

# Adoptive family forum

The Adoption North  
London Newsletter



Issue 5

Adoption  
with a  
birth child

Caring for a child  
of a different  
ethnicity

Recipe of the season –  
sausage rolls

Building resilience

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in movies

We Are Family



# Editorial board

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## Training dates for your diary

To book a place at one of the training sessions below, please contact your adoption support social worker or visit [www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk](http://www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk) for further details.

### Transitions in Education



**Trainer:** Dorothy Johnson, Education & Wellbeing worker at PAC  
Hosted by Islington

### Telling Your Child about Adoption



(for over 11s - secondary school children)  
**Trainer:** PAC  
Hosted by Hackney

### Social Networking and Contact



**Trainer:** Chris Atkins from CoramBAAF  
Hosted by Enfield

### Taming the Tiger



**Trainer:** Renee Marks  
This is combined joint training for parents and social workers

### Caring for Adolescents



**Trainer:** Rachael Staff  
Hosted by Haringey

### Therapeutic Parenting for Adopters



**Trainer:** Julia Davies  
Hosted by Camden

### Talking to Your Child about Adoption (under 11s)



**Trainer:** Judith Ellis  
Hosted by Barnet



# We Are Family



We Are Family

**We Are Family is an adoption support community based in and around London. Among other services, it provides local playgroups and parent-led support groups that are safe places for adoptive parents to share the ups and downs of adoptive parenthood. Through a number of activities, it provides opportunities for members to meet, thereby creating**

## networks for adoptive families within their communities.

We Are Family turns four years old this summer and has come a long way from its humble beginnings when a few families would meet up weekly in the local park. It now has full charity status and offers peer support to hundreds of families across London. Take a look and see what you think of the shiny new 'all singing, all dancing' website (courtesy of the geniuses at Here Design) which features among other things a highly addictive bubble game on the homepage.

[www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk](http://www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk)

We Are Family publishes a popular weekly blog where adopters share all aspects and experiences of parenting.

To submit your own blog, please email [blog@wearefamilyadoption.org.uk](mailto:blog@wearefamilyadoption.org.uk)

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

[www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk](http://www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk)

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

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

## Blog: 'Our adoption journey'

We met each other relatively late in life; we'd both had 'near misses', broken engagements, relationships that weren't quite right after all, not quite. Then we met, courted blissfully, naturally and we laughed a lot.

We had a lovely life; our lives were full of joy. So we thought we would like to share that joy with a child. After a lot of not preventing pregnancy, leaving it in the lap of the gods, so to speak, we had one round of IVF, felt a shade sad for a few days that it had not worked, and moved into a happy mode or getting on with being with each other, just us two. We were not desperate to have children. So why adopt? We still had that feeling of being almost too lucky not to share that with a child; joy abounded, and some children, conceived, never experience joy.

We were not grieving the loss of not being able to produce viable fertilised eggs, we weren't feeling bereft that we had not conceived, neither of us felt a burning desire to be birth parents; they didn't

really believe us, the other couples (and singles) in our introduction to adoption group; they did not believe us, the social workers. They probed us incessantly to open a vein of grief that truly was not available to us. To us it was as simple as sharing our joy, not as complex as grief or loss or lacunae.

But of course it's never that simple.

It took nearly three years from first contact with adoption authorities to bringing our daughter home. Three years, two different case workers, one poem we had to write about our feelings.

Six months of intensely personal weekly sessions, being asked questions about our sex lives, our finances, our upbringings, our families.

Five months of waiting to go before the adoption panel.

Four hours of waiting to hear we had been accepted.

Three months of looking at heart-breaking stories of looked after children, wanting to give them all a home, being advised professionally, but with warmth

not to proceed with some children.

Two weeks of thinking we were going to bring home a son, Special K we called him, only to be told that another couple were considered a better fit; we did grieve then, we truly did.

And one glorious phone call to say we were matched with a 13-month old baby girl and this time, no other people in the frame.

Three very stressful weeks of introductions, of getting to know our soon-to-be-daughter, feeling under scrutiny by a highly-experienced foster carer who seemed not to think we were up to the job.

Two hours of waiting after waking too early on the day we were to bring her home.

One wonderful journey of five hours to finally sit with her in our laps in the glorious sunshine bathing our garden.

It's been almost four years since that day. And the thing is, it is that simple, although in a way we had not anticipated; most of the joy comes the other way.





## Education conference review

by Sarah, parent

I recently attended the conference entitled **Adoption, attachment and schools: ways of supporting children in education**. Roughly a third of attendees were adoptive parents, a third were social care professionals and a third were education professionals.

The opening to the conference was sobering. The presentation consisted of statistics which clearly showed that adopted children were underperforming academically in education. It showed that this group of children were much more likely to have mental health needs, attend a specialist school, have an Education and Health Care Plan and be at a greater risk of permanent exclusion.

The opening speakers identified the key needs of adopted children within a school setting. They also began to set out what could be done practically to support adopted children in school; measures such as training school staff, putting in place support plans and developing Adoption Friendly Schools.

PAC-UK then gave a presentation on what makes an Adoption Friendly School: a school that can understand the needs commonly experienced by adoptive families, a school that knows who their adopted children are, a school that can assess the children's social and emotional needs and can think of the children's needs developmentally. From this research, PAC-UK have developed packages of support to help schools become more adoption friendly. These packages are designed to support

the implementation of the Adoption Friendly Schools guide and toolkit which will be available to schools from May 2017.

There were then presentations from Virtual Heads, focusing on a broad range of issues, including understanding the particular needs of schools in their areas and on attachment issues in education. The role of Virtual Heads is being extended to include adopted children from September 2017 when the Children and Social Work Act is passed.

Two Education Practice Managers from PAC-UK then hosted a session on practical strategies. The speakers covered some familiar territory, such as the use of transitional objects, being aware of curriculum 'hotspots', calming boxes, reducing triggers in school, the importance of routine and predictability and so on. It also covered less familiar strategies and ideas, such as setting up fact files on adopted children which can be shared amongst staff involved in the child's care, sensory grounding, co-regulation, spotting patterns of behaviour, reconnecting and repairing.

The conference wrapped up with further information about other initiatives going on, including the Attachment Research Community which schools can join ([the-arc.org.uk](http://the-arc.org.uk)) and the creation of e-learning tools for teachers, which is another PAC-UK project due to be launched in 2018.



My colleagues and I were delighted to be part of the PAN

London conference, which was organised by the London consortia coordinators. As Sarah mentioned, it was well attended with a wide-ranging demographic. It was great to have so many from the education profession in attendance, perhaps indicative of an increasing awareness of the additional needs of adopted and permanently placed children in schools.

At PAC-UK Education Service we are passionate about promoting awareness around the needs of adopted and permanently placed children in education and equipping parents, guardians and education professionals with the tools needed to provide a safe and supportive environment for children who have had a difficult start in life.

We feel the Children and Social work Bill will be beneficial in addressing some of the difficulties outlined by Sarah in terms of the voluntary nature of the take up of the support available and the varying degrees of recognition of additional needs of adopted children in education.



**Helen Hoban -  
Education Practice  
Manager at PAC-UK**

For more information about our education team and the support we offer please visit: <http://www.pac-uk.org/education/>

As a parent, it was a useful conference to attend. It was encouraging to hear that adopted children will be better supported in school going forward and that their particular needs will be better understood and met. As a parent of an adopted child struggling in mainstream, I would have liked there to have been a session on adopted children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties; children

who are academically very able but unable to access learning fully in mainstream because of their challenges. I felt the conference didn't go far enough in addressing or even acknowledging the needs of those who struggle most in education and those who are regularly excluded. My other observation is that much of

the practical support – the training, the toolkits, the guides, the e-learning and becoming an attachment-aware school - is about voluntary take up by schools. As parents, we can make our schools more aware that these things exist and encourage them to join up or invite in training, but we can't make them. The challenge will

be to make sure all schools with adopted children access these things and integrate them into their policies and internal training and that this is a long-term commitment. At the end of the day it's not only adopted children who will benefit from better informed and trained staff, all school children will.



**Gill has taught Stress Management for 20 years. She is an adopter and writer for Adoption Today and has also created a state of the art film-based e-course to support adoptive parents.**

Imagine some fresh playdoh straight out of the tub. The bright vibrant colour, fresh smelling, flexible, fun to play with and full of possibility. That was me before adoption. Now get some old dried up playdoh, its dull, hard, rigid, un-responsive, has cracks and crumbles easily.

Recent research indicates that having children with attachment difficulties can cause stress that is quite unique, including: not understanding the child's behaviours, being the target of constant rage, always having to be hyper alert, experiencing lying, theft, violence and verbal abuse, constantly having to cajole, distract, reward, use humour and state manage to help to keep life stay on an even keel,

## Building resilience to stress less By Gill Tree, Founder of Adoption Academy



suffering from broken sleep because of nightmares, safeguarding the TV, mobile phone and knives, the family pet and younger sibling.

The stress of a withdrawn or compliant child also has challenges when you are constantly trying to second guess what is going on for them and are unable to connect with them when they go into hiding.

Adoption can bring out a side of yourself that is alien to you and it is stressful being someone you no longer recognise.

### Continued and heightened stress can lead to:

- Loss of confidence
- Loss of direction
- Loss of motivation
- Loss of self-belief
- Poor communication
- Loss of energy
- Becoming self –critical
- Over reliance on sugar, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol
- Depression, lowered immunity and illness

### Blocked care

Dan Hughes and Jonathan Baylin in 2012 identified and named a syndrome they called 'blocked care'.

Their research shows that if you don't get enough positive strokes back from the person you care for, you can literally turn into old playdoh. Your ability to empathise and care for your

child is reduced, so that parenting becomes a chore. Parenting whilst in stressed out survival mode makes us defensive, reactive, unable to emotionally regulate and empathise. It is vital that we build emotional muscle and keep putting deposits into our energy bank to remain in a giving and responding state rather than a reacting one.

### Building resilience e-course

My e-course, provided in 20-30 minute chunks, offers accessible and practical tips on improving resilience, staying calm and in control whilst enhancing connection.

### You will develop strategies for:

- Managing your reactions and reducing the triggers
- Extreme self-care
- Reducing stress and developing resilience
- Gaining an insight into what lies behind your child's behaviour
- Developing a greater rapport and connection with your child

View a 15 minute free trial here:  
<https://ecourses.adoptionacademy.co.uk/course/view.php?id=3>

If you are interested in having access to this training, please speak to your adoption support social worker.

You can also contact Gill Tree directly on **0203 553 1060** or by email at [gill@adoptionacademy.co.uk](mailto:gill@adoptionacademy.co.uk)

# Recipe of the season - My mum's sausage rolls



by Angela who lives in London with her husband and 5 year old daughter, two dogs and a cat.

I grew up with avid foodie parents who loved nothing more than trying to outdo each other in the kitchen.

I've lost count of the amount of times my father demonstrated how to crack open and dress a crab. Seafood was his speciality and our Sunday tea usually consisted of crab, brown shrimps, winkles and cockles, salad and brown bread and butter and was utterly delicious. My mum was a different story. Much as she tucked into the seafood with us, her heart was elsewhere and her absolute speciality was and still is making the most perfect shortcrust pastry you have ever tasted. It is a simple thing but done correctly is a thing of beauty. She created numerous pies

and tarts but the thing we loved most as a family – particularly my dad - was her sausage rolls. He was crazy about that combination of shortcrust pastry and filling.

It's more usual to make a sausage roll using flaky or puff pastry, but mum always favoured shortcrust and, I have to say, I still definitely prefer it.

Needless to say, this recipe has been passed on to me, and my daughter now loves them the same way my father did. If she sees me making them she will let out a squeal of delight and rush over to try and 'help' me roll out the pastry (most of this ends up in her mouth). I recently made over 60 of these for her 5th birthday party (at her request) and there was not one left

at the end of the day.

Time marches on and my father sadly died this year but at the end of last year when he was getting frail and not eating very much, he and my mother came to stay and he asked if she would make some of her famous sausage rolls. We were both so pleased that he wanted to eat something - and seeing that my mother was tired I immediately jumped in and said that I would do it for him.

As we tucked into them he took a bite, turned to my mother and said "Do you know I think this pastry might be even better than yours"... I'll never forget the look on her face or the smile on his.

**So here it is.  
Enjoy, Angela.**



## Ingredients

Pastry  
8 oz plain flour  
2 oz lard  
2 oz butter  
Pinch of salt  
A little cold water

## Filling

500g good quality free range sausagemeat (I often use actual sausages and squeeze the meat out of each into a big bowl)  
One small onion  
Generous pinch of mixed herbs  
One whisked egg

## Method

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

Begin by making the shortcrust pastry.

Sift the flour and pinch of salt into a large bowl, holding the sieve as high as possible, so that they get a really good airing before you begin.

Now add the lard and butter, cut into smallish lumps, then take a knife and begin to cut the fat into the flour.

Go on doing this until it looks fairly evenly blended, then begin to rub the fat into the flour using your fingertips only and being as light as possible.

As you gently rub the fat into the flour, lift it up high and let it fall back into the bowl, which again means that all the time air is being incorporated, but do this just long enough to make the mixture crumbly with a few odd lumps here and there.

Now sprinkle 1 tablespoon of water in, then, with a knife, start bringing the dough together, using the knife to make it cling. Then discard the knife and, finally, bring it together with your fingertips.

When enough liquid is added, the pastry should leave the bowl fairly clean. If this hasn't happened, then using your fingertips, add a spot more water.

Now place the pastry in a polythene bag and leave it in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to rest.

While you are waiting for the pastry to chill, empty the sausagemeat into a big bowl and grate in the onion.

Add a generous portion of mixed herbs and then season with salt and pepper.

Now get your hand into the bowl and really blend all the ingredients together, then put aside.

Roll out the pastry into two oblong

strips and divide the sausagemeat mixture also into two, making two long rolls the same length as the strips of pastry (if it's sticky sprinkle on some flour and flour your hands).

Place one roll of sausagemeat onto one strip of pastry. Brush the beaten egg along one edge, then fold the pastry over and seal it as carefully as possible. Roll the whole thing over so the sealed edge is underneath. Roll lightly and repeat with the second piece of pastry and sausagemeat.

Then use a small sharp knife to cut each roll into six sausage rolls, each about 5cm long.

Snip three V shapes in the top of each roll with the end of some scissors and brush with beaten egg. Place the rolls on the baking sheet and bake high in the oven for 20-25 minutes, then remove them to a wire rack to cool.

**Then simply enjoy!**



# Adoption stories in kids' movies



**Have you ever noticed how often parents go missing from children's stories? Even if the story starts with a parent or two, very often, before long, they're gone.**

Here's why: if you are a writer, considering plot structure, parents stand for authority, security, routine. From Harry Potter to Pippi Longstocking, get rid of the parents and you open up all kinds of possibilities for exciting adventure - and unfettered storytelling.

Even before our children are reading, they see this enacted on-screen, but kids' films are classified so that we know, broadly speaking, what we can let them watch safely.

But with adopted children, films

that we think are safe can raise all sorts of questions. How about these?

## **Finding Dory**

Dory's disability results in the early loss of her parents, something she is responsible for because she didn't remember what she was supposed to do. After growing up lonely and friendless she is welcomed into a surrogate home, but has flashbacks about her parents and early life. She eventually finds her parents who are overjoyed and have been looking for her the whole time.

## **The Lego Batman Movie**

Bruce Wayne, Batman's playboy alter ego, adopts young Dick Grayson by mistake (!) at a fundraising gala. Dick eventually gains Batman's attention and love by taking on a superhero persona - Robin.

## **Despicable Me**

Showcasing the adoption of a hard-to-place female sibling group by Felonius Gru, a male single parent who happens to be an arch villain with a heart of gold. Despicable Me II brings a fabulous step-mom into the mix.

If your child is going to see a movie, have a think about how they might react to its messages. You could also use some of these films as conversation starters.

We'd like to hear more about stories of adoption in kids' films - please send an email to [elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk](mailto:elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk) to share your thoughts.

# Adoption with a birth child

Liam and Jenny adopted three year old Cara four years ago, when their birth son Luke was six years old. Here, Jenny talks about what prospective adopters with a birth child could expect when they go through the adoption process.



**When we decided to complete our family through adoption four years ago our assumptions and expectations were turned on their head.**

**Here's what we learned:**

**1** An age difference of at least two years is a good thing. Those years are likely to result in different bed times allowing special bonding time, and - in the usual scenario where your birth child is older - your child will be more able to cope with you allowing different behavioural standards.

**2** Choosing a child of a different gender will be less threatening to your birth child – it's not 'another

me'. Not so good for hand-me-down clothes though!

**3** It's best to involve your birth child in the transition. Our daughter was adopted from another city half a day's travel away. So, we took a holiday let and all moved there for the week. Our son met our daughter the day after we did and he played an active role in the whole process as we got to know her day by day. 'When we went to bring Cara home' is a collective memory, not something he is excluded from. It was worth missing a few days of school.

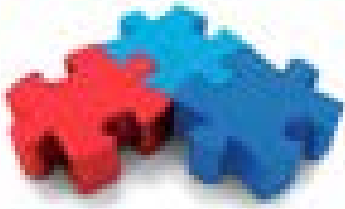
**4** It's a disadvantage in the matching process – and the matching process is often competitive. This was a total

surprise to us. We thought having parenting experience would be a positive but the risks of an adoption breaking down are higher if there is a birth child involved. It makes horrible sense – the settling in period is fraught; the birth child reacts badly; the parents can't cope with hurting their biological child; the to-be adopted child is rejected. Family finders try to avoid this.

However, when we were finally matched with our daughter, it was our son that clinched it. She was emotionally close to her foster carers' own son, who was of a similar age to ours, and the family finder thought replicating the carer home set up was the perfect fit.



# PAC-UK



## THE AGENCY FOR ADOPTION & PERMANENCY SUPPORT

**PAC-UK are contracted to offer educational support and advice for adoptive and special guardianship families whose adoption support is provided by Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington.**

**The education advice line for parents, guardians and carers is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays between 10am and midday.**

 **020 7284 5879**

Call this number to speak to PAC-UK's Education Service about any issues around the educational needs of permanently placed children and young people.

### **Education focused consultations**

These are held at PAC-UK's London office in Kentish Town, or via telephone. School staff and social workers can also attend, however this is optional. Up to two sessions per family can be booked via PAC-UK's advice line.

### **Education focused groups**

PAC-UK attends a number of existing north London parent support groups in order to provide an education-based focus for a session. To find out if they are visiting a group near you, please

contact your local adoption team, or local branch of We Are Family.

The education advice line is also open to school staff and other education and care professionals.

### **Training for Schools**

As part of our DfE funded project, PAC-UK are offering FREE training to all schools within London and Tees Valley, and will be running this until March 2018. To find out more or to book, please contact [noelle@pac-uk.org](mailto:noelle@pac-uk.org)

### **Commissioned Training**

Local authorities can commission PAC-UK's Education Service to provide training for parents, social workers, virtual school staff or groups of schools.

For more information contact [rebecca@pac-uk.org](mailto:rebecca@pac-uk.org)



# Caring for a child of a different ethnicity

Part of our series of extracts from Bristol City Council's 'Caring for a child of a different ethnicity' publication. This article is published with the kind permission of Bristol's Adoption Service.

## Activities for promoting positive self-esteem and racial, ethnic and cultural identity

### Life story through painting and drawing

Make sure you have a good range of colours of paint and crayons (Crayola do multicultural crayons to represent a wide variety of skin hues). On a large piece of paper draw all the people, houses, and schools that have been involved along the way. When drawing the people discuss the colours chosen by the child and help them to experiment to get colours as closely matched to their skin colour. Talk about hairstyles or clothes that people wore. It can help to create a chronological timeline or path/road to help a child make sense of their journey. You could also use materials to make a collage if you had a good range of brown, pink and blacks, cutting them out of specific Black Hair magazines for example.

Similarly, plot out a family tree with your child, using the image of a tree and its branches for the child's adoptive family and the roots for the child's birth family. Place birth parents closest to the top of the soil and branching down to birth siblings, birth grandparents etc. Draw a face of each individual, again discussing colour to use, and place a flag of their country of origin (if applicable) or food/clothes/sayings they remember about that person. These can be drawn, cut out and then stuck onto the tree.

### Life story with miniatures

Miniature figures are a useful tool in engaging children in the process of sharing information and feelings. They can be moved to different areas and placed together. You can use pieces of paper or food boxes to represent different houses the child has lived in and encourage them to choose which miniatures to place in the house and talk about each one. If your child chooses the 'wrong'

colours, encourage them to choose another that represents that person more closely. Between each house encourage the child to talk about moving between each one. Ask open questions throughout and empathise, "it must have been hard to leave your swing behind".

Miniatures that are useful with a good range of skin tones are Duplo World People or Duplo community set (job and ethnicity based), Sylvanian families (as they have a wide variety of white, brown and black and have babies, children, adults and grandparents), and Black Family finger puppets – [www.kidslikeme.co.uk](http://www.kidslikeme.co.uk)



### Self-esteem Self Portraits

Use wallpaper or lining paper and get your child to lie down on the paper and then draw round them. With paints, glitter, beads and material create a life size portrait. Encourage your child to look in the mirror to see what they should paint, spend time making sure you have the right mix of paint for eyes, hair and skin. Talk about the shape of their eyes, texture of the hair etc. If they have their hair braided or it is curly use beads or curly wool. The important thing throughout is to talk about the parts of your child, where they got their features from, talking about their ethnic origin and culture, making positive comments such as "I really like the way you managed to draw your strong brown legs". Similarly point out details, which are not ethnically based. "I like the way you chose your favourite colour for your skirt".

With younger children it is important that if they paint their eyes/hair/skin the wrong colour, to point out gently "let's go and look in the mirror and see what colour your beautiful eyes really are".

You can also do self-portraits with just the head/face and use similar techniques and conversations/encouragement as above.

**Using clay to do a head and shoulders model** of your child is a good way to concentrate on the shape of features; you can do one for yourself and other family members, meanwhile having a conversation about comparison in shape of noses, eyes, lips etc.

Add wool, string, beads, crepe paper etc. for the hair.

**Make a collage** with your child, using material from magazines, newspapers and photocopies of the child's birth family. Look at similarities between your child and those images from magazines and photos in terms of features and hair and skin colour. Ask them to look through magazines to look for people who look like them. You could also make a collage of their life story using these pictures.

### Coloured tights game

Set out a number of nylon knee-high stockings in various shades, brown, black, white, pink, yellow and red. Encourage all the children in your family to try them on their hands and arms or their legs and feet. Ask questions to help the children increase their awareness of skin colour. For example, "can you find a stocking that is the same colour as your skin? Or "what colour is that stocking you have on your arm?" Ask them to "try the \_\_\_\_\_ stocking. Is it lighter or darker than your own skin?" Discuss with the children about how no one's skin colour is really white, pink, yellow or red. Emphasize that skin-colour differences are interesting and beautiful.

In addition to these exercises reading stories and discussing the characters in them is a positive way to start a conversation around identity. Children will often feel more comfortable and able to open up if they are discussing a third party, even if in reality they are identifying with the characters themselves and the people important to them.



## Your questions responded to

Please contact Natalie by email at [natalie.salaman@enfield.gov.uk](mailto:natalie.salaman@enfield.gov.uk)

Natalie is a social worker who works in adoption support.



### Dear Natalie

Our children both lived with extremely neglectful birth parents before they came to us. I can hardly bear to think what they went through, but know I need to remember so I can better understand what is going on in the present. Their parents did not mean to harm them, but they did. They were not smacked, hit or molested but they were left to get on with life right from the start with the bare minimum of parenting. Their home was cold, dark, damp, dirty and crucially without enough food. When Ben was two he was found on the estate he lived in trying to climb into bins for food.

It is about both children's behaviour with food that I am writing. Ben is now 10 and seems to live for food alone. He asks what he is having for supper as he eats his breakfast. He always tips food down his throat at fast speed. He has now got rolls of fat on his tum. He doesn't play football as well as he could do as his weight slows him down. I don't want to give him a complex, but being hungry and fat is really not going to help him in life. I bite my tongue not to say this. Gina (age 12) by contrast does not seem to even like or enjoy food except for chocolate and ice cream. She is pitifully thin, eats very little and seems to hold everything inside. I notice she retches when something important is happening at school. She said that she does not like watching people eat. I worry it will be anorexia for her when she is older. Surely her light weight and size will delay puberty which will only make her feel more on the outside of life. The school have commented that she eats hardly anything at lunch.

What can I do about both of them? My husband says I am over thinking and that they are just two different body types.

**Annabel**

### Dear Annabel

It would be hard not to be affected by both Gina and Ben's attitude to food although your husband may be trying to stop you worrying and leaping to conclusions about your children when he responds the way he does. Food is such an important way of showing thought for others and is often equated with experiences of love, generosity and pleasure. To have its goodness squeezed out of it by such unhealthy behaviour sounds both painful and frustrating for you.

For Ben, is an appetite for life being taken over by an appetite for food? I think you really need to encourage Ben's appetite for other things, like football, swimming, adventures. There are core issues about self-worth and survival for both your children affecting their appetites. Right now they are hopefully not too concerned about their appearance, but as they get older being either too thin or too fat will be an issue in its own right, so it is vital that some help is sought before too much time passes.

For Gina, perhaps refusing food is an attempt to feel some control. The reality is that she may be feeling out of her depth and not trusting herself to engage or take from life.

It feels as if there is something isolated and resisting in her behaviour. I wonder what she needs to express before she can welcome the outside world in through food. Are there feelings about her birth parents that she is not able to share with you? Is she worried about your strength of feeling about them and the conflicting loyalties this may bring up? On a practical level do you allow her as much choice of food as you can? Can she move over to packed lunches and could you take her with you to the supermarket allowing her to select her own food for school? With Ben if he doesn't have second helpings can you find rewards for him that are not food related? Is there something you can distract him with straight after a meal that can become more important than the meal?

I have given you lots of questions to think about. There are no easy answers here and our relationship with food can have patterns that last a lifetime. I think if simple strategies such as the ones suggested here do not make improvements then you really do need to consider therapeutic intervention. Do talk to your local adoption support team.

**Natalie**



## The more we share, the more we help each other

This newsletter is a way to exchange ideas, and we want to make sure it tells you 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. If we choose your story or idea you will win a **£20 gift voucher**.

To send us your stories, comments or suggestions about the newsletter, please email [elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk](mailto:elias.koronis@camden.gov.uk) or call **020 7974 1152**. Please submit your stories by the end of August 2017 for inclusion in our winter 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.

Go to our website at [www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk](http://www.adoptionnorthlondon.co.uk) for information about the consortium, the training we offer and useful adoption support literature, including our leaflet on adoption support.

## 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 the north London consortium. Do let your voices be heard. You can do this by being a representative on the adopter forum, sending in agenda items or by giving feedback about the types of things you find useful in the newsletter or sending in articles you think other parents would find interesting. If you are interested in becoming a representative on the adopter forum, please email me at [lorna.rook@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:lorna.rook@hackney.gov.uk)

With best wishes,  
Lorna Rook  
NL AFC Manager