

# Bridges between families

## Contact and its meaning for foster children, foster parents and birth families

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# Contact in Foster Care

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More contact vs.  
less contact

„Traumatized child  
should not have  
contact with the  
,offender‘ = often  
parent“

Contact in foster  
care =  
very special thing

What is good  
for the child?

Different views  
between  
involved parties

Why contact???

# What we know about contact in foster care

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- Most children have some kind of contact
- Legal significance of contact getting more important
- Many children in care are complex traumatised
- Children often have mixed feelings towards contact – foster carers too
- Forms and frequencies change over time
- Object: maintaining the relationship to the birth family or the contact itself
- Attitudes of foster carers and birth parents have an influence
- Little knowledge about general outcome of contact – the situation is very complex



**Contact is good, when it doesn't restrict the child's development**

(Biehal et al. 2010, Brousek 2010, Blandow 1999, Cleaver 2000, Erzberger 2003, Kötter 1997, Leitner 2012, Neil & Howe 2004, Prietl 2014, Schmidt et al. 2010, Sinclair et al. 2004 & 2005, Sauer 2008)

# Research question

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How are contacts between foster children and their families in long-term foster care from the perspective of the involved parties (children, foster carers, birth family)?

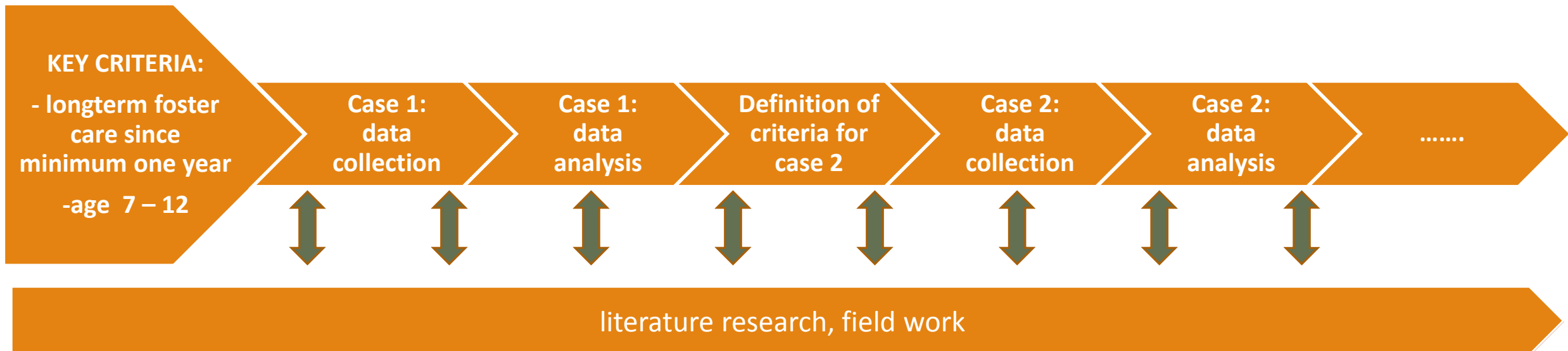
# Methodology

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## - Multi-perspective qualitative study

- Four cases (2011-2014): with child(ren), foster carer(s), birth-parent, perhaps supervising social worker
- Adults: Qualitative focused interviews
- Children: Qualitative interviews based on photo-report and drawing

## - Research process based on Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1998):



# Findings

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# Core category: processual structure of security and insecurity

*Prozesshaftes Sicherheits-Unsicherheits-Gefüge*

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The individual and processual structure of subjective recognised security and insecurity in every contact-figure of birth family, child and foster family, is constituted through internal and external factors and is essential for a working contact.

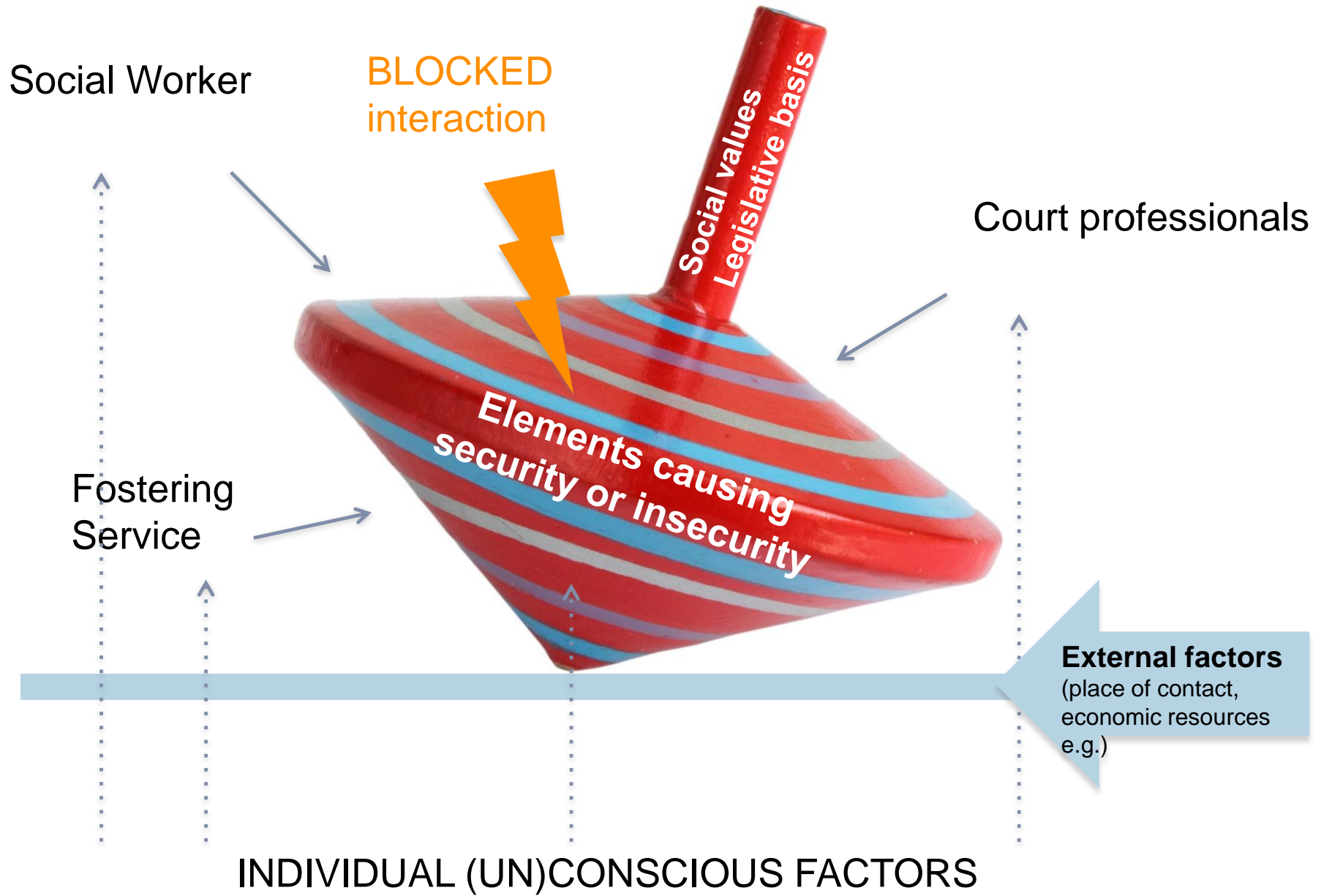
Die einzigartige prozesshafte Dynamik aus subjektiv empfundener Sicherheit und Unsicherheit in jeder Besuchskonstellation von Herkunftsfamilie, Kind und Pflegefamilie bildet sich durch innere und äußere Faktoren und ist wesentlich für das Gelingen des Kontaktes.

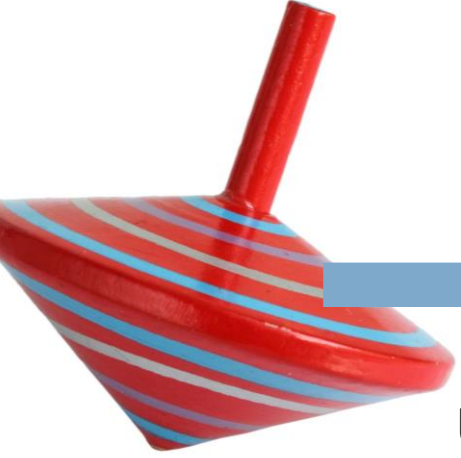
# The spin top model

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DAS KREISELMODELL







# „Understanding of reasons for care“

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Understanding of reasons for care corresponds with the attitude towards contact. Confusion about the reasons for care can lead to anxiety, hopes or openness

→ risk that needs of the child are not seen in an appropriate way

- Foster carers see neglect less seriously than abuse and are open towards contact;
- Father approves of care and prefers contact with the foster parents instead with the ex
- Kinship care case: no fixed perspective (“maybe until end of school”), mother and foster mother are friends and trivialise the reasons “it was the best solution”, “I was working therefore I couldn't look after my child”, “It was the wish of the mother herself”, “I (foster carer) suggested it to her” “he has double the love now”

→ child has no idea why he is in foster care; wishes being at home; many, unclear contacts (foster mother balances contacts between school demands, wishes of parents, child and her perception of parents' condition)

# Practical relevance

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- Every contact-figure is individual
- Contact is a process
- How to increase security and minimise insecurity?
- Sensitivity for the child's behaviour = indicator for necessary changes
- Reflexion of the own influences on the system

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