



## **The Adoptables – Essential information for teachers to read before delivering the resource**

### **Introduction**

The Adoptables schools' Toolkit and accompanying session plans have been created to help improve the experience of school for adopted children and young people. The Toolkit was funded by the Department for Education and The Queen's Trust, enabling films and lesson plans to be created for both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 pupils. The resource is free for you to subscribe to and use in your lessons, and we would love to hear feedback on how you found using it. This guidance document outlines some of the issues for adopted children and young people, and signposts teachers to more specific or tailored support.

The Toolkit was co-produced with adopted young people who are known as 'The Adoptables'. The Adoptables are a peer network of young adopted people aged 13-25 years. The name 'The Adoptables' was chosen by the first cohort of young adopted people who worked on the project. The group decided on the name as they felt they strongly identified with it. Children in care are not always put up for adoption; this depends on their long-term care plan. The 'Adoptables' name does not imply that some children are 'unadoptable'; simply that, for some, the care plan is different.

The Adoptables speak out about their experiences as adopted young people to help better the experiences of those children growing up today. We asked some adopted young people what they would like teachers to know about their experience of being adopted. We filmed exactly what they said, unprompted. The 5 minute film gives an honest and, at times, moving insight that we urge you to watch.

Go to: <https://www.coramlifeeducation.org.uk/adoptables/> (Ambassador Interviews) to see this film of young Adoptables to understand their experiences.

The reasons leading to adoption, and the potential effect on the young person, are many and varied. Each adopted child or young person needs the support of professionals who understand their unique situation.

In April 2014 the Pupil Premium was extended by the Government to include children adopted from care on or before 30 December 2005. This was in recognition of the trauma and loss many adopted children have experienced in their early lives: *'Teachers and schools have a vital role to play in helping these children emotionally, socially and educationally by providing specific support, to raise their attainment and address their wider needs.'* Pupil premium for Adopted Children, (BAAF2015)

See: [Pupil Premium information for schools and alternative education settings](#)



## How we would like schools to use the Toolkit

Please note that for both KS2 and KS3, a parent/guardian letter **must** be distributed in advance of the session. Schools can choose to request the return of a signed consent slip in order for the pupil to attend the session or to waive this option. However, it is recommended that schools do have contact with all Parents / Guardians prior to the session. This is to avoid the potential distress that might be caused if a pupil is affected by the issues and not prepared adequately beforehand. Where pupils are withdrawn from the session, consideration must be made for their individual support by the school's pastoral team. Further support is available from <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/adoption-support/education-support/>

<http://www.pac-uk.org/education/#AUKST>

All session plans enable delivery within one lesson, alongside the appropriate film clips, discussion cards and PowerPoint slides. The KS2 Toolkit is delivered by the teacher, and the KS3 Toolkit is delivered by a teacher or with an Adoptables Ambassador, in liaison with Coram.

The development of this resource was informed by the PSHE Association's best-practice guidance, including their Programmes of study. The learning objectives of the sessions, located at the start of each session plan, relate directly to the suggested Learning Opportunities within the PSHE Association's Programmes of Study which are also set out at the start of each session plan.

## Some background information\*

### What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents.

It is a legal procedure in which all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters.

Once an adoption order has been granted it can only be reversed in extremely rare circumstances.

An adopted child loses all legal ties with their first mother and father (the "birth parents") and becomes a full member of the new family, usually taking the family's name.

See [First4Adoption](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk) for more information on adoption.



## **What is the difference between adoption and fostering?**

Foster carers share the responsibility for the child with a local authority and the child's parents.

Fostering is usually a temporary arrangement, though sometimes foster care may be the plan until the child grows up. This long term or "permanent" fostering cannot provide the same legal security as adoption for either the child or the foster family but it may be the right plan for some children.

See Coram BAAF's [fostering page](#) for more information.

## **Who are the children who need adopting?**

There are thousands of children across England needing adoption every year. These children are from a great variety of [ethnic](#) and religious backgrounds.

Many of these children are of school age and over half of them are in groups of brothers and sisters who need to be placed together.

There are children with additional needs and those whose future development is unclear. Some children will have been abused and/or neglected and all will have experienced moves and uncertainty and their resulting behaviour may be challenging.

(\*Source: First4Adoption).

## **So what can teachers do to help? This is what our group of adopted young people had to say (see film clip, page 1, above):**

**“It’s hard for teachers because each adopted person has a unique story.”**

As we can see from the young people in our film, they wish to be treated as individuals not as a homogenous group of ‘Adopted Children’. We can all support any young person and manage their behaviour more effectively if we know their history. This is especially true of young people who may have experienced trauma. The Secondary schools that we spoke to as part of the development of the Toolkit told us that one of the biggest problems in supporting adopted young people was ‘not knowing’ about their adoption. Often the adoption was only shared with the school if there was a problem and the parents had been called into school. If adoption has taken place when the child was in the pre-school phase, Primary schools tend to be informed but some parents see the transition to Secondary school as a potential ‘clean slate’: an opportunity for the young person to move on without the ‘adoption’ label. One of the components of the Coram Adoptables session is a letter that the school issues prior to the session, informing parents / carers of the content. This is to avoid the situation that was described in the film where abuse and neglect were discussed



and the young person was unprepared for the anxiety that this caused. It is hoped that the letter will create an opportunity for discussion and greater understanding between the parents of adopted young people and the school.

*'Children were bullied in schools because of their adoptive status. Teachers need to be better informed about adoption, the risks of bullying and to be more aware of the impact of activities which focus on the family and the possible impact of specific teaching on subjects such as maltreatment and attachment theory.'* Beyond the Adoption Order (DfE2014.)

### **"I just want to be treated like a normal child."**

Many of today's adopted children will have come from a background of abuse and/or neglect and may have had many moves through the Care system. The average age at adoption in the year ending 31st March 2015 was 3 years 3 months, 2 months younger than in 2014. Their experiences before adoption will have impacted to some degree on their development.

For more information, see **Beyond the Adoption order (DfE 2014)**. It gives an excellent insight into the reasons why children are adopted, the impact it can have on families and the experiences of those families in dealing with agencies such as social workers and schools.

### **"Because I was adopted when I was younger, they said that my issues had gone."**

Many adopted children have experienced abuse or neglect, the effects of which are likely to continue to present even when the child is placed in a loving and stable home. Some of the issues that adopted children and young people might have include:

- Difficult start in life
- Multiple losses – a succession of carers
- Attachment style – insecure
- Often emotional arousal high – anxiety/fear
- Poor ability to interpret social cues
- Strategies to get needs met are poor and limited.

Adoption does not 'fix' trauma. Stress and sensory reminders can act as triggers for years. One adopted young person told us that the smell of 'off' milk could still trigger a negative response over 15 years on from her adoption.

For more information see *'Let's Learn Together' (Sheila Lavery with Adoption UK and Health and Social Care 2013)*, giving practical advice to parents and teachers.

For more information on attachment issues see: <http://www.attachmentawareschools.com/>



**“I definitely wasn’t trying to be deliberately difficult, I just couldn’t help it.”**

*‘Children need to be calm and alert in order to absorb new information. Imagine how hard it must be to learn when trying to manage high stress with the regulation skills of a toddler.’ Let’s Learn Together (Sheila Lavery 2013).*

Self-regulation and impulse control are learnt behaviours. Many adopted children and young people struggle to manage their own behaviour and may have aggressive outbursts. They may find relationships difficult, having trust issues and low self-esteem.

### **What role do schools play in supporting young people who are or have been adopted, fostered or in care?**

Schools have a key role to play in improving the educational outcomes of looked after children. For further information and guidance on:

- School admissions
- The designated teacher
- The personal education plan
- School governors The pupil premium
- Attachment
- The Virtual School Head
- SDQs – Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires
- Emotional health and wellbeing

visit The National Association of Virtual School Heads –  
<http://www.navsh.org.uk/information-for/schools>

The National Association of Virtual School Heads exists to improve educational outcomes for looked after children by working with partners and commissioning research to ensure that the educational needs of looked after children are better understood.

All local authorities in England are required to have a Virtual School Head.

### **Further information and Pupil Premium**

*‘The Pupil Premium provides schools in England with additional funding to help them raise the attainment of disadvantaged children and close the gap with their peers. It is paid to schools in respect of children from Reception to Year 11. In April 2014 the Pupil Premium was extended to include children adopted from care on or after 30 December 2005 and was extended to all children adopted from care in summer 2014. To enable a child’s school to claim the Premium of £1,900 (correct at July 2017), adoptive parents must inform the school about their child’s adoptive status and provide supporting evidence (e.g. an adoption order).*





*Schools are then responsible for deciding how it should be spent and are accountable for the use and impact of the Premium on the achievement of the pupils who attract it. The additional funding can be spent directly on the children who attract it, or on a group basis including those who are eligible for the Premium.'*

For more information on Pupil Premium see: [Pupil Premium information for schools and alternative education settings](#)

For information on how best to use Pupil Premium see: 'Pupil premium for Adopted Children' (BAAF2015)

For more information see 'Let's Learn together' (Sheila Lavery with Adoption UK and Health and Social Care 2013)

<http://www.attachmentawareschools.com/>

**"If my mum had been told before that they [outside agency] were coming in to school, she would have been able to tell me the information I needed to know instead of me finding out then going home crying and not understanding anything at all."**

The Coram Adoptables session resources include a letter that must be signed and returned by parents / guardians.

Children who have experienced trauma can react (and sometimes appear to 'over-react') to all kinds of triggers – verbal, non-verbal and sensory. These can vary from child to child. However, there are some common 'triggers' that can be avoided or carefully considered, these include topics such as:

- Family Trees
- 'When I was a baby'
- Personal / family history
- Mothers' / Fathers' day
- 'Adopting' an animal

### **Useful Websites**

[www.first4adoption.org.uk](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk)

<http://www.adoptionuk.org/resources/education#EducationShop>

<http://www.attachmentawareschools.com/>

<https://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings>



## Further reading

*'Let's Learn together' (Sheila Lavery with Adoption UK and Health and Social Care 2013)*

*'Pupil premium for Adopted Children' (BAAF, 2015)*

*Beyond the Adoption Order' (DfE, 2014).*

*Boomber, L (2007) Inside I'm Hurting, Worth Publishing*

*Bomber, L. M. (2011). Inclusive strategies to support pupils with attachment difficulties make it through the school day.*

*Bowlby J (1988). A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development. Tavistock professional book. London: Routledge*

## National Statistics for looked after children

### England

The number of looked after children has continued to rise; it has increased steadily over the last eight years. There were 70,440 looked after children at 31 March 2016, an increase of 1% compared to 31 March 2015 and an increase of 5% compared to 2012. The rise this year reflects a rise of 1,470 in unaccompanied asylum seeking children, compared to a rise of 970 in all looked after children.

4,690 looked after children were adopted in 2016, down 12% on a high of 5,360 in 2015 which followed a period of growth since 2011.

In 2016 the number of children in foster care continued to rise; of the 70,440 looked after children at 31 March 2016, 51,850 (74%) were cared for in foster placements – the same proportion as last year.

In 2016 the number of looked after unaccompanied asylum seeking children increased by 54% compared to last year's figures, up to 4,210 children at 31 March 2016 from 2,740 in 2015 and up from a low of 1,950 in 2013. At 31 March 2016, unaccompanied asylum seeking children represented 6% of the looked after children population.

The proportion of children looked after due to abuse or neglect has fallen slightly from 62% in 2014, to 61% in 2015 and to 60% in 2016. Over the same time period the proportion of children in need due to absent parenting has risen from 5% in 2014, to 7% in 2016, reflecting the rise in unaccompanied asylum seeking children.



The average duration between entry into care and being adopted fell between 2012 and 2015, from 2 years 7 months to 2 years 3 months, but in 2016 it has remained unchanged. The decrease up to 2015 was largely down to a reduction in the time taken for the initial stage, the time between entry into care and the decision the child should be placed for adoption, which has fallen by four months from 11 months in 2012 to 7 months in 2016. This follows the Action Plan on Adoption that was published in March 2012 by the Department for Education which set out aims for reducing the time taken for a child to be adopted. The average time between entry into care and adoption varies by age and is longer for older children. Children aged under 1 year at the start of their period of care were adopted the quickest – the average time being 1 year and 11 months. Children aged 1 at the start of their period of care were adopted on average in 2 years and 6 months. Whilst the durations for children aged five and over can be 3 years or more, these durations can be influenced by the small number of looked after children aged 5 and over being adopted.

#### Sources:

Children looked after in England including adoption: 2015 to 2016 (September 2016)  
National Statistics

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2015-to-2016>

#### **The Adoptables within the context of PSHE**

The Adoptables should be taught in a wider context of a planned programme of PSHE, taking into account your pupils' needs. The resource would sit well within a set of lessons based on relationships, the family or children's rights.

PSHE education is currently a non-statutory subject on the school curriculum (as of November 2017). However, section 2.5 of the national curriculum states that all state schools 'should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), drawing on good practice'.

In addition to the national curriculum framework, the [Department for Education guidance](#) states that the subject is 'an important and necessary part of all pupils' education' and that 'schools should seek to use PSHE education to build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in statutory guidance on: drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education (SRE) and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle.'

In March 2017, the Department for Education announced that SRE will be a mandatory part of the curriculum for all schools from the academic year 2019/2020. Known as





‘Relationships and Sex Education’ in secondary schools, and ‘Relationships Education’ in primary schools, the legislation includes the option to extend statutory status to PSHE education at a later date.

The [national curriculum](#) also states that ‘all schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), drawing on good practice’. PSHE education contributes to schools' statutory duties outlined in the [Education Act 2002](#) and the [Academies Act 2010](#) to provide a balanced and broadly-based curriculum and is essential to Ofsted judgements in relation to personal development, behaviour, welfare and safeguarding. For more information see *‘Let’s Learn together’ (Sheila Lavery with Adoption UK and Health and Social Care 2013)*.