

Identity and Inclusion

Adoption

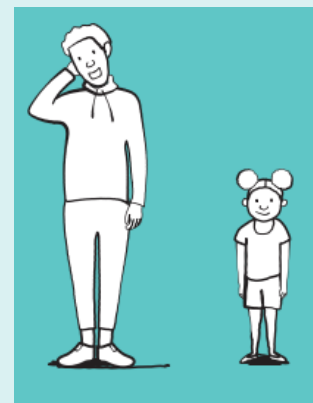
Overview description

Adoption is a way of providing the security, permanency and love of a new family when it is not possible for a child to remain with his/her birth parents or within the birth family. Adoption is a legal process which fully transfers Parental Responsibility from the child's birth parents to their adoptive parents. When the child is settled with the prospective adoptive parent(s) an Adoption Order is granted by a court. A child remains looked after until this point and a child's social worker remains involved. Education settings should continue PEP processes until the order is granted, however good practice highlights that a post-PEP process is helpful.

All children develop in an environment of relationships. Early caregiving relationships have a long-lasting impact on a person's development, ability to learn and their capacity to regulate their emotions and behaviour. Warm and sensitive caregiving relationships are associated with more developed cognitive skills, enhanced social competence, positive mental health, fewer behavioural problems and higher achievement in education.

When a baby or child experiences adverse childhood experiences, stress interrupts typical development. Adverse childhood experiences may include neglect, abuse and household challenges (e.g. parental abandonment, parental drug and alcohol misuse, domestic violence, parental mental illness, parental separation/ divorce). Stress is a normal part of childhood when it is temporary and in the context of safe, secure relationships. Nevertheless, stress can have lifelong consequences for children and young people when it is prolonged and where adults are not available to buffer the stress or provide nurture, care and support (i.e. toxic stress).

Children who are adopted are likely to have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences and developmental trauma and they may continue to experience further adverse childhood experiences (e.g. an adoption breakdown). However, research indicates that supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults as early in life as possible can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress response and developmental trauma. Additionally, it is evident that additional support in early years, schools and colleges can help them to feel ready and able to learn and to deal with the impact of a more challenging start to their life.



This section provides information and advice about adopted children's needs in educational settings, good practice in settings, risk of breakdown and disruption, support and funding for adopted children and their families, and additional resources or links that may be helpful.

What we know about learning and attainment for adopted children

Adopted children are likely to need additional support in school, personalisation to their curriculum and/or targeted interventions to help them to achieve their full potential and to prepare them for adulthood. This might be most of the time or at specific time points or situations within school.

The Department for Education identified that adopted children's attainment in school/college is significantly lower than their peers with the gap widening as they get older. Data suggests that:

At key stage 2, only 49% of children reached age related expectations in reading, writing and maths compared with 75% of non-adopted children (2014)

At key stage 4, adopted children were half as likely than their peers to achieve 5 good GCSE grades (2016)

At 18-19 years, 14% of adopted children are reported to be enrolled in a programme of university study compared to 33% of the general population (Wijedasa & Selwyn, 2011) suggesting that more support is required to encourage adopted children to continue participating in education

Adopted children can present with needs within seven areas including sensory processing, attachment skills, emotional regulation, behavioural presentation, cognitive and learning skills, their understanding of themselves and their self-identity, and dissociation (Van der Volk, 2014). In school this might present as a child who finds it difficult to:

Build trusting relationships with adults or manage friendships and use appropriate social skills

Cope with their feelings and manage their behaviours

Cope with transitions and change

Have a clear sense of their identity

Use their executive function skills (self-organisation, attention & concentration skills, planning skills etc.) and learn

Adopted children are within the statutory guidance for "Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children". This guidance sets out the local authorities' duty to promote educational achievement and to protect looked-after and previously looked-after children from further childhood adversity such as being excluded. Unfortunately, research highlights that adopted children are still 20 times more likely than their peers to be permanently excluded from school (White, 2017). They are also at risk of bullying (Wijedasa & Selwyn, 2011) and anxiety-based school refusal (White, 2018). [See chapters in this Toolkit.](#)

Good Practice in Adoption

“Every interaction is an intervention” (Dr Karen Triesman)

Developmental trauma can be repaired and adopted children can learn the skills they need to reach their full potential. Evidence suggests that the key to recovery, repair and helping the child or young person to learn at school is through relationship-based approaches and helping them to feel safe and secure in school.

“Children being happy and settled in school might be worth a million formal therapy sessions” (Angie Hart, 2007)

1. Helping the young person to feel safe and coregulated

The first step to supporting an adopted child or young person is to help them to feel safe and secure in their educational setting where they have a familiar adult who can help them to manage their emotions through coregulation. This will reduce times where the student's survival system is “turned on” in nursery, school or college (e.g. when they experience the natural instinct to fight or flight or freeze in order to help them to survive an unsafe

Strategies that help students to feel safe and co-regulated include:

- ⇒ A regular routine and structure within the day where changes can be easily communicated to the student. Visual timetables, Now and Next boards or visual schedules can be helpful;
- ⇒ Morning and afternoon meet and greet sessions where an adult can help the child through co-regulation to manage the transition from home to school/setting calmly;
- ⇒ For teaching staff to focus on helping the child to experience joy and fun at their educational setting. This might mean that staff need to consider how to reduce challenge within the curriculum, help the child to experience regular success and provide explicit praise for effort;
- ⇒ To focus on building safe and secure relationships between the child and a key adult or a team of adults and a sense of belonging. It is helpful for adults to be understanding and warm, to help children feel heard and understood whilst also empathically providing structure and boundaries especially at times sadness, difficulty, relational breakdowns or emotional distress. Emotion Coaching can be a helpful technique;
- ⇒ For changes to key adults or the team of adults to be recognised and opportunities to experience a good ending through celebrations and acknowledgment of sadness;
- ⇒ For adults to provide additional transition planning for large transition such as moving year group, moving education setting, changes of key staff;
- ⇒ For adults to be sensitive to key time points within the year that may be difficult for the child due to their early life experiences or because they adopted such as birthdays, Christmas, Easter, anniversaries of leaving their birth parents or moving to their adopted parents;

- ⇒ For teaching staff to be sensitive to adopted children’s experiences when delivering the curriculum including family trees, genetics, cultural/ ethnic heritage, death/ loss, sex education or drug and alcohol misuse. The Adoption Friendly Schools Manual provides ideas of how to adapt the curriculum during these “hotspots”;
- ⇒ Children will benefit from tools and activities that help their bodies to manage difficult experiences or emotions. You might notice unusual behaviours which show that students are seeking ways to calm and settle their bodies (e.g. seeking dark spaces or finding it difficult to sit down). Help them to meet these needs with tools and activities that suit your classroom and school. For example, sensory tools (e.g. fidget tools, weighted objects, wobble cushion), whole class or individual movement breaks (e.g. walking to another classroom, moving heavy objects), repetitious activities (e.g. re-ordering a bookshelf, sharpening the pencils), whole class or individual breathing exercises or opportunity to be in an open or closed space (e.g. spending time outside or having a tent in the classroom); and,
- ⇒ For education setting staff to build supportive communication strategies with parents and for key information to be shared regularly.

It might be helpful to consider some of these key questions:

- ⇒ Are we aware of children who are adopted and their individual strengths and needs?
- ⇒ Has a key adult or team of adults been identified for the adopted student(s)?
- ⇒ What relational approaches are already in place in our setting? Do our policies and procedures (particularly behaviour management) meet the needs of adopted children?
- ⇒ How can current strategies be adapted to support adopted students to feel safer and more secure?
- ⇒ Are we tuned into the emotional needs of this cohort of students, understanding any triggers for dysregulation and how can I or other staff members help them to regulate their emotions?
- ⇒ Are staff confident to meet the needs of adopted children? What can we do to support staff’s understanding and skills in meeting their needs?

2. Helping the child or young person to build attachments and process difficult memories or experiences

Once the child feels safe and secure in their educational environment, they will be more able to learn and manage challenges, spend time building and developing relationships and attachments with key adults and their peers. They will also start to process more difficult memories or experiences: a safe, caring adult can support them to manage their emotions and to acknowledge their loss and grief.

A continuation of the above strategies is essential. Additional strategies that help children to build attachments and process their experiences include:

- ⇒ The key adult/ team of adults to acknowledge and celebrate key milestones for the child;

- ⇒ Adult-led play activities will help to build the relationship between adult and child whilst also safely extending the child's key skills (e.g. emotional regulation and ability to cope with challenge). For example, Theraplay activities may be beneficial;
- ⇒ Targeted group interventions that focus on building the child's relationships with their peers through play, joy and connection;
- ⇒ For adults to reflect about the successful moments of interaction between them and the child: what is the adult doing that helps the child and meets their need? How can this be done more often?

3. Helping the child or young person to develop their sense of identity, make sense of their life story and strengthen relationships

This final stage relies on the child feeling safe and secure with strong, supportive relationships: these relationships help to buffer any strong emotional responses or experiences that they have when they start to learn more about themselves and their early life experiences.

A continuation of the above strategies is essential. Additional strategies that help children to develop their self-identity, make sense of their life story and build stronger relationships include:

- ⇒ To provide regular, protected opportunity within the child's education timetable for them to share their experiences, questions or concerns with a safe, trusted adult. It is okay for adults to not know the answers but the adult needs to validate, empathise and label the child's feelings whilst communicating that they do not know the answer and deciding a plan for how they can together learn more;
- ⇒ Targeted intervention where the child can learn about: their strengths, interests and times they experience joy; things they find difficult or challenging; and, strategies that they find helpful. The child might want to do a "This is me" project or might benefit from identifying a role model and doing a project about them.
- ⇒ The child may benefit from therapeutic intervention such as Family Therapy, Therapeutic Life Story Work; Creative Arts Therapy, Psychotherapy, Drama Therapy, DDP, EMDR or MBT. In school or college, you may have a therapist or counsellor who can provide therapeutic intervention or you may wish to speak to parents and the social worker to explore funding (e.g. the Adoption Support Fund) for therapeutic intervention from community/ health-care providers.

Top
Tips!

For Early
Years

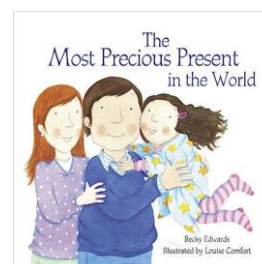
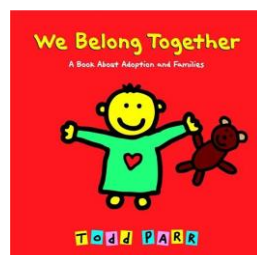
- Allow children to bring a transitional object from home to the setting for reassurance and comfort throughout the day.
- Think with the adoptive parents of ways that you can support the child to know they are being kept in mind at home e.g. a photo in their pocket or a heart sewn into the sleeve of their uniform.
- Ensure you encourage an open dialogue with adoptive parents to support times of transition or change. For example, inform parents if there is an upcoming change to staff/routine and provide guidance for strategies to support this change e.g. photos of new members of new staff members.

Useful links

<https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/spotlight-on/supporting-families/supporting-adopted-children/caring-for-adopted-children/>

<https://www.annafreud.org/early-years/early-years-in-mind/working-with-families-facing-challenges/adoptive-parents/>

Age-appropriate texts



Within the Children and Families Act 2014, new support was made available to adoptive families including:

- free early years education place from the age of 2 years;
- the pupil premium grant from the age of 3 upwards; and,
- priority school admission for previously looked after children.

Post-16

Top
Tips!

Adolescent brains are developing with a focus on who they are and how they are or would like to be seen by other people. This means that they are exploring what they are like, how they experience emotions, how they respond to situations, their confidence in completing activities etc. However, they are more sensitive to feeling judged and become increasingly aware of what makes them different and how they may be at risk of social exclusion.

For adopted children, adolescence can be especially challenging. During this key developmental stage, adoptees begin to connect adoption to their sense of identity. Not only do they need to consolidate their identity, they also must consider how the genetic package they inherited from their birth parents contributes to their concept of self.

Adoptees will often think a lot about their birth parents and they may try to over-identify with them. It is also challenging to integrate two sets of parents as part of their identity especially if there is little known about their birth parents.

While all teens may resist parental authority and alternate between periods of distance and neediness, the adopted teen may become more extreme in this behaviour because of these additional complexities.

Research highlights that the quality of mother-child and father-child relationship plays a crucial role in guiding the process of adoptees' identity formation and influencing their well-being (Ranieri et al., 2021).

What helps? A student's sense of belonging and feelings of safety within their education setting is crucial! See advice above on how to support students to feel safe in their provision.

Virtual School and Designated Teachers role

Since 2018, Virtual Schools and Designated Teachers (DTs) now have the following responsibilities for previously looked after children (i.e. adopted children):

- to be a source of advice and information and to help parents to advocate for their children;
- to support schools with training. Staff and governors must ensure they have accessed training about meeting the needs of previously looked after children; and,
- to make information available to early years settings and schools to improve awareness of vulnerability and needs of children who have been previously looked after including promoting good practice.

Pupil Premium Grant

Staff and experiences in education can have a vital and influential role in helping adopted children to develop socially, emotionally as well as, more obviously, academically. In recognition of the likely additional needs of adopted children and in order to raise attainment for adopted children, the Department of Education provide an annual grant to schools. From April 2020, the pupil premium grant was £2345 per adopted child per year.

These funds are to be used to provide specific support to meet the adopted child's individual needs in order to raise their attainment levels. See the "Good Practice in Adoption" for suggestions on how you may use funding to support your adopted children.

Adoption Support Funding

The adoption support fund (ASF) provides funds to local authorities and regional adoption agencies (RAAs) to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order (SGO) families.

The LA or RAA that places a child with a family is responsible for assessing that family's support needs for 3 years after the order is made and applying for ASF, if appropriate. After 3 years, the responsibility lies with the LA or RAA where the family lives, if they have moved.

Families apply to the relevant LA or RAA, which will assess their needs. LAs and RAAs will:

- ⇒ assess the family and consider if therapeutic support is needed;
- ⇒ decide on the type required and if it is eligible for payments from the ASF;
- ⇒ apply directly to the ASF; and,
- ⇒ purchase the support from their own list of approved suppliers when the ASF approves funding.

In 2019 – 2020, the ASF provided £2,500 per child per year for specialist assessment and £5,000 per child per year for therapy. If additional funding is required, matched funding is requested from the LA or RAAs. Funding amounts may change each year.

For further information, please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/adoption-support-fund-asf>.

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs)

Regional adoption agencies provide support to adults who wish to adopt, adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults. Staff may wish to signpost adults to these services, especially if concerns arise about a student in their educational setting. The

family can work with an Adoption Counts Social Worker to complete an Assessment of Need and apply for funding from the Adoption Support Fund (see below).

- ⇒ **Adoption Counts** provides adoption support in Greater Manchester and Cheshire within Cheshire East, Manchester, Salford, Stockport and Trafford. They work closely with the **Adoption Psychology Service** who are a multi-agency service including clinical psychology, educational psychology, occupational therapy, psychiatry and therapeutic social work. They provide a range of support for adopted children, adoptive parents, social workers and schools. For more information: www.adoptioncounts.org.uk; adoptionenquiries@adoptioncounts.co.uk or 0300 123 2676.
- ⇒ **Adoption Matters** provide adoption services to an area across the whole of the North of England, parts of Wales, Stoke, Stafford, Shropshire and the Isle of Man. For further information: <https://www.adoptionmatters.org/adoption-support/> ; info@adoptionmatters.org or 0300 123 1066.
- ⇒ **Caritas Care** provides adoption services for the North West including Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cumbria, parts of Yorkshire and parts of Scotland including the Dumfries area. For further information: <https://www.caritascare.org.uk/>; adoption@caritascare.org.uk or 0800 652 6955.
- ⇒ **Barnardo's Adoption West** provides adoption services for Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Warrington, St Helen's, Merseyside, Wirral, Cheshire, North Staffordshire, parts of High Peak and Blackburn and Darwin. For further information: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/barnardos-adoption-west>; adoption.west@barnardos.org.uk; or 0161 786 1492.
- ⇒ For other services that provide support outside of Manchester but within the North West, click on this link: <https://www.first4adoption.org.uk/find-an-adoption-agency/>

Useful Resources & Links

Manchester Schools Hub: <https://www.manchester.gov.uk/schoolhub>

First4Adoption: <https://www.first4adoption.org.uk/>

The Adopter Hub: <https://www.theadopterhub.org/>

“Becoming an Adoption-Friendly School”: Langton, E. G., & Boy, K. (2017). *Becoming an Adoption-Friendly School: A Whole-School Resource for Supporting Children Who Have Experienced Trauma or Loss-With Complementary Downloadable Material*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

“Meeting the needs of adopted and permanently placed children: a guide for school staff”: <https://www.pac-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Meeting-the-needs-of-adopted-and-permanently-placed-children-A-guide-for-school-staff.pdf>

“Supporting children at the point of adoption with educational transitions”: <https://www.oneeducation.co.uk/> or 0161 276 0160.

Beacon House: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>.

“The Neurosequential Model of Therapy”: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-Neuro-Sequential-Model-of-Theory-Building-Blocks-005-1-1.jpg>

Emotion Coaching: please see the Emotion Coaching within this toolkit.

Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children (2018):

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

The designated teacher for looked after and previously looked-after children (2018):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children>

Adoption Breakdown

Overview Description

The hope of adoption is for children to be placed permanently with their new parents, however adoption breakdown (or more technically known as disruption) does occur.

In 2014, the Department for Education completed the first national research study that highlighted 4% of adoptions disrupted following the Adoption Order, although figures are believed to be much higher. Disruptions were more likely for children who were adopted between 4 – 11 years old; and, 61% of disruptions occurred whilst the children were 11 – 16 years old.

Adoption disruptions often occurred due to children's experience of developmental trauma and adopted families not receiving enough support to understand and meet the needs of their child from their social workers or local authority. Additionally, key timepoints or situations seemed to trigger increased behavioural difficulties related to the adoption disruption including transitioning from primary to secondary school, bullying/ friendship difficulties, a lack of sensitivity within the school curriculum, puberty, changes within the adoptive or birth family and disclosures of abuse. An adoption disruption often means that the child or young person will re-enter the care system thus creating additional life moves and relational breakdowns which can negatively impact a child or young person's social, emotional and mental health.

What can educational settings do to support if an adoption is at risk of disruption?

It is important to seek support at the earliest point when you become aware that the child's home placement may be very fragile. The child's Social Worker has a statutory responsibility to visit regularly in the period up until the Adoption Order is granted. Therefore, if you have concerns in the early stages of the adoption you should liaise with the adopters and contact the child's social worker (CSW) to discuss this and seek further support. The CSW would support the adopters and liaise with the assessing social worker or the adoption support team to identify support that may prevent a placement disruption.

If the child has been adopted for a number of years and is resident in Manchester (see section on Adoption Counts for areas covered), then further support is available from Adoption Counts. It would be helpful to ask the parents if they have had an adoption support assessment and if they have an allocated social worker from the Adoption Support team.

To access support services you can phone the adoption support team on 0161 234 5268 (parents can phone for support or they can be referred by another professional including teachers and health visitors). There is a range of universal and specialist support available

Top
Tips!

For Early Years

- Remember the importance of the child's key person in the setting. Children may require additional 1:1 play/care with their trusted adult during this time.
- Some children will require more physical contact than before, they may seek out their trusted adults for hugs or want to sit on your knee to share stories and enjoy the closeness from a trusted adult.
- Additional support will be required during periods of transition and change at school. Take time to prepare children for changes to their day/routine and provide visuals and time to ask/answer questions about the upcoming changes.
- Share a class/setting ethos of acceptance and value for one another. Children will need to know that they are safe, wanted and valued within the setting. 'The Invisible String' story is a great age-appropriate book to share with children about love, separation and connectedness.



Another helpful website: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/early-years-childcare/WelcominganadoptedchildtoyourEYFSsetting.pdf>