

# Helping your child move overseas





## Hello and welcome

This short guide is written for family members who have decided to think about permanently caring for a relative's child living in the UK and who they plan to take to live with them in their country.

We hope that it will help you to understand:

- How public child care arrangements work in the UK.
- How events that happen to children prior to coming into family care might affect them.
- How you can help your child both now and in the future.

For a child moving to live with a new family, even one they might know, and moving to a new country it is a very big event.

In this guide we will be following the story of Joe, who is moving to the USA and Mia who is moving to Jamaica as a way of thinking about children and their stories.



## Looked After Children

In the UK if a child cannot be cared for by their birth family local government Children's Services have a duty in law to care for a child until more permanent arrangements can be made.

When a family is struggling to care for a child Children's Services will first offer help and support so that the family can stay together.

Sometimes it is not possible because the birth parents are not able to keep the child safe. In this case Children's Services can apply to the Court for a 'Care Order'.

Birth parents will have a lawyer to assist them and to present their case before the Judge. A Court appointed Guardian will represent the child.

If the Court grants a Care Order then the responsibility for the child is shared between the

parents and the Children's Services and the child is called a 'Looked After Child', meaning that they are being looked after by the State.

The child will have a social worker who must then make a plan for the child's future, which includes who might be able to offer a permanent home and love and care for the child.

Whilst this is happening the child will be living with Foster Carers, who have been approved by the Children's Services to look after children whose parents cannot do so.

You will be able to talk with the social worker and Foster Carers on the phone and meet them if you come to the UK.



## Joe and Mia

Joe lived with his mummy who looked after him on her own. When he was two she became very ill and had to go into hospital.

Joe had a social worker called Jessica who arranged for Joe to live with Tony and Joan who were foster carers.

When Joe's mummy became very sick Jessica helped her to think about who might look after Joe permanently and they decided that Rick, Joe's uncle in the USA might be able to love and care for Joe with his wife Gayle.

Mia lived with her mummy and daddy until she was four. They both took some drugs that made them both unwell and they found it hard to care for Mia.

The Court thought that Mia needed to be kept safe and asked John, Mia's social worker to find a foster carer to look after Mia whilst John thought about who could care for Mia permanently.

Mia went to live with Meg and John spoke to Mia's aunty Yvonne in Jamaica who had said that she would like to look after Mia.



## How past experiences can affect children

A child's early experiences can impact upon how they develop and grow and how they attach to and form relationships with their new carers.

Let's think about a new born baby.

- A baby needs safe and loving adults to offer care, protection and nurture.
- A parent or carer will ensure that the baby is fed, kept warm and clean and safe.
- They will touch, talk to and cuddle the child, understand a baby's cry so that the baby's needs can be met to avoid the baby becoming distressed.

All of these actions stimulate parts of the baby's brain as it develops and the relationship between baby and carer builds. The baby begins to trust that the adults caring for them will meet their needs.

**The baby and carer become attached.**

Through these experiences a child will grow up:

- Trusting people and the world.
- Feeling secure and safe and able to play and learn.
- Feeling good about themselves as carers have paid them attention and given love to them as individuals.

A strong attachment to a reliable carer means a child can then build relationships with others around them – extended family, a teacher, friends. We call this **secure attachment** and it is the foundation for healthy relationships throughout life.





## For some children however their early life is not always easy

Let's think about Joe and his early life:

- Joe's mummy had poor mental health. She found it hard to care for him and would leave him to cry, would shout and hit Joe and left him alone when she went out and Joe was hungry and scared.
- Children's Services visited and realised that Joe's mummy was unwell and unable to care properly for Joe. They arranged for medical help for Joe's mummy and Joe went to live with a foster carer.
- When Joe's mummy felt better Joe came back home to live with her.
- His mummy became ill again and Joe had to go to live with different foster carers, Tony and Joan.



- When Mia was born her mummy had been taking illegal drugs. She felt that these helped her to manage life better.
- Mia's daddy lived with Mia and her mother but he left and no one knew where daddy went to.
- Mia was also sometimes hungry and when she cried no one came to her because her mum was often asleep.
- Mia had grandparents. They took Mia to live with them. Mia loved her grandparents and they loved her very much and would play with her all the time. When Mia was three her grandmother suddenly died. Grandad was not well and could not care for her alone.
- Mia went back to live with her mummy but she was not safe so Children's Services arranged for her to move to a foster carer.





## How do these experiences affect children?

Children like Joe and Mia have not had the chance to develop secure attachments.

Their life has been:

- Unpredictable, unsafe and frightening sometimes.
- Full of change and loss.

Their attachments are insecure:

- They find it hard to trust adults; they do not expect adults to be reliable or consistent and feel angry, anxious or confused.
- They feel they are not worth anything and are unlovable.
- They may be developmentally delayed as they have not had one to one attention, play and stimulation.

Children develop behaviours to cope with difficult situations. When children move to live with a different carer they may bring some of these behaviours with them.

They might be:

- Sad and withdrawn.
- Angry and lose their temper very quickly.
- Behave badly to get attention.
- Anxious about being separated from a new carer and constantly watchful.
- Might be hyperactive and do not having a 'stop' button.
- 'Bossy' and need to do everything themselves.
- Very compliant and 'too good' because they fear being rejected again.
- Over friendly to strangers.

### Other children in your family

If you have other children living with you at home you will need to think about how you talk to and prepare them for a new child joining the family.

How you do this will depend upon the ages of the child/ren involved. Think about how you discuss the plan with them, what changes will need to be made to their life, including maybe having less time with you. Help them to start to build a relationship with the child in the UK by including them in some phone calls. Other children can be a real support in helping a child to settle but as in any 'sibling' relationship be prepared for some challenges also.

## Think now about the child who is coming into your life and what has happened to them

- Who looked after them at home?
- What was life like for them at home?
- Was there anyone who was unkind to them or ignored their needs?
- How many homes and carers have they lived with?
- Was there anyone who was very special to them?
- How do they behave now and are there any behaviours that you think might come from not being securely attached?

If you do not know the answer to these questions then ask your child's social worker.

## Planning the move home

There will be a legal process to go through in the UK before you can move back to your country with your child. This may be through:

- Adopting the child.
- Becoming a Special Guardian of the child.

Depending on the Court order you may also need to obtain a visa for the child to enter your country. The Children's Services will help you through this process.

If your child has British Citizenship it will be important that they can keep this, so that they have the choice in adult life to continue to visit or live in the UK. This means you will need to keep their British passport safe and renew it before it expires and then every 5 years. All the information for how to do this can be found at: [www.gov.uk/overseas-passports](http://www.gov.uk/overseas-passports).

The move to live with you overseas is a big step for the child so think about how you can help them adjust.

- Has the child ever been on a plane?
- What special things can they bring with them and how can these be kept safe and accessible.
- Have they visited your country and your home? Where will they sleep?
- What foods might be different?
- What is the climate like and what clothes will they need?
- What about language – what is their primary language and what is yours?
- Culture – every country has different cultures, not only to do with music and art but everyday culture. How do you address elders? The teacher? What rituals are there around food and who sits where?
- Schools – what year will they enter and will they need extra help? What curriculum will they follow and will they need to catch up? Is the style of teaching different – more formal or less so? What about the school day – is it shorter or longer? What about discipline in school?



Make sure that you are thinking about what support you might need in the long run; you may need to research what resources there are locally, to support you and your child. Think this through early on with the social worker, so that the local authority can consider what post placement support they can offer, depending on the child's long-term needs.

## Planning helps to make the move easier.

Think about the above and make a plan for your child.

- Bring a video or photographs of your home, the rooms, the garden and the area around your home to help your child to picture the changes.
- Talk with your child about the move and the differences.
- Take photographs of the new school building and talk about the school.
- Talk about all the things that will be different and all the things that might be the same.
- Who do they need to say goodbye to and how will they keep in touch?

### Saying good bye

Remember saying goodbye will be sad but it is an important ritual. Make sure the child has photos of key people and of goodbye events – it will enable you to talk about them once home and acknowledge their important place in the child's life.

Start to build an album, either digital or physical, that photos, drawings and other important items can be added to. Let the child keep this with them and talk it through with them regularly.



Children will worry about lots of different things which to adults perhaps do not seem important.

Adults should always take time to sit down and talk with children about their worries. For example in our stories.

### **Joe**

- Loves baked beans – will he be able to have them for dinner in the USA?
- Joe loves Joan reading to him – will Gayle read to him in his new home?
- Can he play football and watch his favourite team on TV?
- Can he speak to his mummy on the phone?

### **Mia**

- Mia loves school – what will school be like in Jamaica?
- Will she have to call Auntie Yvonne mummy and what would her mummy in the UK think about that?
- Auntie Yvonne says it is hot in Jamaica – what clothes will she wear?



## Thinking about your child's health

Looked After children will have had regular health checks up and there will be a record of these for you to take back to your home. You will have information about:

- Any special health or educational needs the child has.
- Any developmental needs: is or was your child delayed in walking, talking etc. This could be genetic, or chance or connected to what has happened to them in early life.
- Any learning needs: this is important to know about in relation to school plans. If a parent has a learning delay this may be inherited, or if a parent has taken substances whilst pregnant it can cause delays and learning challenges.
- What vaccinations the child has had and which they will need before travel?

Again the social worker will be able to give you information about the child's health history and current state of health.

If your child has any health needs think about how these will be met and what you need to ask or do to ensure you have the right information.

**It may be that in your country you would need to pay for health or educational support. If so you should discuss this with the social worker before the child is placed.**



## Education

In the UK children start school just before they are 5 years of age and enter a primary school in the reception class. They progress through years 1 to 6 (age 6 to age 11).

At 11 years they move to secondary school for years 7 to 11 (age 11 to age 16).

At 16 they may stay in school (called the 'Sixth Form') or may move to a college until the age of 18 to study either academic or vocational subjects.

Children take regular tests or exams but the key ones in the UK are:

- Key Stage 1 at age 7 – in Maths, English and Science.
- Key Stage 2 at age 11 – in Maths, English and Science.
- Key Stage 3 at age 14 – in Maths, English and Science.
- Key Stage 4 at age 16 – called General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE's) in Maths, English, Science and in additional subjects such as languages, art, music, history etc.

In the UK if a child does not pass the end of year or Key Stage Exams they still progress to the next year. This may be different from your country.

You will be given information about:

- Their learning and if the child has any special learning needs and what support has been given.
- Recent school reports/report cards.

In the UK schools vary in size but primary schools are generally smaller than secondary schools where the number of total pupils may exceed 1000; however children are taught in classes of no more than 30 children. At secondary level children may be grouped for key lessons, such as maths and English, according to ability.

Your child's schooling may have been disrupted by external factors –not attending school or moving schools frequently. They might therefore be behind their peers and need extra help and support in your country. **Again talk to the social worker before the child is placed about this and how Children's Services might help.**

## Settling in and managing behaviour

Often when children move to live with a new family there is a 'honeymoon' period where everything seems to be going well. Over time children may begin to think about what has happened to them and to feel homesick.

They may miss their birth family, foster carers and friends and feel a sense of loss and grief. They do not always tell you how they are feeling so how they are behaving may be the clue.

A child might feel:

- Sad and tearful about being rejected or abandoned by their birth parents or other adults.
- Angry about what has happened to them, angry with their birth parents, or the social worker, or yourself.
- Guilty and blame themselves for what has happened without realising it was not their fault.
- Envious if other siblings have stayed with the birth parents.
- Embarrassed at being different from friends at school through not living with birth parents.
- Confused about what happened and fantasise about returning to the birth family.
- Divided in loyalty between yourself and the birth family.

Try to think about what the feelings are behind the behaviour.



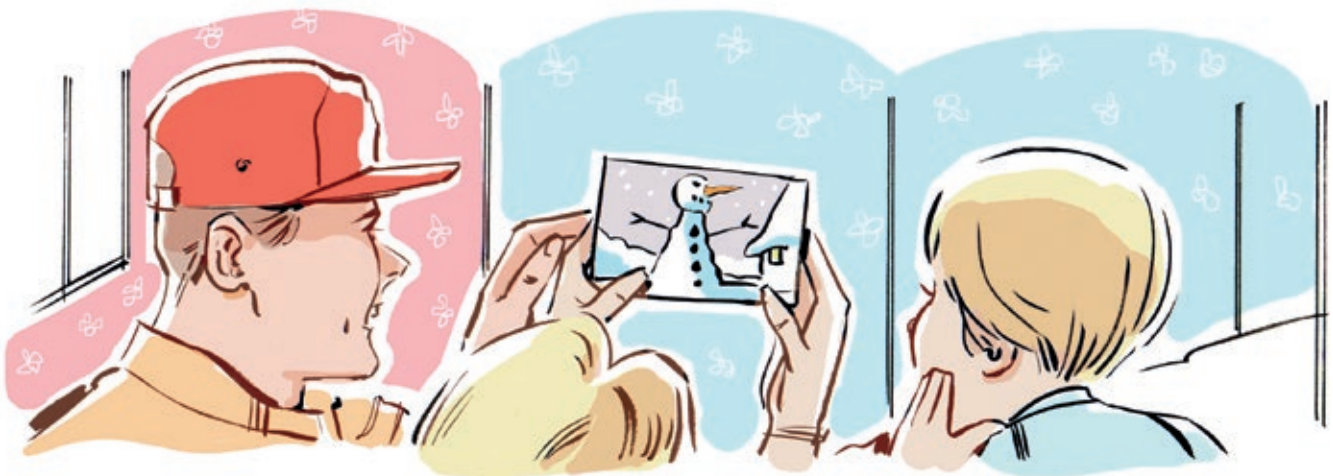
## Managing behaviour

A child misbehaving may make you feel cross or frustrated but take a step back and a deep breath. Then in your mind separate out the way the child is behaving from who they are. You love them just not their behaviour that day!

- Be clear and consistent about what behaviour is or is not acceptable.
- If a child is angry remain calm but firm – once they have calmed down talk about how they might show their anger in a different way – hitting cushions, running around.
- Talk about how the child may be feeling. If they find it hard to talk read stories and talk about characters feelings, or make paper plate faces with happy, sad, cross faces and play a game with those.

- Spend time playing and having fun – giving undivided attention helps.
- Show affection through words and actions but take it at their pace.
- Talk to family or friends – offloading can really help after a stressful day.
- Think about how you use discipline. Sending a child to their room might make them feel more unsafe and smacking a child is never acceptable.

Remember it takes time for a child to adjust to a new country and home and to you as their parent. Allow time and space for everyone to accept the new circumstances and relationships.



## Keeping your child safe

Keeping a child safe from harm is an important part of parenting. Your child may have been exposed to harm in the past and therefore brings memories from those experiences with them.

Do not shout at or hit a child. This will only make the child more fearful and anxious and will prevent them from trusting you.

Do talk about personal boundaries – what parts of the body are private and not to be shown to or touched by others. Some children may touch inappropriately and need help to understand and change this behaviour.

Do talk about personal safety – crossing roads, talking to strangers, accepting sweets from people they do not know. Your child may seek out affection from anyone so explain who in your network is safe and special.

Do talk about internet and phone safety as they grow up and make sure you stay aware of social media.

Be alert for bullying and racist behaviour and ensure your child knows it is not acceptable behaviour.

These are important conversations that need repeating as your child grows. Lots of help and support is available online no matter where you live in the world.



## Your child's story and helping them to understand it

Every child has a right to know their story and when you adopt or offer a permanent home to a child then you have a responsibility to help the child to understand it.

Your child will come with a life story book from the Children's Services which will explain to them:

- Why their birth family could not care for them.
- What happened to them.
- Who they lived with before they came to you.
- How they and you came together.

It can be tempting not to talk about the past but your child will be thinking about it and will have questions and feelings. You must take the lead and not wait for the child to ask – they may be too worried or anxious to start the conversation.

Some tips to help you:

- Sit down with your child and look at the story together. Give space to talk about their memories or their feelings.
- Talk about the birth family positively – how is the child like their birth parents in looks, in the kind of things they enjoy. This gives the child the message that you are open to talking about them.
- Make sure that a child understands that what happened is not their fault and that children do not cause the family break up.
- Be honest about what you know – if you make a story up the child may well find out the truth when they are older which can damage the relationship and trust between you and your child.

If you do not know an answer, say so. You can suggest that you might be able to find the answer at some point. Offer to write it down and keep it safe until you are able to find an answer.

## Mia and Joe both had life story books

Rick and Gayle explained to Joe

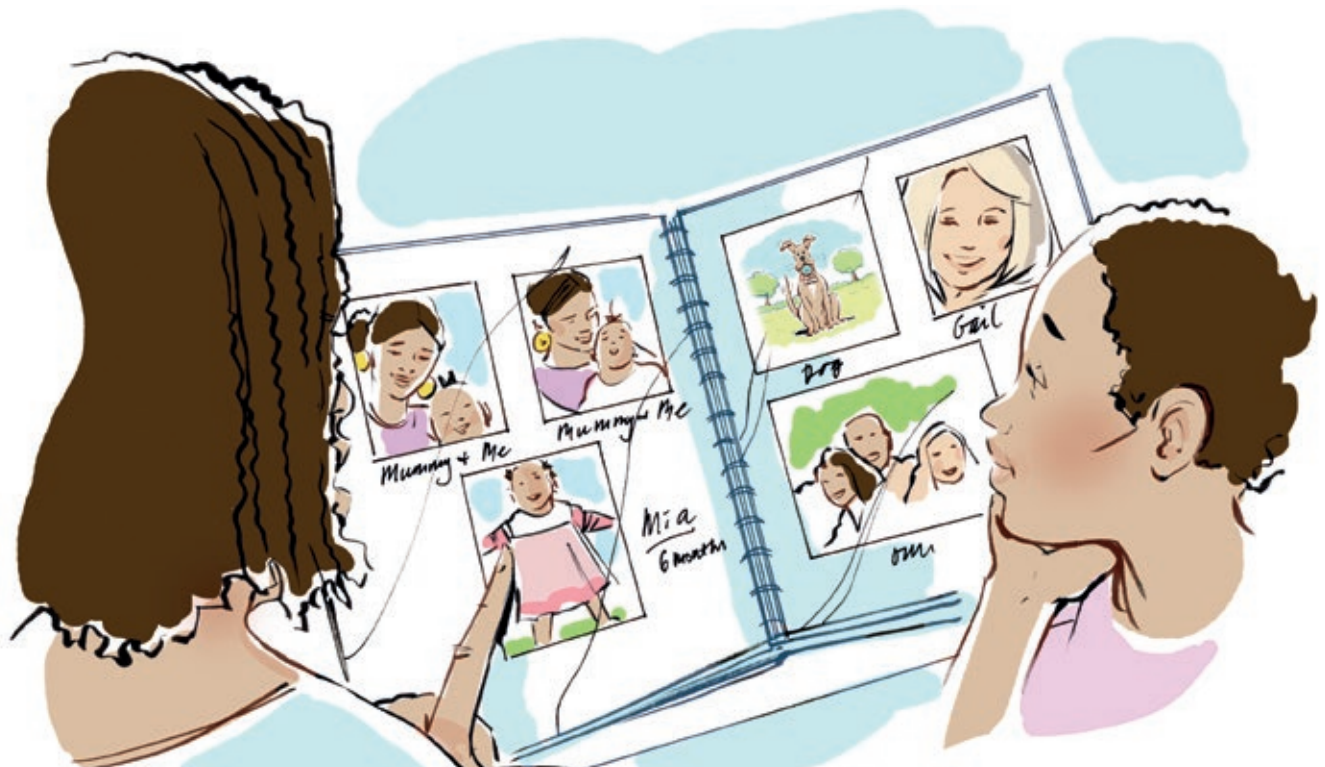
*“Parenting is a hard job and not everyone is able to look after a child and keep them safe. Your mummy became very ill and was very sad and that’s why she couldn’t care for you even though she loved you very much.”*

Yvonne talked to Mia and explained

*“Good drugs make you feel well when you are ill but there are also bad drugs which make you feel unwell. Some people, like mummy and daddy took these drugs because they were sad or confused, but it meant that they found it hard look after you and keep you safe. You went to live with Granny and grandad who loved you very much and who played with you all the time. Granny became sick and the good drugs the doctor gave her couldn’t help her so she went to heaven.”*

Talking like this can sound difficult but if you are open and honest it will help their understanding, and their acceptance of the past, and help them to build a strong relationship to you.

Helping a child to accept what has happened and valuing who they are as an individual is key to helping them to build a strong sense of their own identity. This is very especially important if they do not fully share your ethnicity or your religion. This ‘difference’ is part of their inheritance and a child needs to be helped to access information about all of their connections. As they grow into adulthood there may be other differences, in relation to gender and sexuality that a young person expresses and your acceptance of who they are in their entirety is key to their mental and emotional health.



## Contact with people from the past

The purpose of contact is to help the child maintain key relationships -of particular importance are the birth parents, grandparents, the siblings of the child, foster carers and special friends of the child.

Contact with the birth family provides a bridge between the past in the UK and the present and future with you and helps a child to:

- Understand their story - the reasons why they could not live with their birth family and why they are with you.
- Dispel any of the fantasies they may have about what happened in the past and what may happen in the future.

When a child is placed with you the social worker in the UK will discuss with you contact arrangements. You should be comfortable with what is agreed so if are unhappy or worried talk to the social worker about this.

Ways to keep contact:

- Face to Face contact: If family members come to your country to visit, or you visit the UK. if your child was removed from birth parents because the child was being harmed, then face to face contact may not be appropriate. The social worker will advise you and talk about this with you.

- Skype, Whats App, Zoom or Face Time: You should always be present for the session, which is an opportunity for the child to see and talk to birth family but also for them to see and hear how the child is getting on.
- Social Media Apps such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook : All are useful but you should not leave your child unsupervised using them.
- Phone calls: A speaker phone where you can both hear and talk is helpful. Most mobile phones have this option.
- Letters and birthday/celebration cards: You can help your child to write a letter or a card and enclose photos or drawings.

It is important to have a reliable lap top computer or phone to make sure that whatever arrangements you have the facilities to support the contact.



## Supporting your child through contact

For the child contact with birth family can be exciting and fun but always talk about and plan contact before it occurs so that you can make the best use of the time and avoid disappointment.

- What does the child want the birth family to know about their new life, their school, their friends, their hobbies?
- What news do they want to hear about siblings or other family?

Birth families may find it hard to think about the child's needs -they may say things that could undermine your relationship with the child, or upset the child.

In these situations you may need to move the conversation to another topic or stop the call and then talk to the birth family separately about what has been said and explain that it is unhelpful to the child.

In rare situations face to face, or unstructured contact may have to stop and instead contact would be through emails and letters.

After any contact make sure you talk to your child about what happened. They may have mixed feelings about the birth family – hate and anger at the same time as love and affection.

Confused and muddled feelings are not unusual and children need help to name these feelings in order to sort them out in their mind.

Over time arrangements may need to be change and change again. A young child has different needs to a teenager and you will need to help them to think about contact as they grow and their ideas and feelings change.

If planned contact does not happen your child may feel angry or upset, so take some time to talk about this and do something nice instead. Have a plan ready in case this happens.

*Remember that whatever arrangements you make must always be in the child's best interest. As the child's parent or carer you must decide what is best on their behalf.*

**We hope that you found this handbook useful and that it has helped you to think about becoming a parent to your related child.**

## Useful reading

### Books for children

Badgers Parting Gifts - Susan Varley  
*A badger is reaching the end of his life, this book explores loss but especially how he is thought of by those who love him.*

Goodbye Mog - Judith Kerr.  
*A book about loss and the celebration of a cat's life.*

Mummy Laid an Egg- Babette Cole.  
*Explanation of the facts of life in a lighthearted cartoon style.*

### Books for adults

Honey I wrecked the kids - when yelling, screaming, threats, bribes, time outs, sticker charts and removing privileges all don't work - Alyson Schafer.  
*Lots of practical strategies and tips for everyday living challenges.*

**Above available from bookshops/Amazon**

### Coram BAAF books for children

Me and my family – Jean Maye  
*A colourful book to help families get to know each other.*

Elfa and the box of memories/My book of memories  
- Michele Bell

Interactive book for children to complete

Morris and The Bundle of Worries - Jill Seeney.  
*A story about Morris the mole to help promote the idea of sharing worries*

Dennis lives with grandma and grandpa –  
Paul Sambrooks  
*A book about moving to extended family to live*

Where is Poppy's Panda – David Pitcher  
*A book about change and the anxieties that brings for children.*

Me and my family – Jean Maye  
*A colourful book to help families get to know each other.*

Elfa and the box of memories/My book of memories  
- Michele Bell  
*Interactive book for children to complete.*

### Coram BAAF books for adults

The Foster Carer's handbook on Parenting Teenagers – Henrietta Bond  
*A useful guide to understanding and dealing with teenagers.*

Facing up to Facebook – Eileen Fursland  
*A really useful guide to social media and protecting children.*

Talking about adoption to your adopted child –  
Marjorie Morrison  
*How to find the right words for the conversations.*

**[www.corambaaf/bookshop](http://www.corambaaf/bookshop)**

### Useful websites

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

[www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-rights](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-rights)

[www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/coming-out/coming-out-advice-and-guidance-parents](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/coming-out/coming-out-advice-and-guidance-parents)

[www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Racial-Bias.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Racial-Bias.aspx)

**IAC – The Centre for Adoption**  
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**If you are a professional supporting the placement of children overseas then do contact our Outbound Service for further advice and support about both the legal and casework considerations of these placements.**



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