



## Exercise: helping adopters to understand birth relatives' feelings about contact

**Research message:** if adopters are sensitive to birth relatives' feelings and able to build positive relationships with them, post adoption contact is more likely to work well. Successful contact has a series of benefits for adopters and children.

To better understand what birth relatives may be feeling during contact, it is useful to note that:

- Birth relatives may experience a range of emotions around contact including grief, rage, jealousy, relief, joy and reassurance
- They are often fearful of showing their feelings in case this leads to restrictions on future contact and anxious about getting things wrong
- Birth relatives generally value contact highly, even when it is difficult.

Practical and emotional support for birth relatives can help.

**This exercise is suitable for:** individual learning; use during assessment and training of adoptive parents and in training for contact supervisors, social workers and foster and kinship carers.

Either **read the summary of key findings from the 'Supporting Direct Contact' study** or use the slide presentation. **Listen to some of the audio clips of birth parents' voices.** **Read** the Mikey Maddox case study.

Consider and discuss the following questions:

- *How might Mikey's adoptive parents feel about contact with Drew and his mum?*
- *How could contact help Mikey? How could it help his adoptive parents?*
- *What might make it difficult?*
- *How might Drew and his mum feel about their first visit to Mikey, three months after he is placed for adoption?*
- *What might adopters think of the visit? What will they think of Drew and his mum?*
- *What questions might Drew and his mum have for adopters?*
- *What might they want to share with adopters?*
- *What hopes and fears might they have?*
- *What might be included in a contact agreement for this child?*
- *What could adoptive parents do to help make contact go well?*

### Trainer's notes

These questions aim to act as prompt for adopters to try and view contact through the eyes of Drew and his mum, how they will view adopters, Mikey and what they think they will be judged.