



AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADOPTED YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHAPE THE WAY ADOPTION SUPPORT HAPPENS IN THE FUTURE



THE BIG CONSULT

Creating adoption services: lessons from young people

A toolkit for Regional Adoption Agencies to address the issues young adopted people find important.

The Big Consult

Developing adoption services: recommendations from adopted young people.

After Adoption was commissioned by the DfE to consult with adopted young people at the end of 2014 to inform legislation and regulation. Since then, we have obtained their permission to share this more widely as we believe these messages from young people can support the development of Regional Adoption Agencies.

After Adoption brought together groups of young people on its national TalkAdoption programmes along with Being Family (Yorkshire Adoption Consortium) AT-ID group in Leeds to get a national picture of the needs and expectations of adopted young people.

- London After Adoption TalkAdoption
- Midlands After Adoption TalkAdoption
- North East After Adoption TalkAdoption
- North West After Adoption TalkAdoption
- Wales After Adoption TalkAdoption
- Yorkshire Being Family Adopted Teens Identity Group

These groups were linked together by video conference and together they discussed issues around adoption to create recommendations about what should be considered.

In advance of the consultation event, After Adoption worked with its TalkAdoption young people to co-design a list of areas and questions to focus on. The questions they identified were:

- What are the most important things people should learn about being a parent to an adopted young person?
- Think of 5 things which would make life better for adopted young people in school.
- What are the best ways of helping young people know what they want to know about their birth families?
- What are the best ways to make sure adopted young people don't feel on their own in being adopted?

On the day the young people from the Wales group acted as facilitators of the session.

This is an example of After Adoption's method of co-production with young people leading every stage:

- Young people setting the topics
- Young people engaged in discussion
- Young people facilitating and moderating the discussion

This meant that the views represented here really are the views and issues that are important to adopted young people across the country in After Adoption's TalkAdoption groups and Being Family's AT-ID group.

Question the young people addressed	Young people's response and recommendations	After Adoption's checklist for RAAs
<p>What are the most important things people should learn about being a parent to an adopted young person?</p>	<p><i>It's all about developing communication between parents and children.</i> <i>Parents need:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>support to learn how to share difficult and general information</i> • <i>help not feel rejected when questions from their children are asked</i> • <i>counselling/support to understand and manage children's behaviour</i> • <i>access to an external and neutral mediator, rather than local authority social workers</i> • <i>to be able to tell children their life story</i> 	<p>Is support easily accessible? Is there support for parents based on the implications of early trauma on children's behavior? Do you have external resources to provide an independent mediator? Is life story work embedded in all work through the child's journey?</p>
<p>Think of 5 things which would make life better for adopted young people in school.</p>	<p><i>School can be a really difficult place for us because of feeling different and people not understanding adoption and what it feels like to be adopted.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teachers need special training to understand more about adoption so that they can properly help.</i> • <i>It would help other kids if there were special assemblies about being adopted that they could go into other people's schools rather than their own or even make a film about being adopted.</i> • <i>There should be a counsellor in school who understands adoption</i> • <i>consider linking adopted young people together in a club or mentoring each other (but without making us look different!)</i> • <i>please make sure ALL teachers understand that when they're teaching about family trees and genetics as part of the curriculum, they need to understand about adoption too. Lots of us have had really difficult experiences in these classes from early years family trees to GCSE biology where teachers still just don't realise that some children don't like with their biological parents.</i> 	<p>Is there someone in the RAA who has responsibility for linking with education? Does the RAA have a plan for linking with virtual heads? Has the RAA identified funding for schools training on adoption? Does the RAA have a strategy to link to all schools including those which set their own curriculum?</p>

Question the young people addressed	Young people's response and recommendations	After Adoption's checklist for RAAs
<p>What are the best ways of helping young people know what they want to know about their birth families?</p>	<p><i>We feel very strongly that we want to understand about our birth families and we think we can deal with real information. We know that sometimes we can't have contact and we want protecting in those cases and to be able to protect ourselves.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Life story books are critical sources of information for us. If they aren't done well then we are missing out on a part of our lives. We need as much age appropriate information about our lives before adoption as possible.</i> <i>Once we've been adopted we still need to know how our birth family are doing and well managed, well supported letterbox contact is great for this. Make sure you support our adoptive parents and birth parents with letterbox too – it upsets us when it doesn't work.</i> <i>We want support for adoptive parents right from the beginning of the adoption process on maintaining some form of contact with birth relatives. Adoptive parents need to be able to talk openly about our birth families as we sometimes find it difficult.</i> <i>We need to be able to keep in touch with our siblings. Social workers must work together to make sure that when we are separated by adoption we can keep some sort of contact.</i> 	<p>Is life story work embedded in all work through the child's journey? Is there a clear plan on how life story work brings together information from LA child protection teams with information in the RAA?</p> <p>Is there a letterbox service? Is there a plan for continuity in letterbox service in the transition period when RAAs form? Is there support for adopters? Is there support for birth family members?</p> <p>Is there information on contact and communication in adopter prep training? Is there further training offered as children get older?</p> <p>Are there plans in place for sibling contact assessments from the point of entry into care? Is it clear how these are maintained / reviewed / updated when adoption is the plan? Does this follow through to support around contact after placement and adoption?</p>

Question the young people addressed	Young people's response and recommendations	After Adoption's checklist for RAAs
<p>What are the best ways to make sure adopted young people don't feel on their own in being adopted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Activity days should be available to adoptive families from the point of adoption to ensure adopted children are meeting others like themselves to reduce feelings of isolation and difference, which they can experience throughout their lives.</i> • <i>Offer group sessions which young adopted people can access on a regular basis for example once a month on a day which suits their needs. This will provide a sense of belonging and offer peer support by adopted young people being able to share their experiences with each other</i> • <i>To ensure young adopted people feel an ongoing sense of support there should be access to a website specifically for young adopted people, a help/textline or something similar which can offer one to one support or enable peer support through an online group (moderated by an adoption worker)</i> 	<p>Are activity days included in the plan? Are they cross agency to maximize attendance and widen peer networks?</p> <p>Is there a programme of group events for adopted young people? Is there an engagement plan for young people?</p> <p>Is access to a website included? Is access to a helpline or text line included?</p>

<p>For further information on how adopted young people can feed into the development of Regional Adoption Agencies including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying out consultation for your regional agency • Holding co-production events in your region • Providing services to meet the needs identified in this checklist <p>please contact us at the address on the right.</p>	<p>Commissioning team 0161 830 2001 commissioning@afteradoption.org.uk</p> <p>After Adoption Citygate 5, 5 Blantyre Street Manchester M15 4JJ</p>
---	---