



Adopting a child from a different ethnicity

A guide for prospective adopters

www.adoptionmatters.org

Registered Charity No. 512892

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About this guide

Adoption Matters aims to provide children, young people and their families with services that value and celebrate difference, promote equal opportunities and ensure the best outcome for children who are adopted. This short guide aims to help individuals and families who are considering adopting a child of a different ethnicity than their own.

In an increasingly diverse society, caring for a child from a different ethnic background can also introduce a more global mindset to family life. A multicultural family is defined as a place, or a situation that consists or relates to many nationalities, cultures, and several races. We want families who are open to diversity.

A multicultural family may have more experience living in different countries and societies and it means that we are offered numerous perspectives to see things and situations in a global context. Being part of a multicultural family will encourage open-mindedness to new cultural experiences and impacts on how we see and perceive the world.

Knowledge and preparation are key to successfully caring for a child of a different ethnicity. This is another building block in developing your knowledge and understanding of your child, yourselves and the society we live in.



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Our Mission

Our main aim is to find permanent families for children who are no longer able to live with their birth families. We also aim to provide a high quality, comprehensive and responsive support service to potential and existing adopters as well as those whose lives have been touched by adoption.

Our Values

At Adoption Matters we believe that children's welfare and needs are paramount and we aim for them to grow up in a secure and loving family who will best meet their long-term needs and who can help them to reach their full potential. In order to do this and in recognition of the lifelong impact of adoption, the agency provides a comprehensive adoption service for all the parties involved, offering support and advice to prospective adopters, adoptive families, children, adopted children and adults and birth relatives, and an information, support and intermediary service to adopted people and birth relatives.

All our activities are underpinned by a strong commitment to the following core values and principles:



Honest and fair

We undertake to treat every case fairly on its individual merits and to be honest and realistic in all our communications.



Celebrating difference

We work within a culture of respect and acceptance, treating everyone who engages with the agency fairly, professionally and with respect to people's right to confidentiality.



Ethical

We maintain strong family values and a compassionate, empathetic approach within all the work we do, embracing equally those who have religious beliefs of any denomination and those who do not.



Inclusive

We strive to ensure equality of opportunity, both for our adoptive families and amongst our staff and Trustees regardless of gender, race, religion, culture, heritage, age, disability or sexuality.



Flexible

We aim to continually develop and improve our services and increase engagement with our service users, using their feedback and suggestions to inform future developments.



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A brief history of 'Transracial Adoption'

'Transracial adoption' in Britain dates back to the 1960s following concern about high numbers of Black, Asian and children of other ethnic backgrounds in the care system. The majority of these children were placed with white families, in an era when racism, prejudice and a sentiment of 'love is enough' were commonplace.

Fundamental changes in social policy and legislation moved the goal posts after the early 70's, when it was recognised that growing up in a white family may have had a negative impact on Black children's identities. There was a move to match children to carers and adopters that more closely matched their ethnicity, religion, and culture.

Social policy has changed again since 2000, with the view being that placing a child is the most important aspect and concerns that delay in seeking a 'perfect' match may be detrimental to the child's best interests. It may still be considered ideal to place a child with an adopter who closely matches the child's ethnicity. However, concern about delays for children of Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds has led to a rethink about what the priorities are for this group of children.

The current position is that in the face of possible delay, finding an exact ethnic match for a child should no longer be the priority. Unlike any other period in history, we live in a far more ethnically diverse society, with more access to multicultural resources and communities.

Estimations are that citizens with origins in Africa, the Caribbean Island and Asia will make up nearly a third of the UK's population by 2050.

A family today will be assessed on its ability to positively promote and celebrate their child's ethnicity and identity even if they do not match their child's ethnicity, essentially the family becoming a multi-cultural family.



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Identity and Attachment

A parent or parents caring for a child of a different culture and ethnicity to themselves have a responsibility to help their children define themselves as a member of their own culture and ethnicity at the same time as bringing them into the new culture that is already present in the family. Without connection, the child can feel 'lost'.

This means preparing your child and your family for the challenges of racism and prejudice.

It is important to recognise that children who have come into the care system are likely to have attachment issues due to traumatic beginnings in their lives. In addition to the issues of attachment, trauma, grief and loss of foster carers and birth family, children being adopted into a family of a different background may experience an extra challenge in finding their identity in a family that doesn't represent their own ethnicity.

Meeting ethnicity and identity needs is an essential part in your child's development and will actively promote their ability to develop secure and healthy relationships within their new adoptive family network. Once a child is valued for who they are it paves the way for them to attach to their new family.

Children placed in a family of a different ethnicity and culture do not have the advantage of learning about their birth cultures through everyday cues and bits of knowledge, unconsciously processed and passed down through the years and generations, in the same way that families of the same backgrounds do. Therefore, deliberate thought must be given to addressing the cultural and identity needs of a child.

Racism

Black, Asian and children from other ethnic groups need to be protected from, as well as prepared for, the various forms of racism and discrimination they may encounter in their lives. Any racism must be seen by your children to be dealt with, openly acknowledged and not tolerated. This increases a child's security and value within the family and helps them feel listened to.

The first step to helping a child deal with any prejudice and racism is to instil strong self-esteem. With a positive view they will be more able to move forwards from any hurtful comments. If they do experience a racist comment in school or the community, acknowledge that you understand how hurt they are and that what happened to them was unfair. Let them know that the remarks are untrue and wrong. Children need help to recognise that they are not alone in experiencing or challenging racism.

Let them know you will go into battle for them!



Current themes in adoption

There are currently far more Black and Asian children in the care system than there are Black and Asian carers and adopters.

We know that when it comes to people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, there are a number of specific barriers which can stop people from considering adoption, whether that is a misconception about the type of person that can adopt, fear of the process being overly intrusive or a mistrust of authority.

It is important that children who are Black Caribbean or Black African, Asian and of mixed Black ethnicity are placed with families who can support their identity and their understanding of their culture and heritage. As there are a disproportionate number of Black children in care, Black and mixed ethnicity adopters, as with all adopters, are always welcomed into the process.

There are approximately 78,000 looked after children in England. Within this, Black children are disproportionately over-represented in our care system; while Black ethnic groups make up 3% of the general population, 8% of the looked after children population is Black. Black children are also less likely to go on to be adopted and wait longer to find their adoptive families.

The data reveals that whilst the average White child waits 919 days for adoption, boys of Black African descent wait the longest - 1,302 days.

Only 2.7% of the people approved to be adopters in 2018/19 were Black. Adoption guidance states that adoption agencies/professionals should not seek to match all aspects of ethnicity and cultural background where this will cause delay to a child achieving a permanent family but should look at what is needed to support the child and family.

Data sources:

- Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board. Headline measures and Business intelligence. (Dec 2019)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019>
- Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019 -
<https://coram-i.org.uk/resource/local-level-data-quarter-2-2018-2019/2019>



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It is recognised that as with any adoption, transracial adoptions are both challenging and rewarding and that aspects such as attachment, self-esteem around identity and racial identity are just some of the support needs that adoptive parents entering a transracial placement should consider; importantly, a multitude of support is available to enable prospective adopters to provide a home and family in which a child's ethnicity is celebrated by the whole family.

There is no single definition now for what constitutes a **family – ideas are challenged and constantly evolve to align with modern life and societal change.**







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Thank you - to our adopters **Ed and Di** for the contributions to this guide.

Download a free adoption information pack:

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