

Adoptive family forum

The Adoption North
London Newsletter



Issue 4

**We Are
Family**

**Adoption
Support Fund**

Mindfulness

**Parenting by
Connection**

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

**Recipe of the season
Fruit cake**



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Support group dates for your diary

Support groups for adopters in the Consortium are held in Barnet and Enfield. They are run by the Consortium Adoption Support staff and are held every other month, usually in the evenings. They provide an opportunity for you to meet other adoptive families and staff.

Support groups in Enfield:



To find out more, please email natalie.salaman@enfield.gov.uk

Support groups in Barnet:



To find out more, please email eldica.noel@barnet.gov.uk

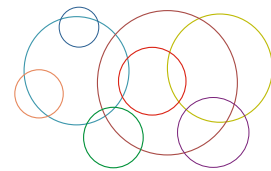
We Are Family (WAF) run regular local support groups in the following London areas:

Hackney and Islington, Enfield, Southwark, North Bucks, Richmond, Shepherds Bush/West London and East London, along with two pan-London groups, one for single adopters and one for prospective adopters.

You don't have to live in one of the boroughs to visit a group.

Visit www.wearefamilyadoption.co.uk for details of your local WAF group.

We Are Family



We Are Family is an adoption support community. Among other services, they provide local playgroups and parent-led

support groups that are safe places for adoptive parents to share the ups and downs of adoptive parenthood.

We Are Family publish a popular weekly blog where adopters share all aspects and experiences of parenting. To view previous blogs or browse their archive please visit <https://wearefamilyadoption.wordpress.com>

To submit your own blog, please email blog@wearefamilyadoption.org.uk

All posts, like the one below, written by an adoptive parent, are published anonymously with any identifiable references removed.

Thank goodness for the parent group

We soon realised – and it was a shocking realisation – that we were in it over our heads.

We had listened intently at the prep course, read copiously, had scoured the internet, picked the minds of the experienced parents around us; we thought we were prepared. However, can anything truly prepare you for the impact of an adopted child coming into your life? Especially when a child displays the trademark – and oh so challenging – behaviour of a traumatised child?

We are taught what to expect and, indeed, one of the biggest criticisms of social services by many of our fellow adopters during the adoption process was that they were overly negative and continually painted the bleakest of pictures. Even if it's not as bad as it could be, it seems that most adoptive parents go through a tough time once that initial 'honeymoon period' is over; it takes us by surprise and immediately rocks that solid foundation we thought we had built with all our preparation. Some of us had years to prepare, yet when we are faced with the reality we realise that it's simply nothing like we expected.

The impact of a child arriving in your – often calm and in hindsight easily manageable – life is truly huge. Apart from the immediate pressure of the responsibility for these little lives and the exhausting non-stop care and consideration that they require, there is the enormous

emotional turmoil that I am sure none of us could have anticipated.

Before placement and in the early days I think many of us can be in denial; a child is just a child and our son/daughter is going to be just fine regardless of what we are being told. I think this can be especially true of adopters of babies or very young children. When the reality of our children, our family, our new life hits it can be frightening and with social services stepping back it can feel worryingly lonely.

To use a clichéd metaphor, for me it really did feel like being in the middle of an endless ocean on a rickety raft; I truly felt adrift and uncharacteristically helpless. On good days it felt like I had oars that could dig deep into the water and make progress, on other days it was oars that barely skimmed the surface or indeed on the worse days (and there were plenty) with no oars at all – bobbing along at the mercy of what life was throwing my way.

For somebody who likes – no, needs – to be in control this was new territory and I was far from comfortable with it.

I needed a life line – oh how I needed a life line – to help me pull the raft ashore and to give me some control again. Turning to our network of family and friends helped tremendously, but as we all no doubt discover, advice and help from parents of birth children is not always what is best for us parents of adopted children.

Then I was introduced to the We

Are Family Parent Group, which has proven to be exactly the life line I required.

I can't say it has 'solved' my family's problems, but it has helped me understand them and most importantly helped me to put them into perspective. It has made me realise that we are not alone and that what we are dealing with is not exceptional; that others out there are struggling just the same as we are and that it is just fine to be doing so.

The parent group is for sharing – sharing your experiences (good and bad) and your worries and your fears – and the group is also about listening, listening to others who clearly understand what you are living through and dealing with as they too face the same challenges and indeed the same joys.

No advice or suggested solutions tend to be offered directly – as nobody is qualified to do so – but by sharing our stories, our problems, our difficulties and, of course, the many positives we are experiencing, we support each other and we can take away what we feel we need to take or what we feel can help us.

If nothing else, the group just gives us a chance to vent – to let it all out – and not to feel judged on any level while we are doing so. That is enormous, that is appreciated and if you have never been along, that is highly recommended!

www.wearefamilyadoption.co.uk

 [@wearefamilyadop](https://twitter.com/wearefamilyadop)

 [We Are Family.](https://www.facebook.com/wearefamily)

Adoption Support Fund FAQs

Why was it established?

Many families need some kind of support following adoption and too many have struggled to get the help they need in the past. The Fund enables them to access the services they need more easily in future.

Who is eligible for the Fund?

The Fund is available for children up to and including the age of 18 (or 25 with an SEN statement) who are adopted from local authority care in England or adopted from Wales but living in England.

What will I need to do?

To access the Fund, you will need to have an assessment of your family's adoption support needs by the local authority. The local authority that placed your child with you is responsible for assessing your adoption support needs

for three years after the adoption. After three years it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live (if different). Where the social worker identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial to your family, they will apply to the Fund on your behalf, who will release funding to the local authority, subject to a £5,000 per child 'fair access limit' (see below).

The social worker will be expected to talk to you about who can provide the types of service you need and which provider you would prefer. This could be the local authority itself, a neighbouring local authority, an independent provider or an NHS provider.

What support will I be able to get?

The Fund can provide money for a range of therapeutic services and can include creative therapies, music therapy, play therapy, attachment-based therapy and psychotherapy. The Fund can also finance further specialist clinical assessments such as for Foetal

Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

However, demand for the Fund is over twice the level forecast. As an interim measure, for the remainder of this financial year in order to keep within budget whilst maintaining maximum benefit to adoptive families, a £5,000 per child 'fair access limit' will be applied to applications to the Fund to ensure that the greatest number of children and families can continue to access support throughout the financial year.

A further £2m increased funding has been agreed by the government, making the total £23m. The ASF will contribute more in exceptional cases where the local authority agrees to match funding – up to a maximum total funding from the ASF of £30,000, taking into account any applications made since 1st April 2016.

Accessing the Adoption Support Fund

by Sarah,
mother of a five-year-old boy

Since the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) came into force in May last year, I have managed to make no less than two successful applications. Together, the two applications amounted to the excellent Parenting-Back-To-Front package (workshops) as hosted by Family Futures. Their workshops have been inspirational, and changed the way I parent. Two courses, in particular, stand out, and I would do them both again tomorrow if I could.

These were a course on Sensory Integration with Mandy Ruddock and the other was Zach Gomm and Denise Golding's Great Behaviour Breakdown (GBB). I attended the latter with my husband. Both courses have certainly made our family much calmer. We respond much more quickly to signs of stress and anxiety in our son, and therefore we are (generally) able to regulate his moods more effectively. There are fewer tantrums, less yelling, less screaming, hitting, etc. And way more collaboration and snuggles. We

have by no means eliminated bad and difficult behaviour, but we both seem more able to cope, equipped as we are with a zillion new tools and ideas.

As a family, we didn't go for individual therapy for our son. He is only five. We thought the money and effort would be better spent on our parenting skills and understanding. There is mounting evidence that parenting programmes attended while the child is still under five – preferably by both parents (if there are two parents) – have a long-lasting positive impact on the whole family.



The Parenting-Back-To-Front package definitely helped us, and we are still feeling the benefits of our newly acquired wisdom, if not necessarily perfect skills. The courses are based on solid theory, but always delivered practical ideas. My favourite kind of learning. Practice makes the master. The GBB course has follow-ups via Skype. So, from the comfort of my sofa,

I can get regular top-ups. There are no quick fixes for early trauma, but I have learned so much that I believe makes me a better parent than I was.

An added benefit for me was that the courses were attended in groups, and so I also learned a lot from the other participants. I enjoyed, was saddened and inspired by their stories. Meeting them no doubt enhanced my own learning.

The application for the ASF was easy: a week or so after my initial email, my post-adoption social worker came to my house while our son was in nursery; we filled in a form over a cup of tea and a catch up. I did have to share some difficult and personal stuff, but together we found a respectful and honest way to describe the reasons why I was applying for the necessary funds. A few weeks later I heard that my application had been successful. The second one was just as easy. Both applications were made with the local authority where my son was adopted from, as the application was within the first three years post adoption.

I now have the third application for ASF funding underway. However, that has not run as smoothly. This was done from another borough within the North

London consortium. I have since learnt that there was some kind of muddle with my application. Chasing this up did eventually lead to getting it picked up by another authority and whilst I did get an apology, I had been left waiting for over half a year. What I learnt from it is that it pays off to chase. And so I would urge any of you to stay on the case with your local authority about your application if you have been waiting for more than a couple of weeks, especially as I hear for many others in the North London consortium and

across London there is a lot of waiting involved. Sadly this period of waiting is further marred by not hearing anything. I understand from those who process the applications that some applications may have been turned down and additional information is asked for and that there are now waiting lists for the most sought after therapies. I also understand that there has been a run on ASF applications, and many social workers are very stretched. However, not hearing anything leaves families not knowing whether or not the

assessment has not been passed on, or indeed whether the applications are successful or not. I would encourage families to talk to their local authority and to chase their case and suggest you do too, if you find yourself in this situation.

Personally, I have been very happy with the ASF. I would love my latest application to be successful too, because I have by no means stopped learning how to be a better parent to my son. And I will certainly go back again to the ASF if or when I need it.

Adopting Changes

Adoption North London has been running the parenting programme 'Adopting Changes' for a number of years. Recently, this programme has been jointly facilitated by experienced adoptive parents and an adoption support social worker.

The programme is best for parents of children aged between 2 to 8 years, who have lived within their families for at least six months. It covers social learning theory, using ideas from 'The Incredible Years' by Carolyn Webster-Stratton and the work of the Maudsley. The programme's emphasis is on attachment and positive parenting.

It is evidence-based and runs for six, three-hour long sessions, over a period of 12 weeks.

Key topics include:

- Play, positive attention
- Encouragement and praise
- Rewards, incentives and celebrations
- Limit setting, selective ignoring
- Taking care of yourself

Adopting Changes is a hands-on, skills-based training. The programme offers the opportunity to learn new skills each week and as part of this home practice is offered, giving you a chance to try out ideas and discuss with other parents and facilitators at the following session.

In addition to learning new skills parents have a unique opportunity to meet other adopters in a small, safe setting and expand their support networks. This is supportive to families who realise that they are not alone in dealing with some of the challenges of parenting an adopted child.

By the end of the programme, you will:

- Be familiar with the parenting programme model, the evidence base and underpinning theory.
- Understand how attachment theory is integrated into the model.

- Have experienced and practiced exercises on the main themes of the programme and considered how they can best be used in your family.

We plan to run the next course in January 2017.

Please let your adoption social worker know if you would like to attend the next programme. If you would like further information about the programme, please email sue.bineham@camden.gov.uk

“ It helped me to focus on positive parenting and I have taken away some useful tips ”

“ The honesty, warmth and generosity of spirit was fantastic. I felt secure and confident to question, query and comment ”

“ Having adoptive parents facilitate the programme was great. I really felt understood in what I was having to manage ”



Recipe of the season - Fruit cake

The recipe is provided by Lucy who lives in North London with her partner Jo and their two children, aged 5 and 2.

I always thought I couldn't make cakes and then that changed magnificently when a friend passed on her mother's fruit cake recipe. I remember having to eat this cake as a child and never liking the bits of candied peel or cherries in it and it was never moist and light, or so I remember. So I was reluctant to try it and I waited and waited until I just had to bite the bullet.

After three years of making it, I have it down to a fine art. This recipe makes two cakes; usually I give one to my mother-in-law and we keep one at home for the family. The kids adore it and almost every birthday celebration cake I bake, I use this recipe as it's light, moist and holds together well. It doesn't take a lot of fuss. My five-year-old loves making it with me, so he has his own mixing bowl and spoon and big supply of raisins. He helps me weigh out the ingredients and grease the tins.

I am never much for measurements which is another reason I love this cake as it's not fiddly. The cake tins I use are a standard loaf tin and a 6" square or round tin.

Ingredients

125g of soft unsalted butter
4 cups of mixed fruit (use any combination of whatever you like)
I use 1 cup of each of dried cranberries, raisins, currants and sultanas.
1/4 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1tsp of mixed spice
1 cup caster sugar
1 cup of boiled water
1 cup of plain flour
1 cup of self-raising flour
2 eggs



Method

Melt the butter in a large saucepan. Add in the fruit, sugar, mixed spice and water.

When it's at boiling point turn off heat.

Add in the flour and bicarbonate of soda.

When it's cooled a little then add in the eggs.

Heat the oven to 120 degrees.

Grease the tins and bake for about an hour.

Insert a skewer in the cake to check it's cooked and continue cooking if needed but keep checking that the cake is cooked. When cooked, cool for a few minutes and turn out on a baking tray.

I cover the cakes whilst they are cooling with a tea towel. Once fully cooled, I wrap the cakes in tin foil and store them in a tin.

After a week, I cut into them and the results are always moist and almost sticky, and definitely moreish. Once they are cut, I keep covered in the tin and have found that the longer they are around the nicer they taste.



Mindfulness

As part of our therapeutic life story work service, we are offering parents the opportunity to attend our complimentary mindfulness programme based in Hackney. We are all aware that living with children who have attachment

difficulties can be uniquely stressful.

Research shows that mindfulness can reduce stress symptoms associated with parenting, help parents feel calmer and improve anxiety, depression, well-being and sleep difficulties.

Mindfulness is a tool for everyday life, enabling us to be more aware and connected with our bodies, minds and the people we care about. Increasingly used in a wide variety of applications, it is also endorsed by the NHS and included in NICE guidelines. Research has shown its benefits for adoptive parents and by the latest thinking in the field of parenting children with troubled backgrounds.

Facilitator: Patricia Downing, Adoptionplus Mindfulness Practitioner and BACP Counsellor

Venue: The Tomlinson Centre, Queensbridge Road, London, E8 3ND

Times: The group will run from 11am until 1.15pm over a period of 8 weeks

Dates: 27th January, 3rd February, 10th February, (no course 17th February – half term), 24th February, 3rd March, 10th March, 17th March and 24th March

If you would like to book a place, please contact Melissa Manser, Team Administrator for Adoptionplus, melissa.manser@adoptionplus.co.uk or call 01908 218251.

Parenting by Connection

A taster of *Parenting by Connection* by Miranda Fairhall, mother of a seven-year-old

Before I discovered *Parenting by Connection* I was that mum we've all seen. The one forcefully dragging their daughter kicking and screaming out of a house at the end of playdate – head bowed, blood boiling, uttering threats, desperately wishing she wouldn't make such a scene; all the while flooded with feelings of utter shame. This was not the parent I'd intended to be, it felt out of my control.

I was searching for answers around my volatility and reactivity to her behaviour. I sensed what I was lacking was an opportunity to release my tension. Tension that was preventing me from thinking and acting rationally, but I had no idea how to find this. Then I stumbled upon *Parenting by Connection*. Central to its ethos is the recognition that parenting is serious emotional work requiring ongoing support; support which research now suggests can prevent an adoptive parent, kinship carer or foster carer from experiencing compassion fatigue in the struggle to meet our children's needs and parent therapeutically.

In their book 'Listen – Five Simple Tools to Meet Your Everyday Parenting Challenges', Patty Wipfler (founder of Hand in Hand Parenting) and Tosha Shore write about the need for support if parents are to help their children heal. "When a parent gets listening support they will grow right alongside their child. They'll facilitate the change they long for and relish the results".

Since learning the *Parenting by Connection* listening tools and putting them into practice, I can feel myself increasing my ability to go with my daughter's emotional moments, to let her offload her tension, the stuff that causes her rigid and off-track behaviour.

I also feel certain my 'listening partnerships' (a parent-to-parent support tool) are empowering me so that I have more moments where I am

able to become the warm supportive parent (leader) my daughter needs me to be, to rise above the shame and my own past hurts that have previously bound me in acting out when faced with my daughter's struggles.

Here's an example.

Meeting defiance with connection

It's time for Miss M's playdate to end. She is four years old and endings are a challenge. I do the usual 10- and 5-minute heads up and I sense the weapons being drawn for a stand-off. I squat to her level and say warmly "It's time to go darling." And she's off!

Into her friend's bedroom, ranting and raving "I'm not going! I hate you! You can't make me! It's not fair!" and on it goes. Miss M reaches for one of her friend's soft toys and before I can get to her she launches it across the room.

I can feel the panic rise inside me, the fear that this might escalate (my worst nightmare). I manage to soothe myself with the learnt mantra 'this is not an emergency' as she starts to move towards a pillow on the bed – she is losing it. I recall the tool of SETTING LIMITS, this requires me to move in close, set a loving limit and, most importantly, listen.

I begin to do so, bringing a caring limit as I place my hand gently over her hand on the pillow, she threatens further to throw it. Keeping my hand lightly but firmly in place I say "Wow! You really want to throw that pillow."

"Yes!" she yells forcefully "and now I'm going to throw the bed." I catch a fleeting smile in the heat of the moment, an invitation to play. Miss M has signalled her need to offload the force of emotion present in her little being through play. In *Parenting by Connection* this is known as PLAYLISTENING, enabling a child to offload tension through laughter whilst having a sense that she is in charge. I accept the invitation.

"How about we throw it out the window?" I suggest, playfully following her lead.

"Yes! Yes!" she yells, "and the teddy bear!" I am listening and following her

smiles and giggles. Thankfully, today (due to my LISTENING PARTNERSHIPS) I am able to let go of the judgement I imagine being directed towards my daughter's behaviour and my parenting as I mime throwing the bear out the window... "There it goes... splat!" I say, making a big splat like noise. Her eyes soften; Miss M identifies more and more things to be thrown out the window; she joins in pretending playfully, yet forcefully to toss each one. The high octane energy is dissipating and she is coming back to a place of regulation. "I want to throw YOU out the window!" Miss M exclaims making direct eye contact with me.

"Oooh yes" I say smiling into her eyes and playfully exclaim "what are you going to do with me!?"

"Throw you out the window!" she repeats and giggles with glee. I move in close with affection and nuzzling known as a 'Vigorous Snuggle' and playfully cry "Throw me out the window!?" More giggles follow and as I move away, a little Miss M sing songs "I'm throwing you in the rubbish bin" more laughter and this time she moves into me for an embrace.

We are now connected

"Ready to go my love?" Willingly she gathers her things and she is ready to head home.



Miranda Fairhall is a founding member of We Are Family and a certified Hand in Hand Parenting Instructor of "Parenting by Connection"

To find out more about her courses, please visit her [facebook page](#)

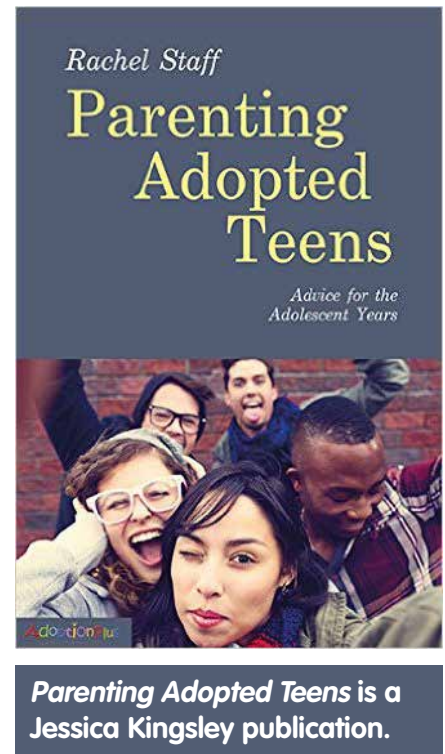
Attune4Connection – Therapeutic Parenting Support <https://www.facebook.com/anadoptivemum/>

About *Parenting Adopted Teens* by Rachel Staff

How can adoptive parents and their teenagers navigate the challenges of the adolescent years? Full of valuable, grounded advice, *Parenting Adopted Teens* by Rachel Staff, will help parents to understand the impact of early trauma on a child's development and the specific nature of the changes that occur during adolescence.

With tips for coping with common problems, it combines first-hand accounts from professionals, parents and teenagers themselves. It also covers essential topics such as family and peer relationships, developing healthy intimate relationships, emerging identity issues, and contacting a birth family.

Accessible and honest, *Parenting Adopted Teens* is an invaluable resource for adoptive parents as well as professionals working with them. In *Parenting Adopted Teens*, Rachel has drawn on her years of experiences of direct work with teenagers, running a support group for parents of adopted teenagers, and her collaborative work with fellow specialists in adoption support. She has created an essential and accessible handbook to add to the growing body of knowledge about adoptive parenting and being an adopted teenager. In a very honest way, Rachel addresses key themes of developmental trauma, neuroscience and underlying behaviours with wisdom, empathy and no judgement at all.



Book review by Hillary Randall



At last, a book that puts into perspective all the problems that adopted teenagers and their parents battle with on a daily basis and doesn't make us feel that we are bad parents. The book was easy to read with just the right amount of theory to underpin some of the behaviours. It gives lots of practical advice on how to handle a number of issues that we face during these difficult times. It also gives parents the message of hope that if we can weather these stormy years, light awaits us at the end of the tunnel. I would certainly recommend this book to any parent of an adopted teenager.

Young Explorers & Teen Spirit

Group therapeutic programmes for adopted children and teens.

Over the past year, Body & Soul, a charity based in Islington, has been working in partnership with the North London Adoption Consortium to develop a programme to support the needs of adopted children and teenagers living across the six London boroughs. The establishment of the Adoption Social Fund has provided the opportunity to explore new forms of provision that were previously absent or at the very best, were in short supply.

Twelve months on, 'Young Explorers' (8-12 yrs) & 'Teen Spirit' (13-18 yrs) have now become established services that are running regular Saturday programmes. Jed Marsh, Assistant Director of the charity, explains why the idea has really struck a chord with the families attending:

"What we have carefully shaped, is an environment where adopted children and young people feel safe and supported, where they can learn to express themselves and where the focus is on their strengths. All too often, the children we see find themselves in situations that aren't shaped to sensitively meet their needs. Here

we have a place that they can regularly visit, where relationships can be built with our team but more importantly with other members of the group."

With now more than 40 children as regular members of both the services, Young Explorers & Teen Spirit feels like an exciting new community that is helping the members to develop ways to manage friendships and begin to transfer their new skills and learning to the rest of their lives.



“The feedback from parents has been extremely positive”

“The children we see often struggle to establish positive peer relationships or feel motivated to stick at activities, so it’s been fantastic to see them voting with their feet and turning up week after week!”

The Parents Place is a dedicated space where parents of children attending sessions can have a four-hour break, relax and meet other adoptive parents over lunch and tea. Crucially, it also gives them access to a therapeutic session where

their day-to-day questions and challenges can be addressed through access to a team of therapists who specialise in skills-based approaches that can be put into action straight away.

One parent with children in both age groups explained: “Having a break is vital, but being able to speak to the other parents and get the support of the group with new ideas and perspectives really helps, especially if you’ve had a tough week.”

The programmes provide a different experience for members. With a blend of adventure, recreation, non-competitive challenge and fun, there is a secure base to

work therapeutically over a prolonged period of time. Dance, drama, art and music group therapy sessions have become a consistent basis to explore themes that are familiar to the children and young people in contained creative ways that never push children beyond what feels comfortable. Yet, as we see every week, these children have talents that often just need the right environment to flourish.

If you are interested in finding out more about any of the programmes, contact Jed at Body & Soul jed@bodyandsoulcharity.org or your Adoption Support Team

Suggestions for free family days out

This list of free activities has been compiled by Enfield’s Adoption Support Team. If you know of any other free days out in or around north London, please email elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk so that we can add to our list. We hope you find these ideas helpful.

Alexandra Palace: boating, playground, café, animals, skateboarding, graffiti art, ice skating and exhibitions ▼



British Museum

Coram Fields: sensory opportunities, farm animals, nice café and only adults accompanied by a child are allowed entry

Epping Forest ▼



Forty Hall: child-centred activities and trails, and walks to Whitewebbs Park

The Foundling Museum

Geffrey Museum

Museum of Childhood

Museum of London: lots of child-friendly activities

Myddleton House Gardens: beautiful garden and nice café; no ball games allowed

National Gallery

Natural History Museum

National Maritime Museum

National Portrait Gallery

RAF Museum in Hendon

The Ragged School Museum in Mile End

Science Museum

Serpentine Gallery

The South Bank: full of buskers, magicians, street entertainment and food outlets and you can also bring your own picnic ▼



Tate Britain

Tate Modern

Trent Park

Victoria and Albert Museum

The Wallace Collection

Caring for a child of a different ethnicity

As part of our series of extracts from Bristol City Council's 'Caring for a child of a different ethnicity' publication, in this edition we will be looking at issues that may arise when caring for your child's hair and skin. This article is published with the kind permission of Bristol's Adoption Service.

Hair care

There is no doubt that caring for your child's hair and skin has a huge impact on their wellbeing, self-esteem and identity. Children feel better about themselves when they present themselves to the world as well-groomed, especially when at school and with children of their own ethnicity. Amongst the African and Afro-Caribbean community for example, dry skin and hair are seen as a lack of parental concern and can contribute to a child's feeling of increased difference and low self-esteem.

You should encourage young people to be proud of their hair and seek out images and models of people with similar hair or hairstyles. Some children, for example Sikhs and Rastafarians will not want their hair cut for religious reasons.

One foster carer in Bristol said of her foster child, "his mother won't let me cut his hair unfortunately so I had to just keep bunching it up. He is the only black child at school and I was aware it just made him stand out more, he looked messy essentially so I had it braided and he loves it".

Black and mixed heritage children's hair needs to be treated with care. It can dry out quickly and can break more easily than European or Asian hair. For this reason, hair needs to be washed less often, once or twice a week but moisturising cream and oils should be applied each day. Ensure hair is shiny, not greasy. The one ingredient to be careful to avoid in a shampoo is lauryl (or laureth) sulphate. Shampoos with this ingredient are designed to strip the hair's natural oils, and were not created for very curly hair. A conditioner should always be applied after shampooing. This is often a good time to brush out any tangles,

so brushing hurts less.

You can buy hairdryers with a comb attachment on the nozzle; this helps to tease out tangles as the heat relaxes the hair while you brush. Some products that are for black hair will be too greasy for a mixed-heritage child, but European products will be too drying. It is a question of experimenting and finding the right one.

Hair needs to be brushed or combed daily (unless in braids/cornrows) as it becomes knotty very quickly. Look around at school for what styles other black and minority ethnic children may be wearing and find out where they have their hair done. Braids and cornrows should last for three to four weeks. Children can wear a do-rag (a piece of nylon cloth that is worn on the head) to bed to ensure the braids stay in place and last longer. If your child's hair is loose but knots easily, then putting it in plaits at bedtime helps reduce the tears when combing in the morning. If the child in your care has dreadlocks, usually associated with the Rastafarian religion and culture, do not put conditioner on the hair as it leaves a residue and can unravel the dreads.

"I just wish they had done something with my hair, they didn't know what to do with it, so just cut it very short. I looked like a boy and since then I've been scared of hairdressers". Bristol adult care leaver.

Hair shopping list for tightly curled hair

1. Combs

- Rattail comb (great for making straight parts and removing debris from hair)
- Pick (wide teeth allow for combing through thick hair)
- Wide-tooth comb (helps detangle thick hair during a comb out)

2. Brush. You need a soft or medium-bristle brush. Avoid brushes with plastic or nylon bristles on them, as they contribute to hair breakage.

3. Oil is good for shine and provides some nutrients. Use oils that contain

sage, olive, rosemary and almond or lavender, which are great for the hair and scalp.

4. Spray bottle or detangler spray. If using spray bottle, fill it with one part oil and six parts water.



Skin care

The darker the skin tone, often the drier the skin. Dry skin will have a white dusting on it and elbows and knees in particular will appear 'ashy' and can crack. The entire body should be moisturised every day before bed or in the morning, often with richer creams than would be used on European skin. As with hair, skin should look shiny, not greasy. Good creams are from the Aveeno and Eurcerin range, any aqueous cream, coconut oil, coco butter, shea oil. Avoid overly-perfumed products and products containing alcohol. As darker skin is drier, avoid long hot baths.

Darker skin can scar easily and may take longer to heal when damaged. The skin on knees and elbows will often appear much darker especially after many a fall in the playground. Try to minimise the possibility of scrapes, wearing trousers or tights for example and use a product such as Bio-oil to reduce the effect of scarring.

Apply sunscreen to your child as faithfully as you would do with a fair skinned child to avoid the discomfort of an un-detected sunburn.

If in doubt, seek the advice of people including other foster carers, who share the child's ethnicity as to what creams and hair products would be most appropriate for your child. By doing this, you are also showing your child that you value them and their ethnicity.



Your questions responded to

Please contact Natalie by email at natalie.salaman@enfield.gov.uk

Natalie is a social worker who works in adoption support.



Dear Natalie

We have attended quite a few courses and read numerous books on positive parenting. I have learnt about the effects of trauma and loss on children's behaviour whilst sitting in 'grown up' workshops and training days. But out of the classroom, it's hell at times in our house. I have to say that no assessment can really prepare you for the reality of parenting a child who is full of moans, negativity and grumps. Marcia is 12 and won't look me in the eyes these days and if she does it is with a piercing attitude of disdain and condescension. This is exhausting and my confidence is plummeting especially as my partner (who is around less) gets the cuddles and smiles. I do blame myself as my emotions are often on the surface and I get into a terrible vicious circle where I can hear my voice raising back to hers. I feel myself wanting to win whatever the dispute (always created by her) is about. I guess I become a child too and not an adult in control of my outbursts and I say things I regret. Is there any help out there? I know we are blessed to have the adoption support fund to give us choice beyond CAMHS. But there are so many different therapies out there: play therapy, theraplay, drama therapy, systemic therapy, music therapy, dyadic developmental psychotherapy, and on goes the list. And, by the way, how can neuroscience help us? All these experts out there make me worry that I am just going to be putting myself up for criticism. Should parenting a child really be this much hard work and need so many 'experts'?

Jaz

Dear Jaz

First let me sympathise with the reality of sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the volume of choice and the alienating jargon of therapy and, of course, being full of self-criticism. Self-criticism is part and parcel of parenting and with adoptive parenting there can be that extra dimension of the child's connections to a past before your entrance. This can incline to make adoptive parents more analytical and questioning.

The impact of an adopted child's previous losses, caregivers and heritage on adoptive parents makes itself announced with an impact that is sometimes hard to describe to those not familiar with adoption issues. It is possible that Marcia herself may be feeling riddled with ambivalence about her identity and where she belongs as she negotiates secondary school demands whilst new relationships are being tested. It sounds as if you are feeling like the 'bad cop' and your partner is 'good cop' just now.

Rest assured this usually changes and may reflect Marcia's need to deposit her mixed up feelings with the more present parent [you] and reserve less complex happier feelings for your partner.

It may actually have little to do with your parenting strategies and be more about her. Try not to get depressed and too anxious about this. You are right that it is a good time to be an adopter in terms of government resources. Do look at this link to the Department for Education's independent evidence review of post-adoption support interventions commissioned by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-adoption-support-interventions-independent-evidence-review>

The review unpicks the categories of therapies available and attempts to quantify what they are about. This may help you decide if you do need the 'expert' help you refer to but there is also always a place for finding your own way through reconnecting with things that give you enjoyment, talking to friends, walking in the park, and organising a break with or without your partner. I would hope that help you receive through outside agencies does not leave you feeling criticised or belittled but if it does please let it be known. You may want to write an anonymised article about it in our newsletter!

Natalie

Welcome to the fourth 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 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 the end of February 2017 for inclusion in our summer edition. We will anonymise your story, if needed.

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.

Go to our website at www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk for information about the Consortium, the training we offer and useful adoption support literature, including our leaflet on adoption support.

Consortium news

Lorna Rook has recently taken over the role of North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium Manager, following Peter Stevens's retirement.



Meet our adoption support social workers



Debbie Fossey
Barnet Team



Val Forrest
Camden Team



Nita Patel
Enfield Team



Irma Thomas
Hackney Team



Edna Thomas
Haringey Team



Michelle Littaur
Islington Team

I am really delighted to be able to continue this role of helping to find ways to best support families in North London.

Do let your voices be heard. You can do this by becoming an adopter forum representative and/or by giving feedback about the types of things you find useful in the newsletter.

With best wishes,
Lorna