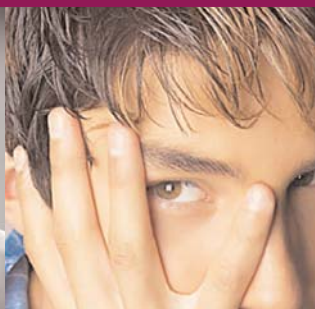
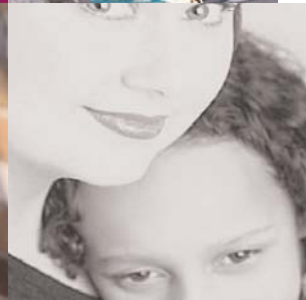




Adopted Children in School

A guide for teachers



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Introduction for Teachers

We appreciate that many of you will already be aware of the issues raised in this booklet but this is directed to those teachers delivering the curriculum who are not experienced in dealing with the needs of children who have been through the care system and have been adopted.

Adoption is a positive option to ensure the safety and well-being of many children. It is rightly seen as something to be celebrated and adopters go through a rigorous process before having a child placed with them. Many children thrive in adoptive homes but for some there can be particular issues, which this booklet hopes to highlight.



What adoption can mean to children

Children who have been adopted have all experienced loss, loss of their birth family, at least one foster family, and perhaps friends, their previous school and social workers to name a few. This can be quite overwhelming and can feel like a rejection.

This sense of loss can be rekindled at various times in their lives not just when they are first placed. This can add to their feeling of 'difference'. These issues are compounded for children who are adopted transracially and transculturally. They may also be dealing with a loss of culture and an adopted family of a different race and may face racism in their new environment.

Many children placed for adoption have also had to come to terms with a very painful history. It can be hard to understand that the effects of this history may persist even when they have been placed with loving, understanding and caring parents.

Adopted children have two sets of parents and may have siblings living elsewhere. Their birth family may still play a very real part of their lives through ongoing contact most commonly in the form of a letter, or perhaps face-to-face contact facilitated by Enfield Adoption Support Service. Although this can sometimes be unsettling in the short term, it may be healing in the long term. When they talk about their two families this needs to be understood.



Adopted children can have low self esteem or feel they have to prove their right to exist, something birth children usually take for granted. They often have friendship problems. They can also display the need to take control in a world where they had no control over what happened to them.

Their issues may be the same as other children, for example aggression or lack of concentration but these may be more intense, extreme and long lasting. Some examples of challenging behaviour may be encountered; these are often the result of their previous life experiences. Do talk to their parents to gain a better understanding but remember that confidentiality needs to be thought about.

Continuity is important to adopted children; change can be very unsettling for example change of class, school or teacher.

Transitions might be very difficult for them and planning ahead can help a lot. Hyper-vigilance due to insecurity is very common amongst adopted children and can lead to problems with short-term memory and learning.

Playtimes can often be stressful due to their unstructured and unpredictable nature and children may need help to manage their time.



Attachment Issues

'Attachment issues' is a phrase being used at present to describe a variety of behaviours, which may arise after a child has lost his/her primary carer, often the mother, and has experienced emotional abandonment in early years.

These behaviours can show themselves in many ways, some children become over anxious to please, desperate to do anything to escape another abandonment. Others act out their chaotic feelings in chaotic behaviour.

Either way, this can present major problems to the schools they are in. It is not only adopted children who experience this; so does any child who has experienced interrupted care in their lives (e.g. if a child had to stay in hospital at birth or later, if the mother has had post-natal depression or if family life has broken down because of divorce).

Attachment issues affect many children who display challenging behaviour in schools. Their behaviour can be confusing and difficult to live with and they are sometimes criticised, neglected and even excluded from school.

How does this, affect children at school

You may want the child to:

- Concentrate
- Work hard
- Do his/her best
- Mix well with others

The child with attachment issues may be dealing daily with:

- Panic
- Rage
- Desperate efforts to please
- Loss
- Helplessness
- Control
- Identity issues



Behaviour that may result from attachment issues and why

Behaviours

Poor concentration

Turning around

Talking all the time

Constant asking of the teacher
apparently trivial questions

Ignoring instructions

In trouble at breaks

Disruptive behaviour

Trying to create chaos and mayhem

Refusal to be helped with new work

Child's preoccupations may be

Continually apprehensive

Danger may come from behind

Life feels safer that way

It feels too dangerous to 'get wrong'
may feel invisible unless getting
attention

Too much anxiety to be able to
listen

Panic sets in when in crowds where
there is less structure and more
chaos, replicating the child's earlier
history

Contact with birth family may be
happening soon or has just
happened

It feels chaotic inside so it feels
safer if its around outside as well

I was left helpless – I'll never be
helpless again

Behaviour that may result from attachment issues and why

Behaviours

Lying, stealing, secret lives

Special 'explosions' around maths and spelling

Sulkiness at meeting with head teachers or others in authority

Behaviour suddenly deteriorates

Being average in performance at subjects is hard to accept – Child can have an all or nothing approach to subjects; a perfectionism often symbolised by lots of rubbing out or non participation

Child's preoccupations may be

Life may feel like a lie – I am not sure who I am or what the truth is. I don't know the difference between fantasy and reality

It is clear when this is 'wrong' and being wrong may lead to rejection AGAIN

The child has no words to describe his/her feelings – looking sulky is a cover up

A new sibling has arrived or there is a painful anniversary or changes at home

A lack of self-acceptance and little intrinsic self-esteem

Other possible difficulties that might arise in school

Here are examples of potential issues relating to the National Curriculum and daily life in school, other issues may arise at other times.

Growth and Development

Children may be asked to bring in photos or articles of clothing when they were babies, this may not be available. Other options can be presented to children.

Family Tree

The child may face a dilemma about how to represent their origins - you could use a 'time line' autobiography format instead or the Royal family – give options. This is also true for children within stepfamilies and in the 'looked after' system. Mother's day cards/presents/art work could also bring up loyalty dilemmas.

Sex Education/PSHE [Physical, Social, health and Education]

Adopted children may feel stigmatised by the circumstances of their birth. If an adopted child has experienced sexual abuse in their past, their knowledge and awareness may be heightened and they may make inappropriate comments. Offer de-briefing after the session. Children who have experienced abuse may find sports activities, or when they are required to remove clothing, disturbing.

Literature

Realise that some stories, particularly those with themes of death or loss of loved ones, may evoke painful memories. Angry or withdrawn behaviour may be a result of this.



Case examples for Teachers

Case Study One

Louis was a troubled child who was disruptive, intrusive and sometimes aggressive to other children. He needed someone on his side.

Action

Louis was given a key worker for playtimes, who set up a project that he and she could work together. Together they managed to count the dinners through, and to set up a specific activity in the playground for each class in turn. Louis stayed with his worker at all times but took the lead.

Gradually, Louis's worker withdrew as he became more confident but let him know without judgement when she felt he still needed help. Over time he became more confident and was able to behave in a more socially appropriate way. The staff were very surprised and commented how he now seemed like a different child.

Case study Two

Chloe is a seven year old who has been adopted after a traumatic time with her birth family. However, teachers feel uncomfortable with the way she tries to snuggle into them, cuddle and kiss them and give them gifts.

Chloe's flirtatious behaviour has made some staff inclined to make a pet of her. Others, though uncomfortable with her behaviour, were reluctant to be seen to be rejecting.

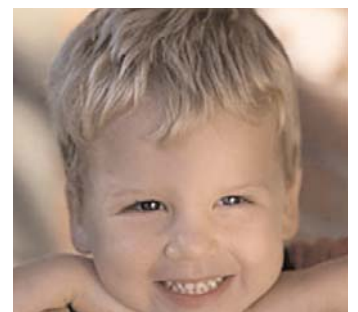
Action

After concern from Chloe's parents, all staff were briefed on how to manage Chloe and ideas about what to say.

Chloe's parents gave her a list of ways she could make contact with key adults. Chloe was encouraged to role-play meetings and interactions using toys.

- Smile and say hello
- Shake hands
- Do a high five
- Do thumbs up

It is very important to develop clear boundaries with children who have attachment difficulties so that they learn how to protect themselves from harm, as they grow older.



What can teachers do to help?

Feelings:

- Validate the child's feelings and name them e.g. 'you feel really angry about this don't you? It seems as if you are finding this really hard'.
- Give praise and remind the child what they are good at and that it is ok to have to work at some subjects if they seem overwhelmed by negativity.
- The child desperately needs the message 'We want you here'. Threats of removal and exclusion should be avoided. That is their greatest fear.
- Opportunities for communication other than words can be very helpful e.g. music, drama, play and art.
- Confronting the child head on and using scathing language may be reinforcing the child's belief that he/she is totally valueless – so valueless that he/she was 'given away'.
- Be aware of the link between adoption and attachment issues and that the adopted child's experiences can have a lasting affect on their educational and social progress.



Other strategies:

- Provide regular communication to parents particularly in the early stages of school. Talk to parents about what strategies work best for their child.
- Help alleviate anxiety and/or trauma around change for example by using a familiar member of staff as a link person or another child as a 'buddy'.
- Tell a child in advance of changes/endings e.g. Lunch is in 10 minutes. Adopted children may need reminding of your boundary in relation to them e.g. 'this is the last term this year that I am your teacher'. Stating the times limitations and repeating the teacher pupil boundaries make them feel safe and contained.
- Share with parents a clear and honest picture of the child's potential as far as academic achievement and social skills are concerned. Expectations may be too high.
- Provide written information to parents about the kinds of help that are available for children in the education setting.
- Be aware of short-term memory problems. Use strategies to relieve ensuing anxiety and stress e.g. direct communication with parents rather than via the child. Make sure they know the child's time-table. Use visual aids to memory; time table on wall or in child's bag. Use planners and homework diaries to orientate a child in space and time.
- Be aware that birthdays can be a complex time, awakening feelings of loss, sadness and happiness.
- Personal revelations by children should be treated sensitively and confidentially. Make sure that you are the best person to be confided in as the change from one confidante to another can throw children emotionally.



- Be aware that issues such as homework maybe difficult.
- Be creative in your disciplining
- Think about the playtime period and how the lack of structure and routine can seriously affect the adopted child. Ensure that the playtime supervisors praise the child for good behaviour rather than just responding to negative behaviour and consider offering structured games e.g. chess club.
- Check that the curriculum doesn't make it harder for the adopted child.
- Consider the impact of doing family tree type work with children, impact of asking children to bring in baby photos and doing family history type projects in the classroom.
- Many children who misbehave may need time out to calm down outside of the classroom. However, these children are often afraid to be on their own for fear of abandonment and need a supportive adult to remain with them. This can enable the child to be helped in looking at their behaviour by firstly regaining control of themselves and being able to talk about their feelings.
- Impact on the adopted child of the school adopting a pet/ park etc - (use of "adoption" as a word can be misleading – "what happens if we cant afford the sponsorship, fees etc - Will adoptive child believe their parents may return them if they cant afford to care for him/her?)
- Consider how support at particular times might be required during periods of transition e.g. from primary to secondary school.
- Find out if your school Special Needs Policy can help.

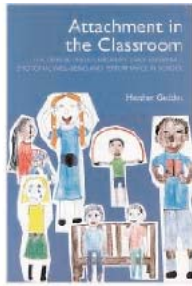


Do think about the adoptive parents...

- Adoptive parents often have great problems adjusting to parenthood. They are not just dealing with bringing up a child but a whole lot more.
- Instantaneous parenthood and possibly the placement of more than one child at a time.
- Often no gradual nurturing into the education system via playgroup/nursery etc.
- Managing social, emotional and behavioural issues stemming from the child's early history.
- If a child is experiencing difficulties in school then parents may be concerned by the negative feelings that may come from other parents.
- Parents don't always know the details you may require
- They may feel different from other parents.
- Be supportive of wider family links.



Some useful books



Attachment in the classroom: The link between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school.

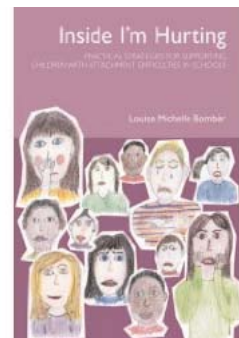
By Dr Heather Geddes
ISBN: 978-1903269084

Synopsis

Every day, teachers and other school staff have to deal with children who present challenging behaviour during their learning process at school. This book combines the fundamental principles of attachment theory with teacher-based case studies, and practical 'how to' interventions.

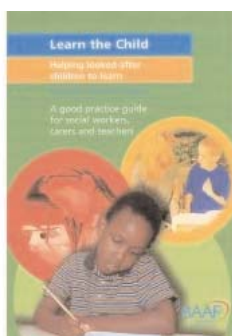
Inside I'm hurting: Practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools.

By Louise Bomber
ISMB: 978-1903269114



Synopsis

Inside I'm Hurting provides educational professionals with a much-needed classroom handbook of new strategies, practical tools and the confidence for supporting these children from an attachment perspective, thus promoting inclusion in the school system.



Learn the Child –Helping looked after children to learn A good practice guide for social workers, carers and teachers

By Kate Cairns and Chris Stanway
ISBN: 1 903699 38 X

Synopsis

The resource pack consists of a book and CD ROM containing a PowerPoint presentation and a set of handouts. The presentation can be used flexibly by anyone involved in the care and education of looked after children while the book can be used as a stand-alone.

Adoption Support in Enfield

Enfield Adoption Support Service offers information, guidance and/or counselling for anyone involved in the adoption process who lives in the London Borough of Enfield or have adopted through the borough.

Enfield also provide a surgery with the Post Adoption Centre for Enfield residents affected by adopted, these sessions run monthly free of charge. To find out more about this surgery please contact: ☎ 0870 777 2197

Where can I find out more?

Enfield Adoption Support Service
Triangle House
305-313 Green Lanes
London N13 4YB

☎ 020 8379 8490
email: adoption@enfield.gov.uk
www.enfield.gov.uk/adoption

Enfield Council would like to thank the London borough of Hackney and Hampshire County Council for their contribution to this booklet.

