

Stand Up  
For Siblings



## Stand Up for Siblings: Re-imagining the seven steps to supporting sibling relationships - Our agenda for a five-year programme of continuous improvement

### Seven steps to supporting sibling relationships: Key Intentions

1. Be led by care experienced children and young people.
2. Strengthen the law relating to siblings.
3. Plan public spending with sibling relationships in mind.
4. Protect and promote sibling relationships through management systems.
5. Build expertise amongst those working directly with siblings.
6. Recruit and retain carers who understand and value relational permanence.
7. Promote transparent and sensitive recording practices.

### Seven steps to supporting sibling relationships: a programme of continuous improvement

Key intentions	Improvement goals	Targeted actions
1. <b>Be led by care experienced children and young people.</b>	All improvements are underpinned by the voice of care-experienced children, young people and adults.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A national 'siblings champions board' made up of care-experienced children, young people and adults is commissioned to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- raise care-experienced children and young people's awareness of their rights regarding sibling relationships;</li> <li>- hear testimony from care experienced children and young people to identify sources of stigma or undermining of rights;</li> <li>- undertake an annual barometer survey of children and young people involved with the care system to gauge problems and progress with sibling relationship support;</li> <li>- inform the 'assess, plan, act, review' cycle of continuous improvement.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. The board reports to Scottish Government annually.</li> </ol>

<p><b>2. Strengthen the law relating to siblings.</b></p>	<p>Scotland has a strong legal framework that acknowledges and promotes the sibling relationships of children in, and on the edges of, care, and protects the rights of siblings to family life, including the right to contact and to meaningful participation in decision-making about their siblings.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define “Sibling” in law, compatible with Article 8 ECHR: “Sibling” includes full sibling, half sibling, step sibling by virtue of marriage or civil partnership, sibling by virtue of adoption, and any other person the child regards as their sibling and with whom they have an established family life.</li> <li>2. Sibling Placements in Alternative Care: Introduce requirement to place siblings together in care unless there are compelling reasons for separating them, based on best interests of one sibling or another. (See UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children, and Moving Forward Guidance)</li> <li>3. Where siblings are placed separately, introduce duty on local authorities to consider reunification at the first and all subsequent reviews of placements. (See Guidance on 2009 Regulations)</li> <li>4. Contact for Separated Siblings: Amend Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Section 17 to place duty on local authorities to promote and facilitate contact between looked after children and their separated siblings, where it is practicable and appropriate in the circumstances of the case. (i.e. extend duty beyond parental contact)</li> <li>5. Amend Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 to place a specific duty on the hearing to consider sibling relationships at each Hearing whether representations are made on behalf of the sibling or not, and give siblings participation rights so they can meaningfully participate in decisions made about their siblings. In relation to participation rights, we are awaiting the UK Supreme Court judgment in two Scottish cases (<i>ABC (AP) v Principal Reporter and another</i> UKSC 2019/0063 and <i>In the matter of XY (AP)</i> UKSC 2019/0134). In these cases the Supreme Court has been asked to rule on what participation rights siblings must have in Children’s Hearings in order to fulfil the requirements of the right to family life under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular whether the participation rights include these 6 aspects: the right to notification the Hearing is to take place, the right to papers (subject to non-disclosure rules), the right to attend Hearings, the right to make representations, the right of appeal or review, and the right to request a review hearing, The Supreme Court judgment is expected in early 2020.</li> <li>6. Introduce an explicit duty on local authorities to take into account views of siblings when making decisions with respect to a child whom they are looking after, or proposing to look after.</li> <li>7. Permanence Proceedings: Amend Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 to introduce explicit right for siblings to be notified of permanence proceedings and to apply to participate meaningfully in proceedings, including the right to make an application for contact with sibling; and to place a duty on the court to consider sibling contact.</li> <li>8. Family Actions: Amend Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Section 11 to introduce explicit right for siblings to make application for contact.</li> <li>9. Curators ad litem and Safeguarders, in preparing reports, will identify each of a child's siblings and record the views of the child and of the sibling as to how they would like their relationship supported under any decision made by the Court</li> <li>10. High quality research evidence on supporting sibling relationships is available to inform practice.</li> </ol>
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<p><b>3. Plan public spending with sibling relationships in mind.</b></p>	<p>Public service planning and commissioning strategies are attuned to the needs of siblings in, or on the edges of, care and organised to promote sibling relationships, prevent, reduce and address sibling estrangement and meet corporate parenting duties.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Community Planning process is used to ensure a joined-up, multi-agency approach to meeting the welfare, health, housing and education needs of sibling groups in, on the edge of, care.</li> <li>2. Service leaders and corporate parents conduct sibling relationship impact assessments as part of planning and commissioning processes for universal services such as early years interventions and education and targeted services such child protection, family placement, through-care and after-care services.</li> <li>3. Resources are targeted at models of provision that place emphasis on family preservation, building children’s social capital and strengthening family ties such as FGDM and Lifelong Links.</li> <li>4. Data on sibling separation and contact (or lack of it) are collected and reported as part of a comprehensive system of accountability.</li> </ol>
<p><b>4. Protect and promote sibling relationships through management systems.</b></p>	<p>Robust management processes are in place in social care services to facilitate and support good practice relating to promotion of sibling relationships.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A set of quality indicators is developed to ensure that direct, virtual and indirect contact that involves siblings is child-focused.</li> <li>2. Any professional decisions that will lead to the separation of siblings or potential for estrangement require sign-off by a senior manager.</li> <li>3. Data regarding the cost of placement and contact arrangements is made available.</li> </ol>
<p><b>5. Build expertise amongst those working directly with siblings.</b></p>	<p>The social care and health workforce are enabled to undertake high quality assessments of the relationship needs of siblings in or on the edge of care and to meet these needs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research evidence regarding the risks of estrangement of siblings in care and effective ways to promote sibling relationships is made available to social care and health/medical professionals through an evidence portal.</li> <li>2. ‘Together or apart’ assessments are replaced by a national ‘sibling relationships assessment framework’ sensitive to the needs of children in and at risk of entering care. Such a framework would be guided by the principles of children’s right to family life, early intervention and changing needs across the lifecourse and the care journey. It would be informed by research evidence and incorporate good practice outlined in the publication ‘Beyond Together or Apart’ (Beckett, 2018)</li> <li>3. Universal early years services and preventative family support services are sensitive to and skilled in addressing sibling issues.</li> <li>4. An expectation is created for universal access to life journey/lifestory work for children permanently separated from birth siblings throughout childhood and early adulthood to promote emotional and relational wellbeing.</li> </ol>
<p><b>6. Recruit and retain carers who understand and value relational permanence.</b></p>	<p>The number and quality of kinship, foster carers, adopters and other “substitute carers” available to meet the needs of sibling groups exceeds the needs of</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A comprehensive understanding is developed of the facilitators and barriers to recruitment and retention of carers/adopters who can meet the needs of sibling groups and effective management of this resource.</li> </ol>

	<p>the children and this resource is managed effectively.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. A national recruitment strategy of foster carers and adopters is developed that creates the conditions for co-placement of siblings and, where this is not possible, high quality contact arrangements.</li> <li>3. A national training strategy is designed and rolled-out to produce confident carers willing and able to care for sibling groups and to address children’s needs such as managing sibling conflict and challenging behaviours, working therapeutically with parentified siblings, supporting contact between separated siblings and addressing loss where this is experienced.</li> <li>4. Specialist therapeutic interventions to support carers and adopters of sibling groups and aimed at high risk placements are implemented and evaluated.</li> <li>5. A national conversation is started regarding the benefits and challenges of a shift from a model of adoption as ‘family substitution’ to ‘dual connection’.</li> <li>6. Consideration is given to the introduction of national ‘siblings allowance’ to support kinship and non-kinship permanence placements.</li> </ol>
<p><b>7. Promote transparent and sensitive recording practices.</b></p>	<p>The value placed on sibling relationships as a right and a source of wellbeing is reflected in official recording practices.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social work and SCRA recording systems are redesigned to enable accurate and comprehensive recording of children’s sibling relationships.</li> <li>2. The meaning of siblings relationships as expressed by children is documented as part of the assessment process.</li> <li>3. Children’s views regarding sibling placements, direct contact and information exchange are consistently recorded of as part of the Children’s Panels process and these views are considered in decision making.</li> <li>4. The decisions made that impact on sibling relationships and the rationale for these decisions is recorded and this is done in a way that takes account of the effect on the well-being of children including those accessing records in later life.</li> <li>5. The benefits of technology are fully exploited to provide meaningful ways of documenting children’s lives and promoting their views and wishes.</li> </ol>

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