

Adoptive family forum

The Adoption North
London Newsletter



Issue 2

Pupil Premium Plus advice

**Caring for a child of
a different ethnicity**

**She's not my
real mum**

**Dates for
your diary**



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Dates for your diary

The following training courses are for adopters from any borough in the North London consortium. Each adoption support team in the consortium arranges one course and so offers six courses per year. If you wish to attend any of these courses, please contact your local adoption support team (see back cover for details).



Camden –
Therapeutic
parenting –
Rachel Staff



Hackney –
Parenting
adopted siblings
– Louis Sydney



Barnet – Talking
to your adopted
child – Judith Ellis
and Liz Segal



Enfield –
Managing
contact – tbc



Islington –
Managing
transitions in
education –
PAC-UK



Haringey – De-
escalating violent
situations with
adopted children
– PAC-UK

Education



Claire Doubleday, Education Officer with responsibility for Adoption and Special Guardianship in Islington's Virtual School talks to us about Pupil Premium Plus and how Virtual Schools help schools understand better the needs of adopted children.

Claire's job is to look at how the Virtual School can support not only Looked After Children in schools, but also adopted and children on Special Guardianship Orders. This includes looking at education planning when children are placed, for example continuing the child's Personal Education Plan after the order is made, developing guidelines, training and working directly with schools and involvement in supporting adopters and special guardians with school issues.

Q. What advice can you give adopters and special guardians about the Pupil Premium Plus?

A: Make sure you identify your child to the school so they can get the Pupil Premium Plus. Try and build a relationship with a particular teacher – the Head of Year,

Designated Teacher for Looked After Children or the SENCO.

Be proactive and let the school know of any particular schooling or learning issues that your child has, for example with homework or free time in school. If you think the school is planning to use the Pupil Premium Plus inappropriately, make an appointment to see the Head or Deputy Head to discuss this or, if needed, contact a School Governor, particularly if the school has a Governor with an interest in adoption.

Seek the support of a service that can advocate for your child, PAC-UK, Family Rights Group, or your local Adoption Support Team.

PAC-UK have produced a leaflet on the Pupil Premium Plus and it's available on their website as well as at www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk and www.specialguardiansnorthlondon.co.uk

Finally, if your child also has therapeutic needs that could help their learning, you could also apply for funding through the Adoption Support Fund.

Q. Can Virtual Schools help schools understand better the needs of adopted children?

A. Yes. Although not every Virtual School gets involved with this group of children, as they are not required to do so, and receive no

funding for this. This is a very live issue at this time of cuts to funding.

PAC-UK have produced a training programme which they run in schools, and some Educational Psychology Services are developing training and other programmes on the effects of attachment difficulties on learning. As an adopter you can talk to your child's school about resources and training available. Talk to the PAC-UK Education Advice Line or speak to your Virtual School to see if they can help.

Offer to talk to the school teachers yourself, if you feel confident enough. Meet with the learning mentor or staff training organiser in the school. Talk to the school about using the Pupil Premium Plus for this. Your adoption support social worker will also be happy to help.

I am developing, with Emma at PAC-UK, a Questions Sheet for Adopters and Special Guardians to use during the admissions stage with schools.

Q. Do Virtual Schools in the Consortium meet to share information and knowledge?

A. Virtual Schools meet to discuss Looked After Children educational issues, but not adoption and special guardianship issues necessarily as not all support these children. The Virtual Schools also meet regionally to discuss the needs of permanently placed children.

Annual fun day for adopters

Camden, Hackney and Islington held a joint fun day for our adopters on Sunday 27 September at Waterlow Park. Thank you all so much for coming to this year's event. Children loved spending the day outdoors, having their faces painted,

drawing, painting, playing football and decorating cakes. The highlight of this year's fun day was the animal encounter experience, which gave children and parents the opportunity to get up close to snakes, owls, meerkats, cockroaches and frogs. There was also a raffle with prizes for children and young people, from teddy bears to a tour of the Arsenal stadium.

The parents were able to relax, share their experiences and swap stories.

“ This is such a warm and friendly event which we look forward to every year – it's fun for everyone and it's great being with other adoptive families.” – **Sonia, mum of two boys** ”

A day in the life of an adoption support social worker



I'm fifteen months into my post here in Camden's Adoption Support Team. It's been a wealth of new and wonderful learning, so refreshing to be in such a great supportive team and a genuine privilege to work alongside all the families, sharing in their joys and challenges of parenting.

'A day in the life of' eh?

Adoption Support Social Workers step in to help implement the family's 'Adoption Support Plan' and to begin exploring possible future support needs. In Camden, we formally take over from the assessing social worker after the Adoption Order has been granted.

So, with that little intro, let me take you through a typical day...

9-10am: perhaps a little window for a cup of coffee whilst catching up with urgent e-mails and phone calls, report writing, training/support group preparation and update myself with Consortium news.

10-12am: off to a local park to meet an adoptive mum and help supervise contact with her daughter and her birth sister. This arrangement takes place twice a year. A large part of our role is helping to facilitate contact arrangements between adoptive and birth families. With good support in place, it is an enriching and positive experience. When contact works well, it acts as a vital way to help children integrate their two families and build a healthy identity.

I prepare and debrief the adoptive parent so that the child is well supported during the contact.

12:30-1:30pm: Back in the office for a birth records counselling interview with an adopted adult

who wishes to see his adoption file. This is an initial interview with a 30-year-old man who would like to read his file. He has already told me that he is interested in tracing birth family members and would like to use Camden's Intermediary Service to support him through this. We can provide support with tracing and contacting birth relatives if located.

The team also provides intermediary services for birth family members wanting to trace adult children who were adopted.

1:30-2pm: Squeeze in some lunch (away from the desk when possible!).

2-3pm: A visit to a family to talk with them about life story work to help introduce the theme of adoption. This involves working with families to help adoptive children understand and integrate their early histories. It can be putting together a life story book, later in life letter or one-to-one sessions to explore particular topics.

3:30-3:45pm: A telephone conversation from a parent who would like to have an Adoption Support Assessment to explore therapeutic support such as music therapy or sensory processing for her son using the Adoption Support Fund. An appointment is fixed so that I can visit and carry out an assessment with a view to making an application to the Adoption Support Fund if appropriate. This fund has been established by the DfE for a year until the end of March 2016.

4-5pm: Some much needed office time to allow me to process some letterbox communications – I have received a letter and photos from

an adoptive couple, to be passed on to a birth mum.

I have also had the chance to set up a meeting in a primary school for the following week to accompany an adoptive parent who just needs some support in talking to her son's class teacher about how his early history still has an effect on his learning, affecting his concentration, behaviour and friendships. The family has moved house and therefore her son's school, and she has not found the school very clued up about adoption. I will take our Adoption and Education leaflet and advise the school about the education service at PAC-UK.

5pm: (In theory!) home time, however, tonight I am co-running the adopter's support group. My colleague Sue and I are running a session on mindfulness and children aged 7 to 9. This is a bi-monthly support group which we run alongside Islington, Hackney and Haringey.

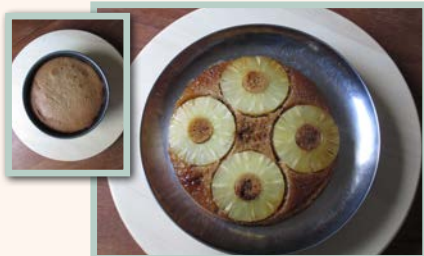
Our role involves supporting Special Guardians too – but I'm sure that's content for a different newsletter!

So there we go – a flavour of what we get up to in a typical full and varied day!

Sara Bonner
Adoption Support Social Worker,
Camden

Recipe of the season

Pineapple upside down (PUD) cake



By Ashmita, mother of an eleven-year-old boy

PUD cake is a firm favourite in our family. I started baking with my son because I'd like him to know how to cook. Baking was a good start and, aged four, it helped him with numbers, accuracy, manual dexterity and he experienced early on the magic of seeing a few ingredients turn into

something wonderful, warming and yummy. He's even taken to passing on his baking skills to his dad who thought it was OK to just chuck all the ingredients into a bowl and mix.

Ingredients

100g butter, 75g castor sugar, 100g self-raising flour, two medium eggs, a splash of vanilla essence, a small tin of pineapple rings (with 4 rings) and 2 to 3 tablespoons of golden syrup.

Switch on your oven (settings: 4; 350, 180 or 160, fan assisted).

1. Butter an 8-inch cake tin. Pat dry and arrange the four pineapple rings (don't include the juice, I usually let my son drink it) so they fit snugly into the tin. Using a tablespoon, roughly spoon two to three spoonfuls of golden syrup over the base of the tin. It doesn't matter if you get some syrup on the pineapple rings.

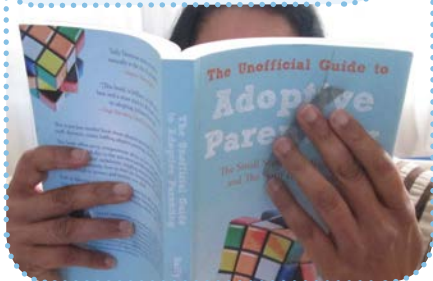
2. Butter and cream and sugar together. Gradually add two beaten eggs to the mix. Sieve and gradually fold in the flour into the mix. Add a splash of vanilla essence. The mixture should be nice and creamy now. Pour over the pineapple/golden syrup and bake for about 25 minutes.

3. If you poke a thin BBQ stick into the sponge, it should come out clean if the cake is baked. Let the cake cool enough to turn out on to a serving plate – with the beautiful pineapple rings showing. Best eaten while still warm.

Please do send in your recipes and why they work for you.

Send an email to elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk with a bit of a background story on why your recipe is special to you and your family.

Recommended reading



The unofficial guide to adoptive parenting by Sally Donovan

Review by Ashmita

In *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, author Sally Donovan sets out to explain what adoptive parenting means. In a nutshell, it means parenting therapeutically and Donovan does a good job of achieving her aim.

I didn't know what to expect (I had not heard of Sally Donovan), but I was hooked from page one. It is not a heavy tome, it's an easy read, written clearly, with clear chapter headings and to the point.

Donovan isn't a professional. She is an adoptive parent, just like you and me. Like most of us, Donovan attempted to parent her children the way we think they should be parented, in the traditional style, with lots of (sticker) rewards for good behaviour and

punishment for bad behaviour. It's an easy enough trap to fall into especially when, during our assessment to be approved as adopters, we are asked to reflect on our own childhoods. So no wonder we either try to replicate our own childhoods – or rebel against them – with our adopted children, but whichever we choose, it's not the ideal way to parent an adopted child who has experienced trauma and neglect, or both.

Donovan explains why traditional parenting isn't always best for adopted children, and with the benefit of her own experiences as an adopter of two siblings, shares what's worked for her and why. She talks in detail about therapeutic parenting as a workable solution to the needs of adopted children. For the book, Donovan said she gathered together everything she'd learnt and 'tested and amended and retested and found to be practical and effective'.

Donovan is brutally frank about her experiences, warts and all though the book is not a depressing read. In fact, it is often amusing and full of hope. It makes for a compelling read.

As an adopter, so much of what you will read in Donovan's book will seem familiar to you, to varying degrees. You will have many light bulb moments (ah, that may explain why he/she does

that) and you will also realise that what you are experiencing is huge, some of it overwhelming.

The feelings of being overwhelmed will be countered by the many examples Donovan gives of what worked for her in parenting therapeutically. Too many examples to list here. For instance, I am glad I am not the only one who hasn't done and redone life story work in the way we are told we should. It seems that the one-size-fits-all is not applicable for life story work – nor in most situations involving adopted children.

Best part of the book? Permission to be fallible, to be human. You don't need to be a perfect parent but you do need to parent therapeutically.

About Sally Donovan

Sally Donovan and her husband Rob adopted two children from local authority care in 2002. She is a writer, blogger and commentator on adoption, and was awarded the British Society of Magazine Editors Business Columnist of the Year 2013 for her regular columns in *Community Care* magazine. She now advises the UK Government on post-adoption support. She is also author of the classic memoir, *No Matter What: An Adoptive Family's Story of Hope, Love and Healing*, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

She's not my real mum

When your adopted daughter says you're not her real mum, how is it best to respond? Sally, who has a 10-year-old birth daughter and a 5-year-old adopted daughter, shares her experiences of just what happened when her adopted daughter casually brought up the topic.

It was said so casually, a matter-of-fact statement that temporarily stopped the room. It was just me and my youngest daughter visiting my mum; the eldest and her dad having stayed in London. This was our first visit to nanny's without them – I'd made the most of enjoying this new, relaxed dynamic where, for a few short days, I wasn't trying to keep both a 10- and 5-year-old happy, in this quiet, 'tick-tock of a clock' environment so different to the harum scarum 90-mile an hour pace and noise of our home.



Mum's brother, who has slipped effortlessly into surrogate granddad role since my dad died, misses a beat or two as he's told this. His eyes flicker from my daughter, to her pointing finger and, finally, who's at the end of it – me.

"Yes, I know all about that, love," he says gently. "But she is, isn't she? Because she's the one taking care of you."

I breathe again, my daughter nods and goes back to combing what's left of his hair.

And I could kiss him – this 80-year-old who's never experienced anything to do with adoption before – was put on the spot, Paxman-style, and came up with an election winner.

And, believe me, I wasn't hurt – it wasn't the first time I'd heard her say this. She'd referred to her 'real mum' a few weeks earlier, when she told me she didn't want to call her by our usual expression, 'tummy mummy', anymore. I said that was fair enough – but maybe she could call her by her first name – or 'birth mum', instead? And then I explained that, although I hadn't given birth to her, and couldn't do anything to change that, in every other way I was, and always would be, her 'real mum' and she was my beloved daughter.

I know this pleased her but I also now think that, for her, it's only half the point. She needs to say it – her 'real', actual mum – whose DNA she shares, and who she already fantasises about coming to her next birthday party – exists. I wonder if saying it out loud is her way of keeping that truth – her birth mum's existence, out there, somewhere – part of our family narrative? Or that she needs me to be able to hear it, and to show I can deal with it, 'hold' it for her,

as part of feeling secure and safe, after all, if I can't handle this truth, then how is she meant to, now, or in the future?

“ I explained that, although I hadn't given birth to her, and couldn't do anything to change that, in every other way I was, and always would be, her real mum and she was my beloved daughter. ”

It somehow reminds me of a film I've not seen since I was a kid but which left a huge impression on me. It's an old Hollywood noir, with a world-weary gumshoe detective tasked with investigating the supposed death of a beautiful young woman called Laura. He has nothing to go on but a haunting portrait of her and various reminiscences of her character by many different people in her life. He becomes obsessed and enthralled. Who is the real Laura and why are there so many wildly at odds contradictions in the reports of what she was like? She is, essentially, the main character, yet she never makes an appearance or speaks for herself – until, that is, the very end, when it's suddenly revealed she's not dead after all and she and the besotted detective finally meet. I've no recollection of where – if anywhere – their relationship goes after that. What on earth happened next...?

My daughter is lucky, in some ways, that we have tons of photos of birth mum at various stages of her life. In fact, recently, when I bought each of my daughters a lovely photo frame, within a nano-second my youngest has flipped through appropriately-sized photos and selected and dexterously fitted the most hauntingly beautiful one of her birth mum. She put it in pride of place on her bedside shelf. And, if you want the truth, I was temporarily poleaxed to find a photo of all of us, that used to be propped up in that same space, discarded, having slipped, unnoticed, beneath her bed. Now, whenever I say goodnight to my daughter, my eyes often wander to her 'Laura', in that photo frame, gazing back at me enigmatically.

My daughter is also fortunate that there are years' worth of 'birth mum' reminiscences we can ask for from close, supportive, birth family members we have regular contact with. For now, at least, they amply fulfil the birth family connection my daughter so obviously needs.

I wish we'd had the opportunity to meet birth mum before our daughter came to us – but it just didn't happen. I wish I could help her know that she really does share her birth mum's smile, and her eyes, which she does, but, like her, I only know this from looking at photographs.

“ If, at some point in the future, my daughter seeks out her 'Laura', I am determined to be at her side, and loving her and supporting her every step of the way. Because that's what a real mum does. ”



“I honestly don't know why you picked crazy wild me”

Bethan is a young adopted adult, in her second year at university. She wrote this poem as she wanted to thank her mum for sacrificing so much for her, and to say a big thank you to her. In Bethan's words, “I love her more than anything in the world. She's my rock and guardian angel as well”.

*There comes a time in every life when trials fill the soul
And all around no help is seen as heartaches take their toll.
Nowhere it seems (that) can she escape
whose life is plagued with hurt
And the pains that fill that life of gloom, no joys can come to avert
When all around on every hand only struggles can be found
And through that life would like to sing,
the heart seems chained and bound
Downward ever falling, that life would soon lose hope
Distresses seem to hang that life at the end of no small rope.
But in that time I rebelled, when my heart was cold and black I
seemed to feel a loving touch, t'was a hand upon my back
And when I looked to see whose hand was extended
in my aid I saw a loving woman with no profits to be made.
The love of life reached deep within and made my heart anew.
I honestly don't know why you picked crazy wild me
Out of all the different girls that you did see
Mature, simple, kind
But you never did seem to mind
So I thank you now mother
For sticking with me these past eight years
Even though you tend to smother You always seem
to deter my tears Now that I'm regrown I can understand
Why there is such a high demand To adopting kids
Because all the parents want to be like you
They want to rescue kids amid all that trouble
And be their knight in shining armour
Live life with no regrets,
Now thanks to you, now I will.*

The things kids say....

We have two girls – a birth daughter, aged 10 and our youngest, aged 5, whom we adopted four years ago...

Here are just a few gems they've come up with over the years.

During a somewhat drawn-out tour of our local secondary school before making the final choices for our eldest daughter for next year, our youngest, after an hour and a half, obviously decided it was time she cut in on the action.

Lightly touching a maths teacher's arm to gain her attention, and stopping her in mid-flow, our daughter piped up: "I can go to ANY secondary school I want to when I'm old enough...cos I'M adopted!"

"Really?" says the teacher, rising to this magnificently. "That's great... and I really hope you choose this school when the time comes?"

Our daughter, after a thoughtful pause...

"No. I won't."

On a day out in Richmond Park, our youngest, and a close friend of ours, climbed a hill a bit ahead of us, towards the trees. The wind was rustling in the leaves and our friend, in poetic mood, said to her:

"The trees are talking to each other, whispering secrets."

She didn't miss a beat:

"Yes. Or it's the wind," she said.

Our youngest, one recent bedtime, with my husband, overheard the following exchange:

"You're my first daddy," she declared. "I've never known my first daddy – so really..."

My husband, obviously moved, fell back on his love the (early) Star Wars films. And in a hushed, complete with requisite, laboured breath:

"Yes, I AM your father..."

After a particularly (and unusually, these days) fractious afternoon recently, wherein it seemed to say, nothing right by our youngest, I was present the time she was in bed. An hour later, it was time old to go up. Giving me an extra big bedtime mummy. My only mummy."

I laughed and said: "Well, I hope so!" And while I added, ruefully: "Though, of course, I'm only mummy, am I? And I sometimes think like this one, that she'd probably prefer to be my mummy..."

I'd meant it lightly, I thought, but maybe something that needed to be aired? So she considered solemnly, then nodded and said: "You know, it's a huge advantage over you because, basically, you're a life, didn't she?"

"Yes, good point, love, and that's just the way it is. Nothing I can do to change that," I agreed.

"But remember, you have an even bigger advantage over me – you're giving her a BETTER life than she has now."

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Our youngest now clearly says she loves us. Recently, she added an extra tag: "I love you mum. And I'll be in my life, un-love you."

"I love you," I repeated, savouring the words and tears pricking my eyes. "I've never heard that before – and what a lovely phrase that is..."

When she was adopted, then: "It's not a disadvantage. It's what I feel."

With daddy saying 'night night' to her and I

"Well, actually, you're my second, but I've always known you're my first AND second daddy."

Back onto a shared reference, as they both imitated an eerily accurate Darth Vader voice, and in a hushed, hushed, he intoned, much to her delight...

Days, I have to say) seemed I could do, or was pretty relieved by the time for our 10 year anniversary hug she said: "My

And then, after a wee while, I'm not your sister's favourite, especially on days when I have to be with her other

When she detected something was wrong, she detected this statement, "I know, birth mum's got a disadvantage, well, she gave her

the way it is and there's no disadvantage.

Disadvantage, mum – I would have had."

I got back from a solo overnight stay at my mum's and the girls wanted to know how nanny's new rescue dog, TJ, was getting on now. I said how nervous, over-excitable and unpredictable he still seemed, even two months since he'd come to live with mum.

Our youngest put her little hands on her hips, waggled her head and exclaimed, in mock outrage: "Well, whaddya EXPECT mum? He's been adopted, hasn't he, just like me! And when I first came to live with you, you were just RANDOM people. I didn't even know you! And really, we're all still totally RANDOM to him!"

A very ordinary teatime, about a year on after we'd adopted our youngest and I'm making boiled eggs. Our eldest casually mentioned how big Auntie V had got now her baby was almost due - and was I that huge when I was pregnant with her? The youngest froze in her tracks and the room seemed to hold its breath: "So, she was born out of your tummy?"

We'd all been upfront from the beginning about adoption and discussing with our youngest her life story, before us. There were no secrets here, we thought. But what we'd not thought of before was her assumption that her big sister was also adopted.

I wiped my hands on a teatowel to give myself time to think and suddenly, thankfully, the words came: "Yes, she was in my tummy," I said, "and, later on, me and dad and your sister really, really wanted another child to join our family that we could love and look after and keep safe. But I wasn't able to grow a baby in my tummy anymore. So we decided to find out about adopting a child..."

"And then you came and found me," she said, a slow smile spreading...

"Yes, we did," I said "and, I want you to know, although the two of you came to us in different ways, you are BOTH my girls – and I love you just as much as I love your sister."

I glanced, then, at our eldest, feeling nervous – was this an okay thing to hear, so explicitly? Without hesitation, she came to her sister's side, smiling, slid an arm around her shoulders, her head against hers. "Yes," she said, "and I love you too. And now you're my sister and you'll be my sister forever and ever."

Then both looked at me, then, and almost in unison, said:

"Are the boiled eggs ready yet?"

Caring for a child of a different ethnicity

Over the next few editions, we will be running extracts from Bristol City Council's 'Caring for a child of a different ethnicity' publication, with the kind permission of Bristol's Adoption Service.

Attachment and self-esteem around identity

It is important to recognise that children who have come into the care system are likely to have attachment issues due to traumatic beginnings in their lives. In addition to the issues of attachment, trauma, grief and loss of foster carers and birth family, children being adopted or cared for transracially may experience an extra challenge in finding their identity in a family that doesn't represent their own ethnicity.

Because you are not raised in that culture and don't come home to that culture, you will never be like those that have been. This was the one thing that I mourned and grieved about the most. I wasn't as in touch with the culture like my black friends were. But I was so blessed to have been exposed to my culture through my close friends at school that I was able to develop my racial identity and pride in my ethnicity. My parents did some extreme things, like moving us to a black neighbourhood, to assure that I would be in touch with my race and culture. That has made a HUGE difference in my upbringing. It allowed me to feel normal around people like me and feel a sense of belonging. So in that aspect I don't feel deprived at all.

Kevin Hoffman, transracial adoptee and author of *Growing up White in Black*

The formation of attachments builds on the child's desire not just to be loved and accepted, but also to be able to admire important others. Meeting ethnicity and identity needs is an essential part in your child's development and will actively promote their ability to develop secure and healthy relationships within their new adoptive or foster family network. Once a child is valued for who they are, it paves the way for them to attach to their new family, in gaining identity as a secure adopted/fostered child alongside their own individual identity. It may be that as a child grows up, they may not wish to

claim aspects of their background and ethnicity, but it is important that parents and carers maintain a steadfast and consistent approach to valuing and accepting their child's ethnicity and continue to be involved in diverse events and communities as part of everyday, normal family life.

Children in transracial placements do not have the advantage of learning about their birth cultures through everyday cues and bits of knowledge, unconsciously assimilated and passed down through the years and generations, in the same way that families of the same ethnicity do. For transracial placements, deliberate thought must be given to addressing the cultural and identity needs of a child. Choosing a certain barber/hairdresser, dentist or doctor, babysitter or Cub Scout group can influence children's sense of themselves.

Interestingly enough, what's hard about transracial parenting is building a feeling of ordinariness into extraordinary days, making experiences into more than just a series of 'cultural' field trips, but creating a securely unified life for our son.

Jan Wolff, *Raising a Child of Another Race*

Making connections with other cultures and ethnicities for the benefit of your multi ethnic family might seem difficult, for example, can you go up to someone and say "Hi! My child is Asian and I need Asian people around my dinner table. Can you come to dinner tomorrow?". It is possible to build friendships and connections as you would everywhere else but with a bit more thought given to mixing with those of your child's ethnicity. Have a think about who are you going to sit next to at parents' assembly, what park are you going to visit, what is your next holiday destination, who are you going to talk to about school costumes?

A child's self-esteem is invaluable in enabling them to go out into the world with confidence and resilience, and is built through a sense of belonging at home and in their immediate community, and being valued at home and wider society. A child in care may already have low self-esteem, maybe

feeling they have failed as a person as they did not stay with their birth family, maybe fantasising they were so 'bad' that 'something was wrong with them', so that they could not be cared for in the way their peers are. Children with low self-esteem are vulnerable to peer pressure, lack resilience to stressful situations (such as racism), and may be unwilling to try new things. It is your role as a parent to help your child build skills to deal with such situations and to promote positive self-esteem.

Summary

- Make time to listen to your child and ensure they feel that their thoughts and feelings are valued and listened to.
- Celebrate both similarities and differences.
- Regularly point out your child's strengths and abilities. Use opportunities to build on these; if they appear good at sports, enrol them in a club, if they show flair for writing, encourage them to start a blog, for example.
- Don't become defensive or feel threatened if your child becomes attached to people from their own cultural or racial groups, especially as they grow older.

Practical activity

Practise phrases on how to celebrate differences and similarities, such as:

"You are great at sums, just like me."

"You and I both love the colour red, don't we?"

"Yes, your skin is darker than mine. There are all kinds of beautiful skin colours."

"Look at your great strong legs, I wish I had legs like that."

"You and your sister both have beautiful and different hair."

Think about your child's ethnicity and racial identity and how you could incorporate these into your everyday life: sports, music, festivals, crafts, art, leisure, food, toys, shopping, literature, holidays, healthcare, friends, clothing, education, language.

If you have a story of caring for a child of a different ethnicity, please get in touch with us.



Your questions answered

Please send your questions by email to elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk

We'll aim to respond to you by phone or email, and may publish a summarised version in the next edition of this newsletter. Natalie is a social worker who works in adoption support.



Dear Natalie

I adopted Naomi at the age of nine months. I am feeling at my wit's end. Stress is beginning to get the better of me and I am tearful. Naomi has hit adolescence too early! She is only 12 but looks and behaves so much older. She is full of attitude towards me speaking in a way that I find alienating and behaving as if I am the enemy. I get told all the time that this is a phase and that all teenagers behave like this which is unhelpful and irritating especially as she is not a teenager and my friends are not adopters. Naomi regularly marches out of the house in anger and won't say when she will come back (though it is five minutes later that she returns). Swear words pour out of her mouth and her eyes are full of hatred as she talks to me. She coats herself in make-up and locks herself up in her room spending any spare time texting, instagramming and skyping. There seems nothing positive about our relationship and I am looking back to those early sleepless nights with fondness! I feel like I have lost the baby I loved. My ex-partner sees a better side of Naomi and she stays with him and his new wife once a month. Have you any suggestions that might make life not seem such hard work?

Martha

Dear Martha

It is true to say that adolescence is starting earlier for girls and can be a difficult as well as exciting time

for all affected. Naomi is adjusting to the secondary transfer and the need to prove herself. Perhaps she is drawn to identify with the apparently more sophisticated 'older teenage girl' in order to boost her own uncertain sense of self? Children of this age are dealing with conflicting emotions and changing states of mind about who they are and who they are going to be. At school it may be about whether they are seen as 'swot' or 'rebel'. Inside themselves it may be about which societal and parental values they are going to emulate and which they are going to reject. Remember Naomi is changing all the time and this behaviour really is likely to be temporary but I don't want to minimise how awful you must be feeling.

For adopted children there is sometimes a fascination with the lifestyle that their birth mother might have led. As a way of understanding it, attempts to live it, can take place. Finding an identity to feel comfortable in can be a lifelong process. Sometimes adolescents think they can pick identities readymade from the shelves. The coating on of make-up whilst seen as fashionable can also serve as armour or disguise, symbolising how far someone feels from the nakedness of just being themselves. The forging of a more lasting sense of self is internal work and evolves over time. On a positive note I would say that Naomi sounds as if she is able to show a loving side and she is socially engaged even if alone in her room. Other worries may be

affecting her as she approaches adolescence. The break-up of your marriage and losing the parental couple as well as the need to find a new way of managing two home environments may well be factors that trigger off questions about how lovable she is. At the risk of over analysing the power of adoption, it must be remembered that the early separation from birth parents meant a final separation. It is a truism that often the person that is closest to the child receives the worst behaviour though I can appreciate this is little comfort. I wonder if you are doing things that relax you and take you away from the home and whether you are cultivating your own support networks. Sometimes it is our perception of events as much as what is happening that trigger a downward spiral. Make sure you have friends you can be open and vulnerable with and who help you to keep things in proportion. Check out with them whether your expectations are too high. Do ring up your adoption support service and ask for a home visit if this feels possible. Make use of the adoption support social worker's access to supportive groups, workshops and therapies. Remember the Adoption Support Fund is only here until May 2016 and now is the time where expense does not have to be the reason for you to be refused therapeutic services that you have selected. A thorough assessment by an adoption support social worker still needs to take place and this too can feel supportive and helpful.

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter about adoption in North London. This newsletter is a forum for you to correspond with us, so the content will continue to adapt to what you need to know and want to read about. If you have any ideas for future features or a story to tell us about your life as an adopter or prospective adopter, please do write in. To send us your comments or suggestions about the newsletter, please send an email to elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk or call **020 7974 1152**. The more we share, the more we help each other. Please submit your stories by 11 January 2016 to be considered for inclusion in our April edition. We will anonymise your story, if required.

Adoption North London is a consortium arrangement between six north London boroughs: Camden, Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington. Five of the boroughs have been working together in an adoption consortium since 2003, with Hackney joining the partnership in 2013.

For information about the consortium, the training we offer and useful adoption support literature, including our leaflet on adoption support, go to our website at adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk

Meet our adoption support social workers



Liz Segal
Barnet Team



Sara Bonner
Camden Team



Morris Linton
Enfield Team



Irma Thomas
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