentiality agreement

This agreement is to state that the Mediator will keep all matters regarding the research study confidential and private. In signing the below, the Mediator agrees to not disclose or discuss any details of the participants to any person outside of this research. The Mediator may discuss matters of the participants only with the following people:

- The researcher – Miss Linda Clare Coutinho
- The researcher’s supervisor – Dr Hannalie Malan

I, Dina Bosch (full name of Mediator) ID
6008290132080, hereby agree to the terms above, and wish to
participate at the mediator of this research.

Signed at Pretoria on this day 27 of July 2016

Dina Bosch (signature)
Dina Bosch (full name)
6008290132080 (ID)

ANNEXURE 6 – LETTER OF INVITATION

To _____

RE: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

The researcher of the study would like to invite you to participate in a valuable contribution to the field of social work.

With your assistance, this research study aims to refine a contact planning tool for social worker's. This tool will assist social worker's in making decisions about contact between a child in foster care, and their biological parent.

You fit the criteria to participate and it would be appreciated if you could take approximately 2 hours of your time to participate in this study.

More details will be provided to you in your informed consent form.

Kind regards

Linda Coutinho

Researcher/student at NWU/Social worker

ANNEXURE 7 – CONSENT FORM



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL WORKER'S AT CMR GAUTENG EAST

Content Validity of a contact planning tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and his/her biological parent/s

REFERENCE NUMBERS: NWU-00364-15-S1

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Linda Clare Coutinho

ADDRESS: 220 Odendaal Street Meyerspark

CONTACT NUMBER: 073 174 0546

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my Masters degree in Social Work, Child Protection. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU-00364-15-S1)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

- *This study will be conducted in Pretoria and will involve semi structured interviews, with experienced health researcher trained in Social work. A definite number of participants cannot be provided as this study consists of as many participants as needed in order to obtain data saturation.*
- *The objectives of this research are:*
 - *To explore and describe the social workers perceptions on the content and face validity of the "Contact Planning Tool"*
 - *To make recommendations to improve and refine the "Contact Planning Tool".*

Why have you been invited to participate?

- *You have been invited to participate because you are a Social worker at a child protection agency*
- *You have also complied with the following inclusion criteria:*
 - *You are a social worker that provides social work services*
 - *You are currently working in a field in which you deal with the issue of this study*
 - *You have at least 3 years' experience and valuable knowledge in this field and therefore are able to provide an opinion on the study*
- *You will be excluded if:*
 - *You do not have direct experience on this topic*
 - *You have never worked on a case that involves the incidences on this study*
 - *You are unable to provide information or form an opinion on this topic*

What will your responsibilities be?

- *To receive the "Contact Planning Tool" 1 week before the semi-structured interview. To print the tool. To go through the tool and write down notes of your opinion/views on the hardcopy.*
- *You will be expected to participate in a semi-structured interview during your working hours, for approximately 2 hours.*
- *To provide your professional input into the Contact Planning Tool.*

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- *The indirect benefit will be that a valuable contribution to the field of social work will be made by the outcome of this study. A Tool will be developed in which social workers across the country can use and benefit from.*

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research?

- *There are no risks with regards to this study*

What will happen in the unlikely event of some form of discomfort occurring as a direct result of your taking part in this research study?

- *Should you have the need for further discussions after the interview, the researcher will be available for clarification or an opportunity will be arranged for you to receive necessary assistance for your needs.*

Who will have access to the data?

- *Anonymity and Confidentiality will be ensured by the processes that the researcher will put in place. The researcher will make field notes as well as record the interview session. The data collected will be coded and transcribed. The researcher will reference each participant, and not their name.*
- *Reporting of findings will be anonymous because only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the information of the participants.*
- *Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in the researcher's office and for electronic data it will be password protected. (As soon as data has been transcribed it will be deleted from the recorders) Data will be stored for 5 years.*

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No you will not be paid to take part in the study, but an edible token of appreciation will be given to each participant.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Linda Coutinho at 073 174 0546 if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the Health Research Ethics Committee via Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 299 2098; carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

How will you know about the findings?

- Once the study is completed, the findings of the research will be shared with you by email. Also an internet link will be sent on the same email, so that you are able to get the entire research report, should you wish to read it. Should you require a hard copy of the final results once it has been published, you are welcome to request such a copy and one will be provided.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled: Content Validity of a Contact Planning Tool for foster children and biological parents

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.

- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use a interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

Signature of researcher

Signature of witness

ANNEXURE 8 – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

(The following schedule will be utilized to structure the semi-structured interviews with the participants of this research. The purpose of the interviews are to explore the views of social workers regarding the Contact planning tool and explore possible recommendations regarding how to improve the tool. This will be done in English.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WILL BE CONDUCTED WHILE THE RESEARCHER GOES

THE CONTACT PLANNING TOOL WITH THE

WHAT IS A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW?

A semi-structured interview is a direct exchange of information that is organised around an area of interest, but it also allows for flexibility and depth. The idea is that you will have the opportunity to share your experiences, opinions and ideas regarding the topic of the research.

WHY A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW?

In the Semi-structured interview, you will discuss your Professional views/opinions/evaluations/comments regarding the protocol on how to determine contact. As you know this is part of a research project and it is important for the research process to get proper feedback from the participants.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THE PARTICIPANTS?

Nobody can be forced to participate in the interview and must do so from his/her **own free will**. The participant will provide her professional views/opinions etc regarding the tool to the researcher. To receive a copy of the tool, to jot down a rating out of 3 (1. Agree totally, 2. Agree to a certain extent and 3. Disagree) you will also have the opportunity to write down your opinions/ views on the hard copy of the tool before the interview, and then to verbally give the information during the interview. The researcher will make field notes as well as record the session as well, so as to refer to it later in order to

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

INTERVIEW TOPICS

The aim of the research is to understand your professional views on the Contact Planning tool. This is done in order to verify the content.

The researcher will go through the tool with you. During which you will then be asked:

- What is your rating out of 3 for each section (1. Agree totally, 2. Agree to a certain extent, 3. Disagree)
- What is your opinion regarding that specific topic?
- Are there changes you would make to this topic?
- Is this topic appropriate and does it contribute towards the goal of the tool (to determine contact between a child in foster care and their parents)?
- Do you have any comments to give regarding the specific topic?

The specific topics of the Contact Planning Tool that will be focused on are:

1. aspects regarding the child;

- the child's age and level of understanding
- the child's wishes/feelings/opinions regarding contact
- the child's developmental stage/needs
- the child/parent attachment; secure vs non secure attachment
- length that the child has been in alternative care
- contact up to this point/the child's reaction to previous contact/ child's experience of previous contact (positive/not positive/neutral)
- support by the foster care supervision social worker for child

2. aspects regarding the biological parent

- give due consideration to parents' wishes,
- the capacity of the parent to meet child's needs prior to removal of child
- the parents opinions/views of foster parents; family placement vs non-family placement
- their current functioning and circumstances
- Parenting capacity (inadequate vs adequate) and parent's behaviour (displaying harmful behaviours vs positive behaviours)
- Their availability for contact;
- Previous experiences of contact/parents behaviour during the contact

- Support by the reunification social worker for the parent/s

3. aspects regarding the alternative care giver/foster parent

- The foster parents views/opinions regarding contact
- The foster parent's views/opinions of the parents
- The foster parents ability/capacity to positively to support the child
- The foster parents' ability/capacity to manage/facilitate contact as well as their availability for contact;

4. support by the foster care supervision social worker for the foster parents
practical aspects

- Purpose of contact;
- Safety aspects with regards to contact;
- Supervision requirements during contact
- Frequency and length of contact
- Travel / transportation
- Location/Venue
- Indirect contact:
- Contact Plan:
- Documenting the contact

ANNEXURE 9 – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE / QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Schedule / Questionnaire:

The researcher will go through the Contact Planning Tool with the participant. While this is happening the participant will be given an opportunity to give the following feedback on the tool:

- **Give a rating out of 3 for each section**

1 - Agree totally	2 - Agree to a certain extent	3 - Disagree
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- **What is your opinion regarding that specific topic?**

N/O – No Opinion

Write opinion on separate page or on the back of tool

- **Are there changes you would make to this topic?**

N/C – No Changes

Write changes on separate page or on the back of tool

- **Is this topic appropriate and does it contribute towards to the goal of the tool (to determine contact between a child in foster care and their parents)?**

Y – Yes

N – No, provide reason why participant doesn't agree.

- **Do you have any comments to give regarding the specific topic?**

Write comments on separate page or on the back of tool

ANNEXURE 10 – THE STEPS FOR CONDUCTING A SEMI- STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The steps for conducting a semi-structured interview:

1. Informed consent:
The researcher will go through the informed consent again with the participant. Making sure that they know what they have agreed and signed to and if they are still willing to continue. Once this is completed the researcher may proceed to the next step
 2. Put voice recorder on.
Make sure that both recorders are on and recording the interview fully.
 3. Go through the interview schedule with the participant.
Explain what a semi structured interview is
What the expectations are from the participant
Allow for questions
Go through interview topic's/questionnaire
 4. Give an overview of what the topic of the research is, and describe the covering letter of the tool to the participants. Ask participants under which capacity they would like to participate; that is as a foster care supervision social worker or the foster care reunification social worker.
 5. Go through the tool with the participant, allowing sufficient time and opportunity for participant to record their comments on the tool.
 6. Close off interview by offering a token of appreciation and switching off the recording device.
-

ANNEXURE 11 – SOLEMN DECLARATION



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Higher Degree Administration

SOLEMN DECLARATION

1 Solemn Declaration by student

I, Linda Clare Coutinho

hereby declare that the thesis/dissertation/article entitled

Content validity of a Contact Planning Tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents

which I herewith submit to the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus, in compliance/partial compliance with the requirements set for the MA Child Protection qualification, is my own work and has been language edited and has not been submitted to any other university.

I understand and accept that the copies submitted for examination are the property of the North-West University.

Student Signature

2	5	9	9	7	5	4
UNIVERSITY NUMBER						
I CERTIFY THAT THIS DOCUMENT IS A TRUE REPRODUCTION (COPY) OF THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT WHICH WAS HANDLED TO ME FOR EXAMINATION. I FURTHER CERTIFY THAT FROM MY OBSERVATIONS, AN AMENDMENT OR A CHANGE OF CONTENT HAS NOT BEEN MADE TO THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.						
Stamp of Commissioner of Oaths						
MAGISTRAT/PROKURER						
RANK						
NAME IN DEEDS/NAAM IN DEED						
NAME IN PASSPORT						

Declaration of Commissioner of Oaths BROOKLYN

Declared before me on this

06 day of September 2016



PLEASE NOTE: If a thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article of a student is submitted after the deadline for submission, the period available for examination is limited. No guarantee can therefore be given that (should the examiners' reports be positive) the degree will be conferred at the next applicable graduation ceremony. It may also imply that the student would have to re-register for the following academic year.

2 Solemn Declaration of supervisor/promoter

The undersigned hereby declares that:

- the student is granted permission to submit his/her thesis/dissertation for examination purposes; and
- the student's work was tested by Turnitin, and a satisfactory report has been obtained.

Signature of supervisor/promoter

Date

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ANNEXURE 12 – CONTACT PLANNING TOOL - COVERING PAGE

Contact Planning Tool

A tool for social workers to determine contact between a foster child and biological parents

The Contact Planning Tool is a compressive guideline that social workers can use to in order to assist them in determining contact that is appropriate for the child in foster care.

The Contact Planning Tool consists of 4 forms:

- Form A - Determining aspects for Contact. Guidelines for case social worker/foster care supervision social worker.
- Form B – Guidelines for reunification social worker
- Form C – Guidelines for foster parent with regards to contact
- Form D – Contact Plan and Contact Agreement

Steps to using this tool:

As the foster care supervision social worker is the case manager of the child in foster care, the full responsibility regarding the decision of contact rests on them. These social workers will have the final recommendation regarding contact. Therefore it is then their responsibility to run and manage the process in determining contact with their biological parents.

- The foster care supervision social worker sends form B to foster care reunification social worker and requests that social worker to complete it with their client (the biological parent/s).
- The reunification social worker completes Form A and C.
- Once the foster care supervision social worker has all forms completed, she can then compile Form D, the Contact Plan.
- This Contact Plan will then be sent to all parties concerned (all social worker's as well as all the clients involved) for them to sign the Contact Plan Agreement.

With this research the researcher aims to open a door for further research on this topic to be done. This tool can then be made available to all social worker's practicing in South Africa so that they can use this tool as evidence in their Children's Court Hearings.

ANNEXURE 13 – FORM A - DETERMINING ASPECTS FOR CONTACT

Form A

Determining aspects for Contact:

Guidelines for the Case Social Worker/Foster care supervision Social Worker

Social worker's should take each child's unique situation and should complete this form for every child (regardless if siblings are in same placement with that child). Social worker's must fill in spaces where outcomes and remarks are needed. Social worker's may delete aspects that are not applicable to their case.

Once a social worker completes this guideline, the social worker is to then refer to Form D, in which she will record the Contact Plan.

Contents of Form A:

1. Aspects regarding the child in foster care **Page 2 – 6**

2. Aspects regarding the biological parent **Page 7**

To be read in conjunction with:

- Form B
- And Report by the Reunification Social Worker

3. Aspects regarding the foster parent **Page 8-11**

To be read in conjunction with:

- Form C

4. Evaluation of aspects 1 – 3 **page 12**

5. Practical aspects **Page 13-16**

1. Aspects regarding the child in foster care:

No.	Aspect	Outcome	Remarks
1.1.	The child's age and level of understanding		
	What is the child's age?		
	Is the child at an age (8 years old), or stage of maturity to participate in the determinations of contact?	Y/N	If yes, social worker is to conduct an interview and involve the child in all proceedings including the signing of the contact arrangement contract (Form D)
1.2	The child's wishes/feelings/opinions regarding contact:		
	Child aged 3 and younger: - If child attends play therapy then request the therapist to comment on the child's desires for contact - If the child does not see a play therapist social worker should hold interviews with foster parents to determine if the child has mentioned their desire regarding contact (be careful of bias foster parents)	Put outcome here	Put opinion of outcome here Or The child's wishes are unable to be determined because of child's age
	Child aged between 4 – 12: - The child should undergo a socio-emotional assessment - Or If child is currently in therapy, then request professional opinion of therapist on this. - Social worker must interview child to determine their wishes/feelings and - Social worker must hold interviews with foster parents to determine what the child says to them (be careful of bias foster parents)	(put outcome of assessment /professional's opinion/interviews here)	
	Child aged between 12-18 If child is currently in therapy, then request	(put outcome of professional's opinion/interviews here)	

	professional opinion of therapist on this. and Conduct interview with child to gain views and opinions regarding contact. Ask foster parent what the child communicates about contact.		
1.3	The child's developmental stage/needs		
	In which developmental phase is this child? 0-2: Infancy 2-4: Toddler 5-7: Preschool/early school 8-12: School age 13-18: Adolescent		
	- Have an interview with the foster parent. Discuss where the child is at regarding their developmental needs, are they on par, behind, etc And - If the child has undergone a socio-emotional assessment, then fill in here her developmental needs.	Put information here	
1.4.	The child/parent attachment ; secure vs non secure attachment		
	Child aged 3 and younger: - If child attends play therapy then request the therapist to comment on the attachment between the child and the parent Or - If the child does not see a play therapist then it one is unable to comment on the child's attachment with biological parent	Put outcome of professional's opinion here	Put opinion of outcome here
	Child aged between 4 – 12: Should undergo a socio-emotional assessment Or If child is currently in therapy, then request professional opinion of therapist on this.	(put outcome of assessment /professional's opinion on secure or non-secure attachment as well as child's perceptions of their bond with their parent)	Or unable to determine if attachment is secure or not secure because of child's age

	- If unable to, social worker should interview child to determine the child's experiences of the bond between the child and the parent. The following questions could be asked: - What is your parent like? - How does your heart feel when you are around the parent? - What do you and the parent do together? - What do and parent play together? - What do you like to do with parent? Remember if the child has <u>not</u> undergone an assessment <u>and</u> social worker has not got training on how to conduct a socio-emotional assessment then the social worker is unable to determine secure or non-secure attachments, social worker will then comment on child's experiences of the bond they have with the parent.	Outcome of interview; child's views of bond with parent	
	Child aged between 12-18 - Should undergo a socio-emotional assessment Or If child is currently in therapy, then request professional opinion of therapist on the child's attachment with their parent/s. And - Conduct interview with child to gain views and opinions regarding their bond.	Outcome of professional's opinion and/or interview with child on bond with parent	
1.5.	Length that the child has been in alternative care		
	How long has child been in alternative care?		Put your opinion regarding these aspects here
	Describe the bond/attachment between the foster parents and the child.		
1.6.	Contact up to this point/the child's reaction to previous contact/child's experience and impact of previous contact (positive/not positive/neutral)		
1.6.1	When was last contact with biological parents?		Put your opinion regarding contact up to

	The pattern of previous contact (regular vs sporadic, be specific and detailed)		this point here
	Was previous contact initiated because of the parent's request for contact or because it was because of the child's needs?		
	Type of previous contact: • supervised vs unsupervised • where • for how long		
1.6.2	Child's reaction to previous contact:		
	Regardless of child's age • Ask foster parents what the behaviour of child was after contact. Detail all behaviours. If alternative behaviour occurred (behaviour that is not normal for the child to display), detail the length of time it took for child to settle and return to their normal functioning. and • If child is seeing a therapist, and the therapist see's the child just after contact, and if therapist is able to comment on the child's reactions to contact, then obtain the therapists opinion.	Put to foster parents experiences of child's behaviour/professional's opinion here	Put your opinion of regarding child's reaction to contact here
1.6.3	Impact of previous contact on the child		
	Child aged between 0-3: • If child attends play therapy then request the therapist to comment on the impact that contact has on child/child's experiences of contact	Put professional's opinion here	Put your opinion regarding the impact of contact on the child and the child's experiences of contact here.
	Child aged between 4 – 12: • Have an interview with the child and discuss possible impact and experiences of contact	Put to outcome of interview and/outcome of assessment/the professional's opinion here.	

	And If child is currently in therapy, then request professional opinion of therapist on this		
	Child aged between 12-18: - Conduct an interview with the child and discuss possible impact and experiences of contact And - If child is currently in therapy, then request professional opinion of therapist on this (best option)	Put outcome of interview/professionals opinion here.	
1.7.	Support by the foster care supervision social worker for child		
	Are you as the social worker involving the child in the formulation of the Contact plan contract (Form D)	Y/N	
	Are you as the social worker preparing the child for contact	Y/N	
	Are you as the social worker debriefing the child after contacts?	Y/N	
	Are you as a social worker referring the child for necessary support with regards to contact (socio-emotional assessment, play therapy, therapy and/or counselling)	Y/N	

2. Aspects regarding the biological parent:

When a social worker is formulating an opinion on this aspect, the case/foster care supervision social worker should request the reunification social worker to complete **Form B**, and/or to compile a report:

Put the evaluation and recommendation of reunification social worker's report here:

3. Aspects regarding the foster parent:

The foster care reunification social worker must go through Form C with the foster parent when going through this aspect.

No.	Aspect	Outcome	Remarks
3.1	The foster parents' views/opinions regarding contact		
	The social worker needs to have an interview with the foster parents: • Discuss their views and opinions • What is foster parents level of willingness for contact? • Discuss the implications for the child of their opinion/attitude regarding the contact • Clarify misconceptions regarding contact • Clarify the purpose of the contact • Clarify the best interest of the child	Record outcome here.	Record opinion here. Please be sure to note if the foster parent remains to still have a negative view or opinion regarding contact even after the discussion with the social worker.
3.2	The foster parent's views/opinions of the parents,		
	Is this a family foster placement? If yes: Have a discussion with the foster parent regarding: • the history of their relationship with the biological parent • internal family politics • their current relationship regarding the biological parents If it is a non-family placement: • Discuss what they know about the biological parents?	Put outcome of interview here	Put opinion regarding outcome here
	The social worker will then • Discuss their views/opinions/attitudes		

	regarding their parents - the implications of their attitude regarding the parent on the child - Clarify the purpose of the contact - Clarify the best interest of the child - If necessary, give feedback on the information gathered by the reunification social worker.		
	The social worker can use Form C in order to provide ways in which the foster parent can positively contribute to visitations with regards to biological parents		
3.3	The foster parents ability/capacity to positively to support the child		
	Has the foster parent ever attended a training for foster parents, a foster parent group work, work shop for foster parent, a foster parenting programme? If yes, explore what was learnt at during the training. If possible contact the person who conducted the training, and discuss the training and the level of skill of the foster parent.	Record the outcome here	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here
	Have a discussion with the foster parents: - Explore how they positively support the child with regards to contact - Explore how the foster parents creates an open environment for the child in which he/she can freely discuss matters concerning their parents - Explore how the foster parents are empathetic, sensitive and reflective with the child - Explore the ways in which the foster	Record outcome here	Record opinion on outcome here

	parent provides support before and after contact.		
3.4	The foster parents' ability/capacity to manage/facilitate contact as well as their availability for contact;		
	Discuss the following with the foster parent: • Have they ever had to manage facilitate contact before, perhaps with another foster child? Explore situation • How involved would the foster parents like to be with regards to contact? • Is the foster parent willing to partake/supervise/facilitate/manage contact? • Is the foster parent willing to provide feedback (in writing) on the contact?	Record the outcome here	Record opinion here and if possible recommendations for foster parents
	Discuss the practical aspects with the foster parent: • When are the foster parents available for contacts? • Are the foster parents comfortable with visitations taking place at their home? • Are the parents willing and able to drive the children to and from contacts?	Record outcome here	Record opinion here
3.5	Support by the foster care supervision social worker to the foster parents		
	The foster care supervision social worker should: • make the foster parent feel a part of the planning with regards to contact, • help and assist the foster parents with regards to contact and should be available and • support the foster parents and all times.	Record outcome of Form C here	Record opinion regarding outcome here

4. Evaluation of aspects 1 – 3

The social worker at this point is able to draw up an evaluation with regards to the information gathered in Aspect 1, 2 and 3. The social worker will look at the remarks made under each aspect and can then draw up evaluations with regards to each aspect.

Once the evaluation is complete the social worker can (if needed) draw up a list of requirements/recommendations for further actions to be taken up by the parties involved before the final conclusion and final recommendation with regards to contact can be decided.

If there are suggestions for actions that either of the parties need to complete before the final decision of contact can be made, then these suggestions needs to be communicated to all parties and followed up if they have completed the suggestions as well as impact it will have on the evaluation.

Evaluations	Suggestions for action before final conclusion of contact can be determined:	Has suggestion been completed?	Impact of the action on the outcome of the evaluation
Aspects regarding the child			
Look at the remarks of all the sections under this aspect. Draw up evaluations on these sections, and list them here.	Make recommendations here has to what needs to occur in respect to the child before final decision can be made: Examples are: • Child needs to go for socio-emotional assessment • Child needs to go for play therapy	Y/N	Adjust the new evaluation here
Aspects regarding the biological parent			
Put the evaluation of the reunification social worker's report here.	If the reunification social worker has put recommendations down on an action that the biological parent needs to perform before the final decision of contact can be made, put that here. Examples are: • Parental guidance • Psychological evaluation • Interaction analysis	Y/N	Adjust the new evaluation here
Aspects regarding the foster parent			
Look at the remarks of all the sections under this aspect. Draw up evaluations on these sections, and list them here.	Make recommendations here has to what needs to occur in respect to the foster parent before final decision can be made: Examples are: • Foster parent training • Therapy/counselling for foster parent	Y/N	Adjust the new evaluation here

5. Practical aspects:

No.	Aspect	Outcome	Remarks
5.1	Purpose of contact:		
	The social worker needs to firstly determine/hypothesizes on the type of foster care placement the child is in. In order to determine the type of foster care placement the social worker needs to look at the information gathered on the following aspects: • Length child has been in alternative care • Child's attachment to foster parents • Contact up until this point • All aspects regarding the biological parents	• Short term foster care placement with the aim of reunification • Long term foster care placement • Foster care with the aim of adoption	Once the type of placement has been determined, the social worker can then link it to various purpose for contact: The purpose for contact in short term foster care placements are • To promote and prepare for reunification with biological parents by supporting the child's bond with their parents and • to provide a space to therapeutically assess contact between the child and the biological parents and/or to help improve the parent-child relationship The purpose for contact in long term foster care placements as well as foster care placements with the aim to adopt is: To preserve and to support family connections as well as to help the child recognise their past identity while not

			interfering with their current needs for belonging.
5.2	Safety aspects with regards to contact;		
	The social worker needs to assess and determine the level of risk with regards to the safety of the child. The social worker needs to look at the aspects regarding the biological parents in order to determine what the level of risk is.	• high level of risk • medium level of risk • low-to – no level of risk	
5.3	Supervision required during contact		
	The social worker needs to look at the safety aspects above, and then based on that the social worker will determine the kind of supervision required for the contact	• No supervision • Minimal supervision • Supervision by a non-professional person • Supervision by a social worker	
5.4	Frequency and length of contact		
	A social worker will first determine the purpose of contact and age of the child. Then the social worker needs to look at the following: • Safety of the child • Geographical distance • Parents finances • Child’s need for contact	The social worker must look at the table below and find the child’s age and the purpose for contact. After that the social worker will take the information from the 3 aspects and formulate an appropriate Frequency for contact between the Maximum and Minimum amounts.	Put frequency for contact here.
Age	To promote and prepare for reunification: (Short term foster care)	To preserve and to support family connections: (Long term foster care)	To preserve and to support family connections: (Foster care with the aim of adoption)
0-2: Infancy	Max : 4 x per week for 1 hour Min: Every 3 rd day for an hour	Max: 1 x every 2 weeks for 2 hours Min: 1 x quarterly for 1 hour	Max: 2-3 x a year for 1 hour Max: 1 x per year 30 mins

2-4: Toddler	Max: 3 x per week for 3 hours Leading to sleepovers Min: 2 hours every weekend	Max: 1 x every 2 weeks for 2 hours Min: 1 x quarterly for 1 hour	Max: 2-3 x a year for 1 hour Min: 1 x per year 30 mins Depending on child's need
5-7: Pre school /early school	Max: 3 x per week for 1 hour and 2 hours on the weekend Leading to sleepovers Min: 2 hours every weekend	Max: 1 x every 2 weeks for 2 hours Min: 1 x every school holiday for 1 hour	Min: 2-3 x a year for 1 hour Max: 1 x per year 30 mins Depending on child's need
8-12: School age	Max: 2 x per week for 1.5 hours And 3 hours on weekend Leading to sleepovers Min: 2 hours every weekend Depending on child's need	Max: 1 x every 2 weeks for 2 hours Min: 1 x every school holiday for 1 hour Depending on child's need	Min: 2-3 x a year for 1 hour Max: 1 x per year 30 mins Depending on child's need
13-18: Adolesce nt	Max: 2 x per week for 1.5 hours And 3 hours on weekend Leading to sleepovers Min: 2 hours every weekend Depending on child's need	Max: 1 x every 2 weeks for 2 hours Min: 1 x every school holiday for 1 hour Depending on child's need	Child can decide on need for contact

5.5	Travel / transportation		
	Type of placement and who is responsible for majority of transport: • Short term – onus on parent • Long term – onus on both parent and foster parent • Aim for adoption – onus foster parent	Put the person who is most responsible for traveling here	Put here who is responsible to do the most travelling to and from visitations
	Look at the parents financial circumstances:	Put answers here	

	Can they afford petrol or public transport to and from visitations: What kind of transportation fair can the parents afford:		
5.6	Location/Venue		
	The social worker should look at the following factors, in order to determine where contact should take place: • Purpose of contact • Safety aspects regarding contact • Supervision requirement • Parents financial situation • Child's developmental needs • Type of contact and • Travel and transportation.	Put the outcome of the evaluations of the aspects here. Should the placement occur in a neutral environment or in a familiar environment for the child?	Once the outcome is established, the social worker can then decide on whether the contact will take place at : • The social worker's office • The foster parents home • The biological parents home • A public area; restaurant, park, mall, school etc.
5.7	Indirect contact:		
	The social worker needs to note the type and frequency of indirect contact between the child and the parent: • Email's • Telephonic calls • Messages via Whatsapp/Mixit/smart chat/viber/facebook etc. • Skype	The social worker also needs to make a clear note the frequency of the indirect contact.	Put your opinion and recommendations regarding indirect contact there
	Discuss with the foster parents and/if applicable the child about who's phone will the indirect contact occur? And how it will be monitored	State the outcome here	

5.8	Contact Plan
	The social worker will then take all the information above, and draw up a Contact Plan (Form D). Once this is done, the social worker will discuss it with the parties concerned, give each a copy. Each party will also have an opportunity to sign the Contact Plan Agreement. Refer to Form D
5.9	Documenting contact
	A social worker should get feedback regarding the contact (preferably in writing) from all parties: • The child (if 7-18 year old) • The foster parent • The biological parent • The reunification social worker With this the social worker should compile a process note on the contact.

ANNEXURE 14 – FORM B - GUIDELINES FOR A REUNIFICATION SOCIAL WORKER

Form B

Guideline for a Reunification Social Worker with regards to contact:

Assessment for contact, support for biological parent and informational guidance for parents

This tool is divided up into the following Sections:

- **Section 1: Investigation by Reunification Social Worker (page 2-9)**
 - 1.1 The wishes of the biological parent
 - 1.2 The capacity of the parent to meet child's needs prior to removal of child
 - 1.3 The parents opinions/views of foster parents;
 - 1.4 The parents current functioning and circumstances
 - 1.5 Parenting capacity (inadequate vs adequate) and parent's behaviour (displaying harmful behaviours vs positive behaviours)
 - 1.6 The parents availability for contact;
 - 1.7 Previous experiences of contact/parents behaviour during the contact
 - 1.8 Support by the reunification social worker for the parent/s
- **Section 2: Informational guidance on contact for biological parents (page 10-13)**
 - 2.1. Activities on par with developmental needs of the child, that parents' can do during contact.
 - 2.2. Behaviour of parents with regards to contact
- **Section 3: Contact Agreement with biological parents (page 14-15)**

Once Section 1 and 3 are completed, the reunification social worker can write their report for the case/foster care supervision social worker. They should to attach Section 3 and (if social worker would like to) Section 1 to the report.

Section 1

Investigation by Reunification Social Worker

The reunification social worker may conduct her investigation through telephonic interviews, office interviews and home visits. The reunification social worker may use this section as a guideline in the construction of her final report. The reunification social worker is to use the remark's she has made to develop an evaluation, a conclusion and recommendations. It is important that the evaluation and the recommendation after the investigation are relayed to the case/foster care supervision social worker so that she/he can add that information to part 2 of Form A.

No.	Aspect	Outcome	Remarks
1.1	The wishes of the biological parent		
	Conduct an interview with the parent in which they can express their wishes, their opinions and their wants regarding contact with their child.	Put the outcome of this interview here	
	Ask parents about their opinion and views regarding the child in the foster care system, and what their feeling are regarding that	Record parents vies and feeling here	
1.2	The capacity of the parent to meet child's needs prior to removal of child		
	The social worker will need to investigate the reasons why the child was initially removed from the parent/s care. If reunification social worker was not the social worker who removed the children, then the reunification social worker will then have to study all reports regarding the case (opening report/progress report/finalization report/Section 159 report/s etc)	List reasons why child was removed here, with detailed actions of parent's incapacity to meet child's needs: • Abuse (physical, emotional, sexual or financial) • Neglect (physical, emotional, medical, academic, etc) • Exploitation • Inability to protect child from the above maltreatment	
	Are there other ways, if any, the parents failed to meet the needs (developmental, emotional, physical) of the child If the social worker has access to this information	List these here	

1.3	The parents opinions/views of foster parents		
	Is the child in foster care with a family member? Family placement vs neutral placement		Put your opinion regarding outcome here
	How is the foster parent related to the biological parent?		
	Has the social worker ever observed the biological parents attitude to the foster parent?	Put outcome of this observation here	
	Conduct and interview in order to establish the following: • The biological parents views/opinions regarding the foster parents • The biological parents attitude towards the foster parents (if there is such contact, telephonic etc) • The biological parents behaviour towards the foster parents in previous contacts	Put outcome of interview here	
1.4	Parents current functioning and circumstances		
1.4.1	<u>Background of parent:</u>		
	Conduct and interview with parent to establish details of the parents' background. Examples of questions are: • Where they were born • Type of family born into/family life growing up/relationship with family members • Where they were raised • Schooling/academic record/behaviour at school • Further studying • Relationships/sexual partners • Details surrounding other parent of the child • Events that led up to the current day	put details of parents background here	
	If possible try contact a family member to confirm/give more information regarding the parents' background. If details of background differ to that of the parents, then approach parent with new information and get their opinion regarding it.	Put information of family member here as well as parents response to that information	Put your opinion here regarding the outcome
1.4.2	<u>Home circumstances:</u>		

	Conduct a home visit at the parents' residence				
	The following need to be established: • Are they renting or do they own it • Type of house (flat, town house, house etc) • Amount of rooms in house • condition of rooms • Description of garden • Condition/amount of furniture • Overall impression of house • Safety risk factors for the child in the home	Put outcome of home visit here	Put your opinion on outcome here		
	Observe the parents attitude towards the house, as well as ask them their opinion of the home.	Put information here			
	Are there other occupants staying in the house? If so the social worker will need to conduct interviews with these people as well as establish their role/ function/ contribution/ support/etc, if any, towards the parent/s	Put details of these interviews here	Put opinion regarding other occupants and possible impact and risk factors it might have, here.		
1.4.3	<u>Financial circumstances:</u> The social worker needs to conduct an interview with the parent				
	Is the parent employed?	Y/N	Put your opinion regarding outcome here		
	Length of current employment				
	Request the following documentations from the parent: • CV • Confirmation of employment letter by employer • Pay slip	Detail willingness to give documents, and if documents were received. Also put outcome of documents here. Attach documents to your report			
	If parent is unemployed, what form of income does the parent have? Sassa grant (specify which grant), support from family member, begging, piece jobs(details of type of service, length of employment, getting new job, time lapse between jobs, etc) etc.	put the details here			
	If there are suspicious circumstances surrounding the parents previous employment, the worker needs to contact previous employer and investigate the matter.	Record the details of the investigation.	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here		
	Discuss the parents overall income and expenses in detail: example below <table border="1" data-bbox="183 1960 1098 2016"> <tr> <td>Income</td><td>Expenses</td></tr> </table>		Income	Expenses	Put your evaluation of the income and expenses here
Income	Expenses				

	Salary	R20 000	Petrol	R1 500	
	Sassa Grant		Debt		
			etc		
	Total		Total		
	if parent is employed, discuss their views/opinions/feelings regarding their form of employment		Put details here		Put your opinion regarding outcome here
	What are the parents views/opinions/feeling regarding their current financial situation?		Put parents views here		Put your opinion regarding outcome here
	Does the parent financially contribute to the child in foster care?		Record it here		Put your opinion regarding outcome here
1.4.4	<u>Physical health circumstances:</u> The social worker will conduct an interview with the parent to gain this information.				
	Does the parent have any serious/chronic medical conditions: If yes, details the treatment and/or medication thereof.		Record these details here		Record your opinion on the outcomes here.
	How is the parents' opinion of their overall health?		Record their opinion here		
	What is the parents' access to the health care system? - Does the parent have a medical aid - Does the parent go to the local clinic (name the clinic), is the local clinic accessible for the parent? - If in case of an emergency in what way will the parents seek medical attention?		Record this information here		
1.4.5	<u>Psychological/psychiatric health circumstances:</u>				
	The worker will conduct an interview with the parents and ask them details of their psychological history. If it is possible, the social worker should get details of previous professionals involved with parents and investigate the history.		Record the history here		Put your opinion here

	If parents state that they are psychologically healthy and have no history of psychological circumstances, then the social worker should refer the parent to go for a psychological assessment/evaluation. The social worker should request a report from this professional. The social worker should insist on this, as there might be a psychological reason why the parent behaved in a manner they did which caused their child to be placed in foster care.	Record willingness of parent to go for this. Record findings of psychological assessment/evaluation.	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here.
	The worker should establish the parents current psychological state: • Detail parents psychological state • If parents are currently receiving psychological care, be it medication and/or therapy, a social worker should investigate the details of such. If they are receiving medication request a report from the psychiatrist or GP regarding this. If they are receiving therapy, request a report from therapist. If you are unable to get a report, follow up with the professional (telephonically) to confirm if the parents are receiving psychological care, and the progress of their care.	Record current psychological state of parents	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here.
1.4.6	<u>Religious aspects:</u>		
	Ask the parents if they are involved in religious practices? If they attend a place of worship, how often, what kind of church, are they involved in other aspects regarding their place of worship?	Record details here	Record your opinion regarding outcome here
	How important is their spiritual life and their religious practices to them?	Record parents views here	Record your opinion regarding outcome here
	Gain details of their head of religious place of worship to confirm the information they give to the social worker.	Record head of religious place of worship here	Record your opinion regarding the outcome here.
1.4.7	<u>Support systems:</u>		
	Ask the parent what kind of support system they have in place?		Record your opinion regarding the

	family/friends/church members etc Record at least 3 people the parents consider their support system <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Full name: _____</td><td>Full name: _____</td><td>Full name: _____</td></tr> <tr> <td>Relationship: _____</td><td>Relationship: _____</td><td>Relationship: _____</td></tr> <tr> <td>Contact information: _____</td><td>Contact information: _____</td><td>Contact information: _____</td></tr> <tr> <td>Cell: _____</td><td>Cell: _____</td><td>Cell: _____</td></tr> <tr> <td>Email: _____</td><td>Email: _____</td><td>Email: _____</td></tr> <tr> <td>Address: _____</td><td>Address: _____</td><td>Address: _____</td></tr> </table>	Full name: _____	Full name: _____	Full name: _____	Relationship: _____	Relationship: _____	Relationship: _____	Contact information: _____	Contact information: _____	Contact information: _____	Cell: _____	Cell: _____	Cell: _____	Email: _____	Email: _____	Email: _____	Address: _____	Address: _____	Address: _____	outcome here
Full name: _____	Full name: _____	Full name: _____																		
Relationship: _____	Relationship: _____	Relationship: _____																		
Contact information: _____	Contact information: _____	Contact information: _____																		
Cell: _____	Cell: _____	Cell: _____																		
Email: _____	Email: _____	Email: _____																		
Address: _____	Address: _____	Address: _____																		
	If possible follow up with the 'support system' to find out their opinions and views regarding the parent	Record their views here	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here																	
	Ask the parent what kind of support they receive from their support system.	Record their answers here	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here.																	
1.5	Parenting capacity (inadequate vs adequate) and parent's behaviour (displaying harmful behaviours vs positive behaviours)																			
	The social worker will interview the parent to ask if since the removal of the child, the parent has tried to address those aspects as to why child was removed? Look at the reasons for removal and question the parents on those aspects: For example: If parent was a substance abuse- has the parent undergone a rehabilitation programme? If the parent was involved in domestic violence – has the parent gone for anger management? If the parent abused/ neglected / exploited the child –has the parent gone for a parental guidance/skill training programme?	Record the interview with the parent here, as well as the details of the programmes attended	Record your opinion regarding the outcome here																	
	If the parent states that he has address the aspect, request details of professional as well as a report from the professional that assisted the parent.	Record information received from professional	Put your opinion regarding the outcome here.																	
	Has the parent and child undergone an Interactional Analysis? If it is in the child's best interests, then an IA is a good way to determine, and can prove very beneficial in obtaining information on	Record the results of the IA report here	Record your opinion on the outcome here																	

	the parents parental capacities as well as the kind of behaviour the parent displays with the child.		
	The social worker will need to work through Section 2 and 3 of this form (Form B) with the client.	Record the parents reactions/views and opinions regarding section 2 and 3 here	Record your opinion regarding the outcome here
1.6	Parents availability for contact;		
	Ask the parents when they are available for contact? Days of the week/month/year	Record parents' availability here, with specific reference to working schedule, if the parents lives or work's in another part of the country/out of the country etc.	
	If the parent lives a fair distance away from the child, are they financially able to afford petrol/public transport there?	Record parents answers here	Record your opinion here, take into consideration the financial circumstances of the parent.
	Can the parents afford to pay for refreshments, if this forms part of the contact? Can the parents afford to provide for the needs of the child if he/she spends the day/has sleepover contacts?	Record parents answers	Record your opinion here, take into consideration the financial circumstances of the parent.
	Does the parent show willingness/openness to the needs of the child with regards to the contact	Record parents answers here, as well as social worker's own observation of parents attitude to this topic	Put your opinion regarding this topic here.
1.7	Previous experiences of contact/parents behaviour during the contact		
	Ask the parent what their experiences were of the previous contact/s	Record the parents experiences here	Record your opinion regarding all the outcome here
	Ask the parent if they experienced any problems/obstacles/issues with regards to previous contact/s	Record each problem here	
	Ask the parent how they act and what they do during contact	Record answer of parent here	
	The worker should also ask the case/foster care supervision social worker what her opinion of the parents behaviour was of the	Record outcome of interview here	

	previous contacts and if she has received information from the foster parents/child on how the parents behaved. If this information is not in correlation with what the parent said then question/have a discussion with the parents on what the case/foster care supervision social worker said		
1.8	Support by the reunification social worker of the parent/s		
	Have an interview with the parent on the following: • Parents opinions/views regarding the reunification services by the reunification social worker • Possible problems/obstacles/issues that the parent experiences • Allow the parent to provide suggestions as to how to improve the reunification social work services	Record interview with parent	Record opinion regarding outcome of interview here.
	Use Section 2 to provide support to the parent		

Section 2

Informational guidance on contact for biological parents

The following information has been adapted from Scott et al (2005:45-47; Appendix B and Appendix C) and Contact for child in care (2010:Appendix B and Appendix C)

The social worker will make a copy of this Section to give to biological parent as well as work through the Section with the parent (this will then be recorded in Section 1, aspect 1.5)

Section 2 comprises of the following:

- 2.1. Activities on par with developmental needs of the child, that parents' can do during contact.
- 2.2. Behaviour of parents with regards to contact

**2.1. Activities on par with developmental needs of the child,
that parents' can do during contact**

Age (years)	Developmental needs/ Developmental milestones	Activities parents can do during contact
Infancy (0-2)	Develop primary attachment Develop object permanence Basic motor development (sit, reach, stand, crawl, walk) Word recognition Begin exploration and mastery of the environment	Meet basic needs (feeding, changing, holding, cuddling) Play peek-a-boo games Help with standing, walking, etc., by holding hand, play 'come to me' games Name objects, repeat name games, read picture books Encourage exploration; take walks; play together with colourful, noisy, moving items
Toddler (2-4)	Develop impulse control Language development Imitation, fantasy play Small motor coordination Develop basic sense of time Identify and assert preferences	Make and consistently enforce rules Read simple stories; play word games Play 'let's pretend' games; encourage imitative play by doing things together such as 'clean house,' 'go to store' Play together at park; assist in learning to ride tricycle; dance together to music Draw together; string beads together Discuss visits and visit activities in terms of 'after breakfast,' 'after lunch,' 'before supper,' etc. Allow choices in activities, clothes worn, foods eaten
Preschool/early school (5-7)	Gender identification Continuing development of conscience Develop ability to solve problems Learning cause-effect relationships Task completion and order School entry and adjustment	Be open to discuss boy-girl physical difference, in an age appropriate manner, if you are not comfortable then do not bring it up, but if the child spontaneously brings it up, do not react negatively and praise child for 'being so clever'. Be open to discussing child's perceptions of gender roles; read books about heroes and heroines together Make and enforce consistent rules; discuss consequences of behaviour Encourage choice in activities Point out cause-effect and logical consequences of actions Plan activities with beginning, middle, end (as prepare, make cake, clean up) Play simple games such as board games, and card games. If possible, Shop for school clothes together go with child to visit school, playground prior to first day; accompany child to school

School age (8-12)	Skill development (school, sports, special interests) Peer group development and team play Development of self-awareness Preparation for puberty	Help with homework; practice sports together; demonstrate support of special interests, such as help with collections; attend school conferences and activities; work together on household tasks Involve peers in visit activities Attend team activities with child (child's team or observe team together) Be open to talking with child Discuss physical changes expected; answer questions appropriately and openly
Adolescence (12-18)	Development of identity Peer group development and socialization	Take an active interest in child's interests and talents Help explore other possible interests and talents child might have If possible meet the child's closest friend/s. Supervise child and friends in an interest/talent activity while positively supporting both of them.

2.2. Behaviour of parents with regards to contact

Characteristics of parents that can prove beneficial for contact:

- Parents' should accept and support the foster placement
They should acknowledge that the foster parents form a part of the child's family.
Accept the 'title'/ name the child calls the foster parent/s.
- Parents' should affirm foster parents in their role.
- Parents should have a constructive and collaborative approach to working with foster parent/s
- Parents should relate to child in a non-abusive, positive way.

Rules with regards to parent/s behaviour:

- Parent should attend the contact on time.
The parent must give as much notice as possible, if for any reason they are unable to attend contact
- The parents must be clean, not under the influence of drugs or alcohol and in fit state of health to meet child.
- There is to be no smoking during contact. Smokers can smoke before or after, but not in front of the child.
- The parent must not bring any other person to the contact without prior agreement.
- The parent must not discuss certain issues, for example - court case, allegations, another parent
- The parents should not make promises to child about the future.
- The parent must not whisper to the child – conversation should be open and audible.
- There should be no use of mobile phones. This includes taking pictures, recording or making /receiving calls. Unless the parent has been given permission to do so.

- The parent is responsible for the child's safety and behaviour during contact. The supervisor will intervene when the contact child's safety is at risk.
- The parent must not be aggressive to the foster parent, contact supervisor or child.
- Contact will not take place when the child is ill.

Section 3:

Contact Agreement with biological parents

Put your organisation's letter head and/or logo with contact details here

This written agreement is between

_____ (full name and ID of biological mother)

_____ (Full name and ID of biological father)

and _____ (name of social worker as well as child protection organisation)

- This agreement concerns (name of child)
- This written agreement is not a legally binding document, but may be referred to in Court.
- The aim of this agreement is to ensure that contact is a safe and positive experience for the child concerned.

It is agreed that:

1. The contact will focus on * 's (child's name) needs. The discussions regarding court processes etc. are not appropriate for contact
2. The parent will arrive in an appropriate state. If the parent arrives under the influence of drugs or alcohol or in an unfit state, then contact will be stopped.
3. Swearing or inappropriate language is not acceptable during contact sessions.
4. Aggressive or intimidating behaviour during contact sessions is unacceptable.
5. The use of derogatory language about the _____ (name of child protection organisation), and/or _____, _____ (names of social workers involved in the case) are also unacceptable.
6. You will be responsible for your child's safety and whereabouts. However, if it is felt that your child or the contact session is becoming unsafe, then the social worker or foster parent will intervene and suspend contact session.
7. If you need to leave the contact session for a period of time this must be negotiated with the person/s supervising contact. In this case, your child must remain with the contact supervisor.
8. Mobile phones are to be switched off during contact; this includes the use of picture taking, internet use and video recording. Unless given permission to do so by social worker
9. There is to be no smoking during the contact session and no cigarettes or tobacco are to be passed to the child.
10. All gifts/ treats to be given at contact must be agreed in advance by the social worker

11. Everyone should attend the contact on time. The end time will not be altered to accommodate late arrival. If for any reason, you cannot attend or think you will be late, please notify the appropriate person as soon as possible.
12. If another person wants to attend contact, then they should seek agreement before the contact session, with the social worker.
13. It is your responsibility to provide your child with appropriate drinks and food during the course of contact.

Everyone who is involved in the contact session has a right to feel safe and protected. This includes the contact supervisor, the children and the adults. If this agreement is breached contact may be terminated immediately by the social worker, foster parent, child, or supervisor of the contact. In this case contact will not be reinstated until a formal meeting has taken place with the reunification social worker and parent to clarify the issues that occurred during that specific contact session. This may result in changes in contact or the need to put the matter before the court.

Signed..... Date.....

(Reunification Social Worker)

Signed..... Date.....

(Biological mother)

Signed..... Date.....

(Biological father)

ANNEXURE 15 – FORM D - CONTACT PLAN AND CONTACT PLAN AGREEMENT

Form C

Informational guidance for Foster parents with regards to contact:

The following information has been adapted from Scott et al (2005:23-24 & 46; Appendix C).

The social worker should make a copy of this Section to give to foster parent as well as work through the Section with the foster parents. The social worker should record it in Form A, aspect 3.5).

1. Role of a foster parent with regards to contact
2. Characteristics of foster parents that can prove beneficial for contact
3. Activities foster parents can do to help child feel connected to biological parents
4. Rules with regards to parents behaviour – things a foster parent should look out for.

1. Role of a Foster parent with regard to contact:

- Inform children about contact. If contact is regular, build a calendar chart showing the days of the week, and when the child can expect to see their parent/s.
- help prepare child for contact
- comforting, reassuring and talking to the child after contact
- providing transport to and from contacts (if applicable)
- allowing contact to take place in their homes (if applicable)
- building birth parents' confidence and supporting their efforts to change by accepting them and treating them with respect
- modelling a healthy parent-child interaction and teaching child care to birth parents;
- monitoring visits,
- give written feedback on contact to social worker on details and views of contact.

2. Characteristics of foster parents that can prove beneficial for contact:

- The foster parents need to be sensitive, empathetic towards the child. They need to be open to discuss any feeling/emotions the child might be experiencing with regards to contact.
- Foster parents should recognise the developmental benefits of openness and contact for their foster child even if they feel anxious about it themselves.
- Recognise, understand and acknowledge that the child will think and be curious about their background and birth family
- Accept the biological parent
- Recognise the reality of the parents current situation and present this reality to the child without negativity
- Convey a positive attitude towards the parents including acknowledging the reasons and circumstances surrounding the need for the child to be placed.

- Work through any impact the foster parent might have with regards to the abuse the parents inflicted on the child.
- Foster parents should have a constructive and collaborative approach to working with parents
- The foster parent should have full involvement in any contact that takes place
- Be open and understanding with regards to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and policies surrounding contact of children in foster care.

3. Activities foster parents can do to help child feel connected to biological parents

- Take child for contact sessions
- Encourage phone calls with parents
- Supervise the contact sessions
- Involve family in celebrating birthdays, holidays
- Invite family to visit in your home (if applicable, and approved by foster care supervision social worker)
- Involve family in shared decision making

4. Rules with regards to parent/s behaviour -things a foster parent should look out for:

- Parent should attend the contact on time.
The parent must give as much notice as possible, if for any reason they are unable to attend contact
- The parents must be clean, not under the influence of drugs or alcohol and in fit state of health to meet child.
- There is to be no smoking during contact. Smokers can smoke before or after, but not in front of the child.
- The parent must not bring any other person to the contact without prior agreement.
- The parent must not discuss certain issues, for example - court case, allegations, another parent
- The parents should not make promises to child about the future.
- The parent must not whisper to the child – conversation should be open and audible.
- There should be no use of mobile phones. This includes taking pictures, recording or making /receiving calls. Unless the parent has been given permission to do so.
- The parent is responsible for the child's safety and behaviour during contact. The supervisor will intervene when the contact child's safety is at risk.
- The parent must not be aggressive to the foster parent, contact supervisor or child.
- Contact will not take place when the child is ill.

**ANNEXURE 16 – FORM D - CONTACT PLAN AND CONTACT PLAN
AGREEMENT**

Form D

Contact Plan and Contact Plan Agreement:

**A document for all parties involved: child, biological parent, foster parent, reunification
social worker and case/foster care supervision social worker.**

Form D is divided up into the following Sections:

- Section 1: Contact Plan (page 2-3)
- Section 2: Contact Plan Agreement (page 4-5)

Section 1

Contact Plan

Put organisation's letter head and/or logo with contact details here

The following will be the contact arrangements between :

- the child concerned _____ and
- the biological mother _____ and/or
- biological father _____.

The case/foster care supervision social worker _____ (name)

_____ (registration number) has conducted an investigation into the circumstances of all parties with regards to contact, and had made the following recommendations that is in line with the best interest of the child:

Indirect Contact:

Fill in the spaces with appropriate findings. Delete if not applicable.

- Emails will be sent from _ _____ (parent's name)
- Every _____ (day of the week/month/year)
- To _____ (put email address of child or foster parent)
- Telephonic calls will be every _____ (day of the week/month/year)
- Time of call will be _____
 - Detail of the supervision of the call

(will the call be on loud speaker for the foster parent to monitor or can the child speak the parent without the foster parents supervision)

- Who will call _____ (is it the parents responsibility to make the call or is it the foster parents responsibility, or is it a shared responsibility)
- On who's phone will the child speak to the parent on _ _ (their phone or the phone of the foster parents) that phones telephone number _____ own

- Messages via social media; whatsapp, wechat, facebook etc.
- Messages between parent and child may occur_____ (time of the day)
_____(day of the week/month/year) for a period of
_____(how long may they message each other for)
- Monitoring of these messages will be done by the foster parent if the child becomes distressed
- On who's phone will the messages conversation take place _ _ _ _ _ (the child's phone or the phone of the foster parents) that phones telephone number_____ e

Direct Contact will be:

- _____(day of the week/month/year)
- For_(length of contact)
- Time _____
- At__(put the location in)
- The supervision requirement of contact is:

(put what kind of supervision measures need to take place as well as who is responsible for supervision)

- Who is responsible for taking the child to and from the contact_____ (the parents or foster parent)

- This contact will commence on _____(put the date)
- After each contact session the following parties that will complete a short summary of the details of the contact as well as their experiences. They will provide this in writing to the case/foster care supervision social worker:

_____(foster parent)

_____(social worker) – if social worker supervised the contact

_____(child) – if applicable

_____(biological mother) – if applicable

_____(biological father) – if applicable

Section 2

Contact Plan Agreement

This written agreement is between

_____ (full name and ID of biological mother)

_____ (Full name and ID of biological father)

_____ (Full name and ID of foster parent)

_____ (Full name and date of birth of child, if above the age of 8 or has reached an age of maturity)

_____ (name of reunification social worker as well as child protection organisation)

_____ (name of case/foster care supervision social worker as well as child protection organisation)

- This agreement concerns (name of child)
- This written agreement is not a legally binding document, but may be referred to in Court.
- The aim of this agreement is to ensure that all parties concerned are made aware of the details of the contact and that they are aware that a full investigation was done into the matter regarding contact and that this is the recommendation of contact in line with what is in the child's best interests.

It is agreed that:

1. The above mentioned Contact Plan materialize
2. Each party participates and follows through with the Contact Plan. Each party will fulfil their responsibility towards this Contact Plan.
3. If any issues, problems or concern's arise that each party will contact their respective

social worker.

4. The Contact Plan will go under review/be updated/or changed under the following circumstances:

- a. If the child's needs change
- b. If the parents situation changes
- c. if difficulties arise and they cannot be resolved and there is a need to significantly alter the Contact Plan

Signed.....

Date.....

(Biological father)

Signed.....

Date.....

(Biological mother)

Signed.....

Date.....

(Foster parent:_____)

Signed.....

Date.....

(foster parent:_____)

Signed.....

Date.....

_____(full name of Reunification social worker)

_____(Child Protection Organisation)

_____(registration number)

Signed..... Date.....

_____(full name of case/foster care supervision social worker)

_____(Child Protection Organisation)

_____(registration number)

ANNEXURE 17- INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. Article types

In addition to full articles, which should be a maximum of 8000 words, the *Journal of Social Work* publishes occasional shorter 'think pieces': reports of research in progress, comments on previously published articles, and analyses of current and topical practice, policy and theory (maximum 2000 words).

2. Editorial policies

a. Peer review policy

The **Journal of Social Work** is a peer-reviewed forum for the publication, dissemination and debate of key ideas and research in social work.

b. Authorship

All parties who have made a substantive contribution to the article should be listed as authors. Principal authorship, authorship order, and other publication credits should be based on the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their status. A student is usually listed as principal author on any multiple-authored publication that substantially derives from the student's dissertation or thesis.

c. Acknowledgements

All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an Acknowledgements section. Examples of those who might be acknowledged include a person who provided purely technical help, or a department chair who provided only general support.

Please supply any personal acknowledgements separately to the main text to facilitate anonymous peer review.

d. Funding

Journal of Social Work requires all authors to acknowledge their funding in a consistent fashion under a separate heading. Please visit the [*Funding Acknowledgements*](#) page on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway to confirm the format of the acknowledgment text in the event of funding, or state that: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

e. Declaration of conflicting interests

Journal of Social Work encourages authors to include a declaration of any conflicting interests and recommends you review the good practice guidelines on the [*SAGE Journal Author Gateway*](#)

f. Research ethics and patient consent

Medical research involving human subjects must be conducted according to the [*World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki*](#)

Submitted manuscripts should conform to the [*ICMJE Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals*](#), and all papers reporting animal and/or human studies must state in the methods section that the relevant Ethics Committee or Institutional Review Board provided (or waived) approval. Please ensure that you have provided the full name and institution of the review committee, in addition to the approval number.

For research articles, authors are also required to state in the methods section whether participants provided informed consent and whether the consent was written or verbal.

Information on informed consent to report individual cases or case series should be included in the manuscript text. A statement is required regarding whether written informed consent for patient information and images to be published was provided by the patient(s) or a legally authorized representative.

Please also refer to the [ICMJE Recommendations for the Protection of Research Participants](#)

3. Publishing policies

a. Publication ethics

SAGE is committed to upholding the integrity of the academic record. We encourage authors to refer to the Committee on Publication Ethics' [International Standards for Authors](#) and view the Publication Ethics page on the [SAGE Author Gateway](#)

i. Plagiarism

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