

## Writing a profile

### A guide to writing profiles for children and submitting photographs

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#### What is the profile for?

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Prospective families will know nothing about the child, and they rely on the profile and the accompanying photograph for their first impression.

Writing the profile is part of the complex and difficult task of linking a child with a new family. The dilemma for social workers is to try and meet not only the child's current needs, but also their anticipated future needs.

They also need to present a rounded picture, while attracting appropriate enquiries. If the profile is too rosy or too vague it could raise false expectations or create misunderstandings, with families withdrawing when told of the fuller picture. If it is too prescriptive, the social worker might miss the 'right' family. Finding the right balance is never easy, but you will be able to talk about the child when families or their social workers make an enquiry.

#### How do you write the profile?

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What matters most is communicating something about who this child is and making readers want to know more. The clearer the profile, the less they will have to second-guess what is meant. So, it's best to write in short sentences, with simple, lively language, avoiding jargon and clichés. You can use quotes from people who know the child, and it's also vital to convey the child's perspective, where possible – a quote, a poem, an anecdote, can often speak volumes.

Be aware that profiles could be read by the child or someone who knows them. Therefore, the profile should not include in-depth background details, or sensitive information that could potentially embarrass or distress anyone involved, most notably the child, now or when they are older. This includes information relating to abuse (including sexual abuse), sexualised behaviour, 'soiling' and 'wetting', or sensitive information regarding third parties, such as the child's birth parents.

We advise that you hint at these difficulties to assist enquirers, and explain these issues in more detail to appropriate enquirers. In terms of writing a profile, for an older child experiencing enuresis, you could for example write that they "need support with some aspects of their personal care".

The challenge is to convey the 'spirit' of the child and include all relevant information – and to do it in the space allocated or recommended!

#### Writing about siblings

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If the plan is for the children to be placed together then you should write one profile:

- include a general paragraph, with any shared characteristics and how the children get on
- provide a separate paragraph for each child
- avoid making comparisons between siblings.

If your agency would also consider separate families for specific children within the sibling group, then you should include this information in the profile. Please provide details of the proposed split of the sibling group, if available, to assist enquirers. For example, that an adoptive family would also be considered for Jessica and Elijah together and a separate family for Zac. Please write about the twins in the same order throughout.

Siblings who are being placed separately will require separate profiles.

## The child's description

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Describe the child in one paragraph, including, where relevant, the child's views. Use direct quotes if possible. Please consider carefully what needs to be included.

- **Personality:** Start with a few descriptive words. Be positive, yet realistic. Find ways of being constructive about any emotional or behavioural difficulties (which may well be temporary or linked to the child's past or current situation). There is no need to describe the child's physical appearance, unless, for example, it is to mention something like exceptional height. However, if no photograph is available, a brief description may be useful.
- **Interests, hobbies, talents, likes and dislikes:** These help describe the child and could match the interests of prospective family members.
- **Child's development and needs:** Give relevant details of social, emotional and behavioural development, including any special needs and probable outcome. Describe disabled children using the social model of disability. Mention recent developments and progress. Only include details of eating and sleeping patterns for very young children. Remember that enquirers can ask the child's social worker for more information.
- **Health issues:** Where appropriate, include details of specific conditions and genetic risks, as well as the implications in terms of treatment. If the child has a particular diagnosis or disability, please ask your agency's medical adviser to put together a short paragraph explaining how this condition or disability affects this particular child. Current research suggests it is useful to mention the possible future developmental effects of the birth mother's use of drugs or alcohol during pregnancy. Also consider whether to mention the possible developmental and genetic implications of a birth parent's history of mental ill-health, such as schizophrenia, or their learning difficulties.
- **Education:** Mention the kind of nursery or school attended (mainstream/special), general progress, assessment of special educational needs, additional support, teachers' and child's views. In the published profile, the word 'school' on its own will indicate mainstream school, unless specified otherwise.

## What's behind the words?

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Words can carry very strong meanings for families, and this leads us to prefer certain ways of saying things, although this is constantly under review. For example:

**Suffered or experienced?** Although 'suffered' could be seen as more realistic, we feel this could publicly label the child as a victim and possibly lay blame on their birth family, which could compromise future relationships. 'Experienced' feels more neutral, as in 'he experienced lack of care'.

**Struggles or tries?** Here again, from the child's point of view, we feel that 'struggles' conveys the idea of failure, while 'tries' highlights the child's efforts and resilience.

**Poor/limited or some/a little?** The aim is to focus on what the child can do, rather than on what they cannot do. So a child who 'has poor concentration' could become one 'with a short concentration span' or 'needing help to concentrate more'.

**Aggressive or challenging?** Of course, the profile needs to present a realistic picture of the kind of behaviour future parents might have to deal with. It should not mislead, but should also avoid labelling the child too early and too publicly. Another carer and the prospect of more stability might lead to a change in their behaviour.

**Bossy or taking on too much responsibility?** 'Bossy' may well describe the child's behaviour towards their siblings, but it implies this is an enduring characteristic. It may be more helpful to suggest that they can be helped to be less controlling and learn to let go of their previous role as caregiver.

## **What about photographs?**

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Photographs make a direct, emotional impact on prospective families, and the quality of the photograph plays an important part in their decision to make enquiries about children.

### **How many?**

Please supply only one photograph per child. Siblings should be photographed together if they are being placed together.

### **What format and size do they need to be?**

You will need to send the photograph as a JPEG (set as 'RGB', not 'CMYK'). Photographs need to be between a minimum of 125KB and a maximum of 1MB in size. We prefer that photographs only show the head and shoulders of the child – that way the image will be much larger and clearer for adopters to see.

### **Points to remember**

- Always use the highest resolution setting when taking pictures
- The photo should be recent – less than six months old for children up to five years, and less than 12 months old for children of five years and above.

Ask yourself -

- Is the child wearing scanty or inappropriate clothing, e.g. in the bath, in only a nappy or in school uniform?
- Is the child's face is not fully visible?
- Is there a cluttered background?
- Are there identifiable features, e.g. a street sign in the background or the child is posing with other people?

### **How to send your photographs**

Photos can be pasted in/included in the forms you use to submit information about a child to the Register (usually the AC01 for new referrals or AC03 for changes of information). If you wish you can upload the photo separately to our online system. If you do this, we will need to know the name, ID number and date of birth of the child.

### **If you cannot supply a photograph**

In exceptional circumstances, for example, if there are legal considerations, you could replace the child's photograph with either a drawing or an image of something significant to the child.