

Family Time in Early Permanence placements: messages from research

RUTH COPSON

Agenda

Overview of EP and research

Experience of the infant

Relationships

Navigating parental identity

Purpose of Family Time

Suggestions for policy and practice

Journey to the PhD



Early Permanence

- Umbrella term – Fostering for Adoption and Concurrency
- 11% of total number of children placed for adoption in 18/19 (Brown and Mason, 2021), just under 20% in 22/23.
- Focus of RAA's – to increase numbers (DfE, 2022).
- Number of regional projects funded by the DfE.
- Little research on EP or Family Time.

Research Questions

How is Family Time experienced and understood by parents, EP carers and infants?

How do practitioners plan, manage and experience Family Time?

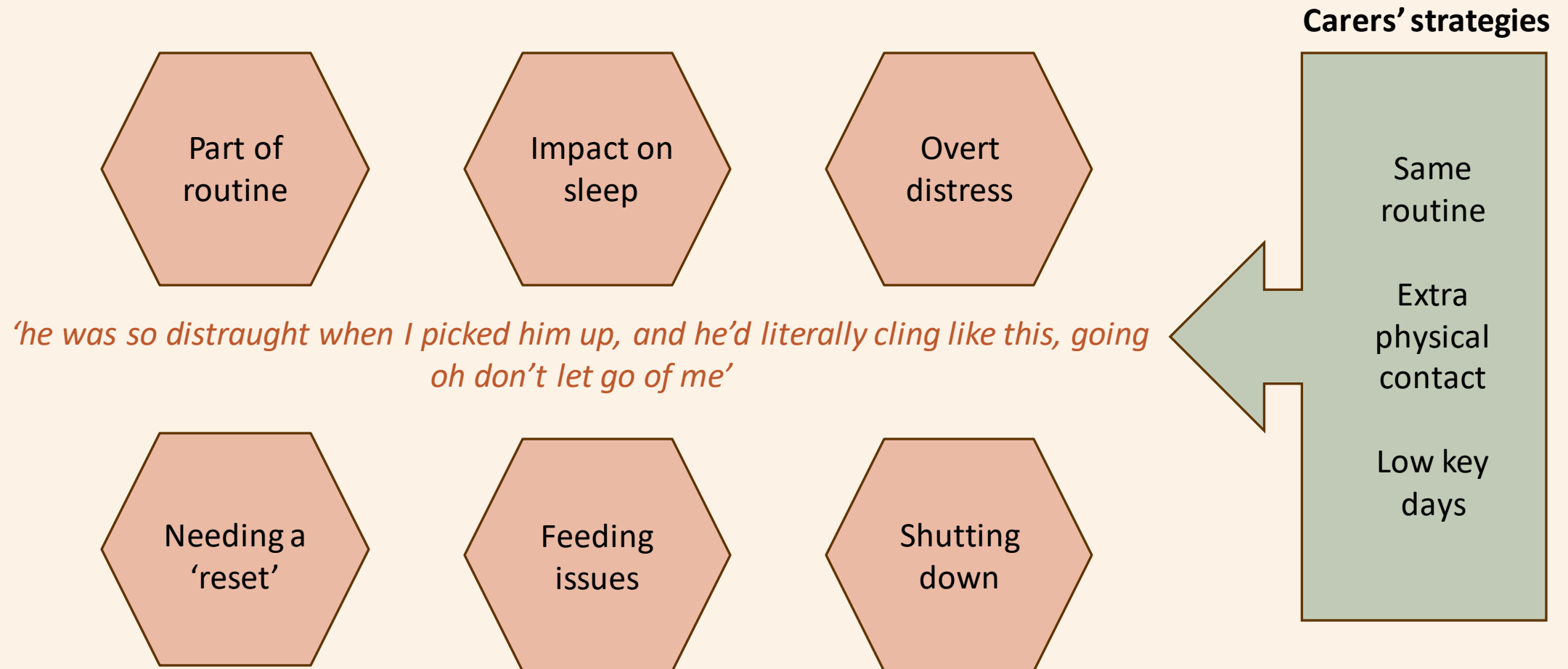
How can practitioners address some of the challenges related to Family Time and support all involved?

What is the purpose of Family Time in EP perceived to be?

Participants

	Number/Demographics	Data collection methods
Parents	Mothers (n=5), Fathers (n=1)	Online and in person interviews
Carers	Female (n=8), Male (n=1). Primary carer interviewed, all in couples, 1 same sex)	Online and in person interviews (n=14 beginning and end of proceedings, n=2 retrospective)
Family Time Managers/Workers	LA (n=6) VAA (n=4)	Online focus groups and interviews
Supervising/Adoption Social Workers	LA (n=2) VAA (n=7)	Online focus groups
Children's Social Workers	LA (n=4)	Online interviews

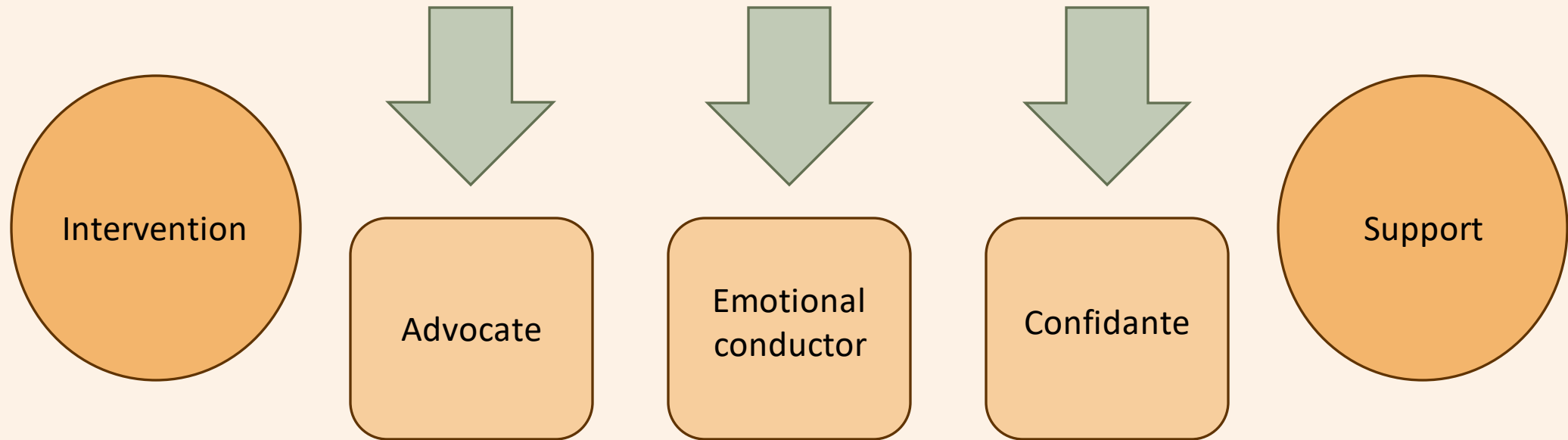
Experience of infants



Relationships – parents and carers

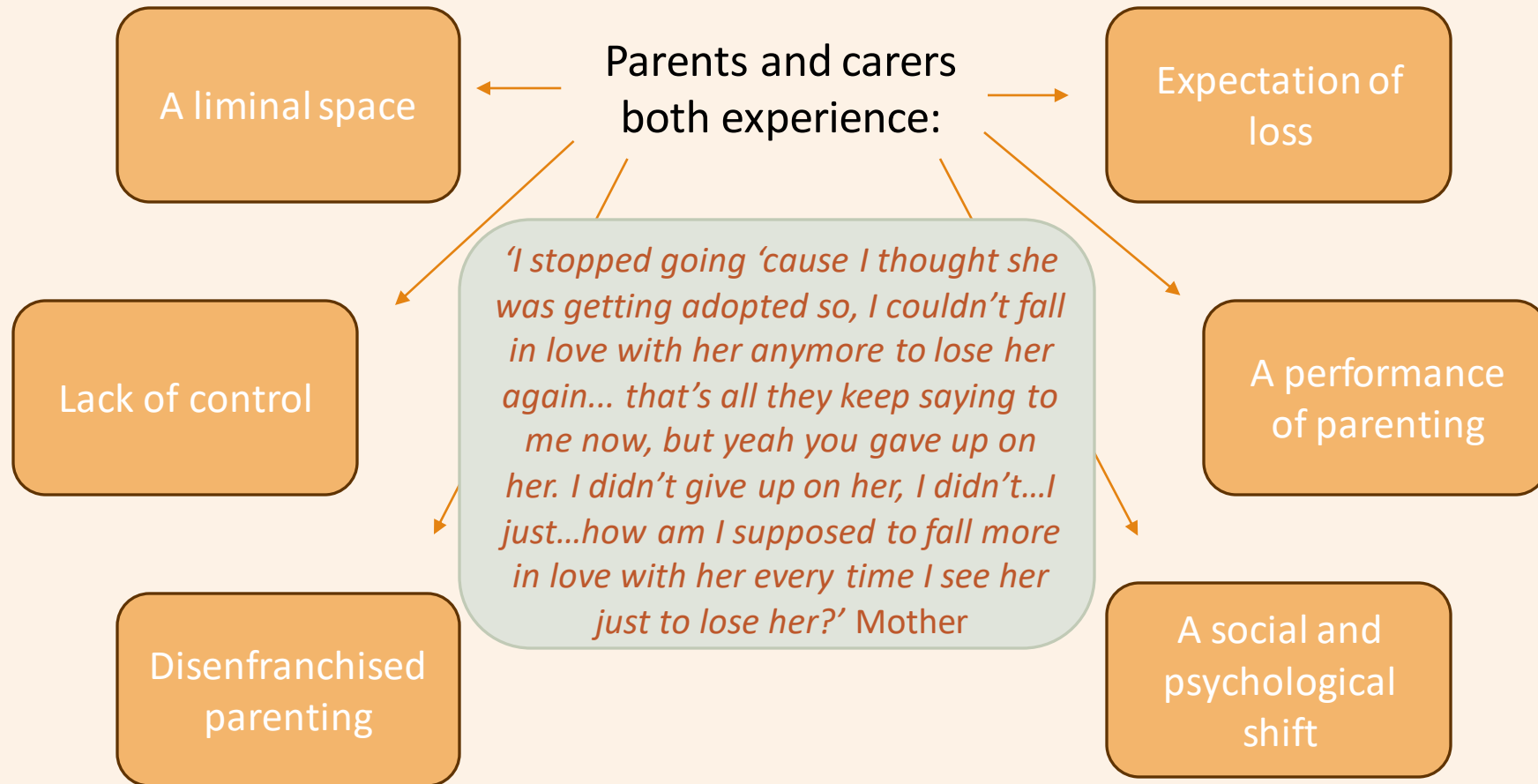
- Mysterious strangers – creation of a divide. A complex battle for the same child.
- *'...so we've never met them really, you don't really know them, you're not going in to the contact centre and then four months into it it's suddenly like an 'us and them' and it's not us and them...so that's month four and we got all the way to month 19, that's a long time of us and them.'* Carer
- Short term > long term relationships.

Relationships – the role of the contact worker



'what one person would say was a concern, another person wouldn't so if it was kept as just one person for like all the time, then at least again there would be that consistency.' Father

Navigating parental identity



A mother's view of Family Time

'...it's not exactly the most relaxing environment to be in, especially when it normally comes not long after you've given birth, you've got a court case... coming up on the horizon, so you're stressed anyway, your hormones are all over the place and you know you're being reassessed at the same time, plus you also know that these people that are looking after your kid have already been preapproved to have 'em if you screw up...but...you're expected to then be the best version of yourself and...be able to show to these people that supervising you and assessing you...that while you're going through...one of the toughest moments of your life...you're still supposed to try and show them that you're the best person for your child when at that present moment in time, you feel like your world's just been like ripped from under you.'

Parental identities of EP carers

New parent

← *'...you're there goin' this just affirms to everyone why you know, this this child is in a better placement here you know. But...it's a bit emotional I think 'cause you're like that's my baby that you're talkin' about'.*

Prospective parent

← *'... when I go to sleep it's like it goes around in my brain, I just think 'what if', 'what if worst happens' like how am I actually going to give him back? I'm sure it won't happen, but you've always got to think 'what if'...'.*

Hopeful foster carer

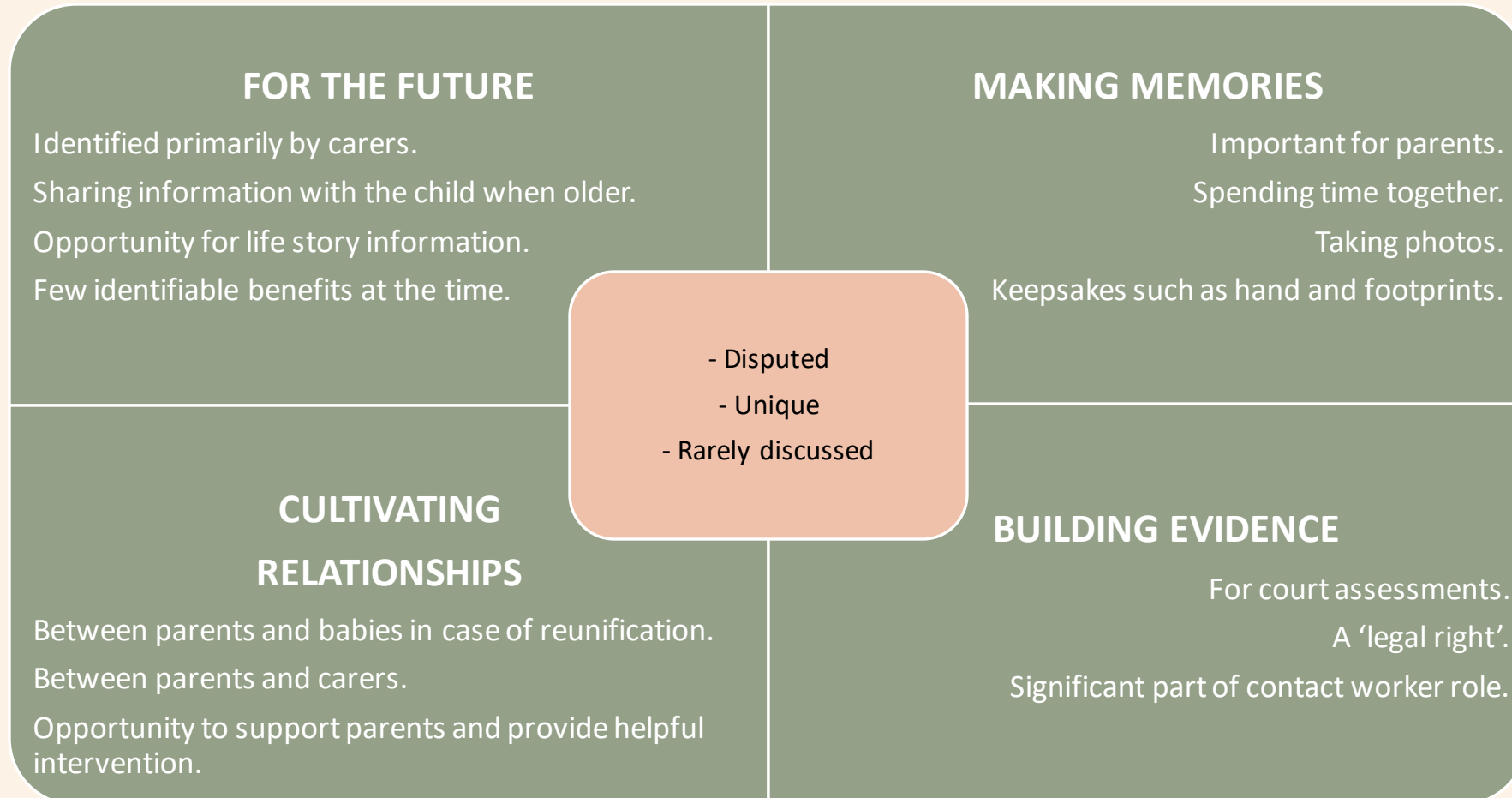
← *'...we try and stay in the foster carer mindset but at the same time we need to love him as a parent loves him.. it's getting that balance...if he does...go on to [birth family]...we'll still know we've given him the best possible start and...that's kind of our job at the moment...'.*

Parental identity and assessment

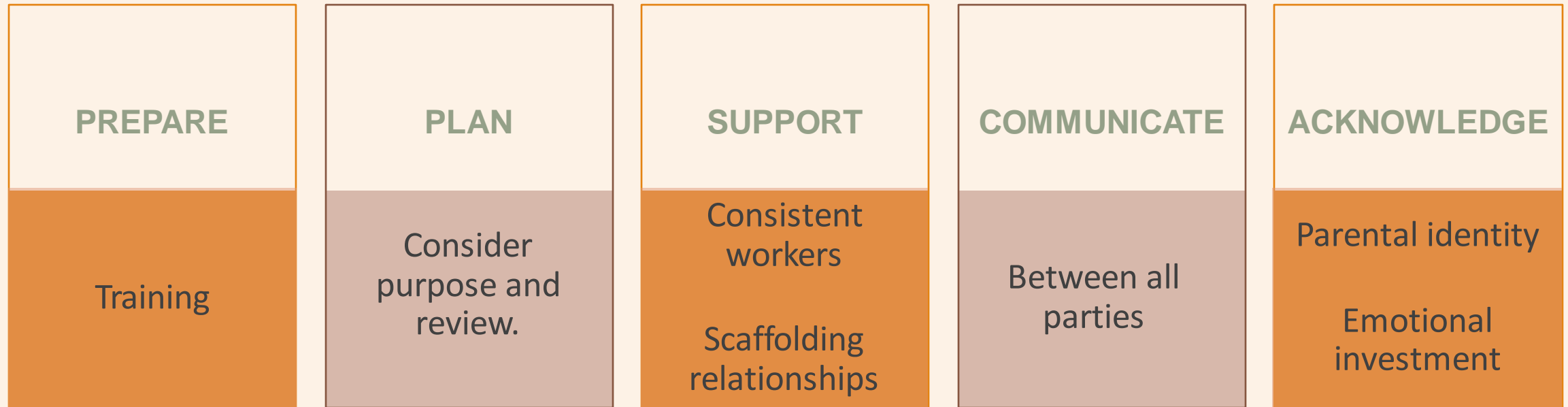
- Impact on Family Time and relationships between parents/carers.
- Assessment and preparation – motivation for EP.

'I don't wanna visit someone's house and see...brand new baby, congratulations new parents' cards at a Foster to Adopt stage...I feel it's disrespectful [to birth parents]...I understand...that's a really exciting time, this child's come home maybe straight from hospital but at that point that child isn't yours to claim. It's yours to love and care about and nurture but not yours to claim and I think there's a real difference..' CSW 1

Purpose of Family Time



Managing Family Time - Implications



Summary points for practice

- Consider the **purpose of Family Time** and clarify **role of the Family Time worker**.
- Managing Family Time – workers **understanding EP**, provision of a **consistent worker/s** if possible.
- Embracing opportunities in relation to **life story work** – photos, sharing information, memory making.
- Helping parents and carers to **navigate parental identity** – emotional investment in the child on both sides.
- **Supporting and scaffolding relationships** between all parties – face to face handovers, time before and after FT sessions, emotional containment.
- Moving from short term to **long term relationships** – preparing EP carers to keep in touch in the future.