

research in practice

We both had the same goal in mind

An adoptive mother and a birth grandmother discuss their experiences of contact

In this film, an adoptive mother (Liz) and a birth grandmother (Denise) discuss their experiences of contact. When the placement for adoption was first made, some years previously, the arrangement was for indirect contact. This worked well and built a foundation of trust. After a few years, the adopted child asked his parents if he could see the grandparents who had kept in touch with him through indirect contact. The adopters discussed this with their social worker and a plan was made for a supported face to face meeting. Face to face contact continued to develop from this point. The adopted child is now in his teens and contact has gradually become fully open with visits to each other's homes two or three times a year and other birth family members involved occasionally.

The film lasts for just under 20 minutes and is divided into four sections. The film may be viewed as a whole or sections may be chosen to illuminate or prompt discussion on specific points.

The four sections are as follows:

1. The initial meeting (6 mins)

In this section, Liz and Denise discuss the significance of meeting each other before the child was placed for adoption. The grandmother reflects that the meeting allowed her to feel that her grandson would be well cared for and loved by his adoptive parents and the adoptive mother felt that it gave her and her husband a sense of the grandparents' 'blessing' to proceed with the adoption.

They both agree on the importance of good social work support before during and after the meeting.

2. The experience of face to face contact (2.5 mins)

In this section, Liz and Denise describe the gradual development of the contact from an indirect arrangement, to meeting on neutral ground, to visiting each other's homes and meeting other family members. Through this process, a trusting relationship developed with both parties able to recognise and prioritise the child's best interests and having a shared goal of wanting the best for him.

3. What has helped to make face to face contact successful (2.5 mins)

In this section, Liz and Denise discuss what they see as the key elements of the successful development of the contact. Important factors for success include a clear delineation and mutual respect for each other's roles for the child and some shared values and expectations regarding parenting.

4. The importance of timing contact to allow for grieving and attachment (5.5 mins)

The emotions of both Liz and Denise are more to the fore in this section. On reflection, both suggest that in the early days of the placement, it might have been more difficult to manage direct contact. Denise feels that she needed time to grieve for her grandson and truly accept the adoption and Liz feels that she and her husband needed time to build their relationship with their new son. The gradual development from indirect to direct contact allowed both parties to build trust in each other and feel secure in their new roles for the child.