

Education toolkit

For schools to support adopted children and their families



Provided by



Parents And Children Together

Starting school and transitions

Meet with the parents

Invite parents of adopted children in for a meeting as soon as you are aware they are joining the school. Discussion points could include:

- Anything you should know that would be helpful in understanding their child
- Who the adopters are happy for information to be shared with
- Possible triggers or things the child may react to
- Listen to how adopters respond when their child is dysregulated and agree on positive responses
- Share the daily routines so parents can prepare their child
- Identify key staff to build relationships with the child
- Ensure the family has a named contact at the school, and direct access to them rather than having to contact the school via the office

Plan for a smooth start

Agree a plan with the family for when the child starts school, ideally in advance of them starting. They may need a gradual start to build up and become familiar with new routines. Consider them experiencing different parts of the day in chunks rather than just building up to longer days from the morning. Be creative and be prepared to reflect, review and make amendments if the plan isn't working or if it's going well and could move along faster.

Plan for transition...every year!

However happy a child is at school, transition will always be a source of anxiety for them. Moving on from teachers they are familiar with or the possibility of friends leaving may add to their sense of loss. Work with the family to plan for this from just after the summer half term and provide opportunities for them to become more familiar with the new staff they are moving on to as well as a chance to have goodbyes with the current staff.

Be aware of common pinch points

The move between different key stages can be a big one as expectations change, even within the same school. Many adopted children will present emotionally younger than their chronological age. Be aware of gaps appearing between them and their friends.

Allocate key staff

Ensure the child has two or three key staff with whom they can have a daily check-in and who they know are safe people to be alongside should they need them. Don't rely solely on one staff member in case they are not in school when the child needs them. They do not all have to be teaching staff; sometimes someone in the office can be easier to find.

Administration

Pupil premium plus

Once an adoption order goes through and a child becomes previously looked after it is the school's job to claim and use the pupil premium plus funding, accessed via the October Census. While not ring-fenced, this funding should be managed for the specific cohort of adopted children and should be targeted to meet their needs. The best way to ensure this is the case is to discuss with the relevant parents and agree the best use of funds to meet their children's needs.

Keep records – right from the beginning

Many adopted children do need more support as they get further up the school. Keep detailed records from the outset on these children as you may see a sudden change in behaviour at a later stage that could require more robust support through means of an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) – often with a social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) focus – so observations from an early stage around emotional development can be helpful later.



Effective communication

Create a system with the parents to share updates

Be aware of calling parents over at the end of the day to have a quick word. Agree a system that will avoid shame for both child and parents. Ensure there are some positive updates.

Listen to parents

It's very easy for adoptive parents to come across as over-anxious, especially if the child is masking all day at school but breaks down as soon as they get home. It's very common that adoptive parents feel they are not heard. Actively listen and offer support where possible. Being pro-active and a reassuring ear is often the most effective way to alleviate worries. Remember these children have so many different layers to their development – they will often show common developmental traits but some behaviour comes from a very different place to other children. Remain curious, kind and set up a way to check in with the parents. Encourage them to seek further support from their adoption social workers if they are struggling at home but be aware that school may be the trigger.

The child needs somewhere or someone safe

Have a plan and a system, such as a small ticket or something on the desk, for children to let teachers know when they are moving out of a regulated state and may need to be somewhere safe with someone safe for a while. Agree something that works for both the child and teachers but keep it consistent and ensure all teachers are aware.



What if it's not working?

Build a team around the child and have regular network meetings. The silver lining of the pandemic is that it has made it much easier to organise these meetings virtually. If a child is having therapeutic work funded by the adoption support fund, ask if the therapist can join these meetings. Share the challenges and seek ideas. Agree small steps and focus on the child's needs rather than what a child should be achieving academically.

Ask for help

If you have a particularly dysregulated child in a class, seek support for the staff in the classroom. Engage with the local authority's Virtual School and draw on resources they may have. Listen to and act upon suggestions for different approaches. These children may need something that doesn't fit with policy but if it helps with relationships and their sense of feeling safe then it will be better for everyone.

Safeguarding

Keep adverse childhood experiences in mind

Section 43 of the 2021 ['Keeping children safe in education' government guidance](#) states:

"Where children have suffered abuse and neglect, or other potentially traumatic adverse childhood experiences, this can have a lasting impact throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. It is key that staff are aware of how these children's experiences can impact on their mental health, behaviour, and education."

Keep this in mind when working with adopted children of any age.



Be aware

Curriculum

Be aware of curriculum topics that could be triggering and share these with the family in advance. Topics such as 'My Family' often come up in early years whereas some children in later primary find studying about evacuees during WWII triggering. A number of GCSE texts may be problematic for adopted children; one that crops up frequently is *Blood Brothers*. These don't have to be avoided but a conversation at home in advance and some preparation goes a long way for adopted children to handle them. If you realise that something may have been hard once you have taught it, let the parents know before the child gets home, if possible, so they can be prepared for a potentially tricky evening.



School plays

Adopted children sometimes face being sidelined when it comes to safeguarding during things like plays or events. Discuss with parents how you can keep their child's identity safe while still permitting them to take part, such as using creative costumes. You may also find a child becomes more hypervigilant standing on a stage in front of many people – you may need to position them near a safe adult or discuss with them as they get older where they'd feel happy on stage, or if they would prefer a backstage role.

Wet play time and towards the end of term

Be aware of film and TV content. Some adopted children can find certain films triggering with frightening characters, loss, being abandoned or being left alone as common themes - [here's an example from Adoption UK](#) about the Cruella movie. Check with parents if they have a safe list of films.

School trips

For trips, consider who can be a safe person for the child to be in a group with. When it comes to overnight trips, many adopted children find that leaving their safe place and people overnight can be a huge step and very scary. What will make them feel safe when they are away from home? Is it possible for a parent to be an extra adult or to stay somewhere nearby? Be creative and open in your thinking. For example, some schools have allowed parents to collect their child late each evening and return them early each morning so they can take part in the activities without the other children being aware they aren't staying overnight.

Keep on learning

Invest in training

Provide training not just for your designated teacher for looked after and previously looked after children, but for all staff including support and administrative staff. This will help to create a culture of understanding for all children from all staff and minimise the risk of children getting treated differently. Review your behaviour policy to move away from shaming strategies to a culture of support and understanding that every child will have different needs.

Don't stop there

Staff training is a good start, but keep what you learned at the forefront of your staff's practice. Consider introducing a staff meeting with a short video or a text, share tweets by trauma experts and embed these techniques into school life to support each other as much as the children. Allocate some of the pupil premium plus funding to maintain staff expertise and bring new staff up to speed.

Support available on The Adopter Hub

The Hub provides tailored resources, webinars and eLearning modules to help teachers and school staff support adopted young people in your school.

To find out more visit www.theadopterhub.org or email our team at theadopterhub@pactcharity.org

Support available to schools with a PACT adoptive child on roll

Schools with a PACT adoptive child on roll can contact PACT's education lead to request bespoke support. The PACT education lead can work alongside schools to improve their understanding of developmental trauma and how this might affect a child's behaviour within the classroom setting. This could include telephone advice, a range of inset day training opportunities, and tailor-made provision for the school to be able to further support adopted children; for example, helping a school to devise an individualised curriculum for a specific adopted child.



Schools with adopted children who are not adopted through PACT may purchase training and support packages. Contact the education lead to find out more.

To contact PACT's education lead, email adoptionssupport@pactcharity.org



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