

Supporting care-experienced children

Supporting care-experienced children is a series of three animations exploring stories of care-experienced and adopted young people, told by the young people themselves. Due to the nature of the content, they are most suitable for use with pupils in upper KS3 (ages 11 to 14), but could also be considered (using teacher discretion) for Year 6 (ages 10 to 11). It could also be used as part of teacher training to raise awareness of the experiences of looked-after or adopted children, or with small groups of care-experienced children as part of an intervention or pastoral care approach.

The films can be used, individually or together, to explore and challenge perceptions and understanding of 'family', and to raise awareness of the experiences of children and young people in the UK care system. The direct insight into individuals' thoughts, feelings and experiences can also be used to generate empathy towards care-experienced children, what it can be like for them adjusting to life with a new family or with carers, and the effects that these continuous transitions can have on feelings and behaviour. The films could also generate discussion around creative emotional expression as examples of narrative and creative depiction via imagery of personal feelings and emotions.

The films should not be used in isolation, but as part of a planned programme of learning within Relationships and Health education or PSHE. Teachers may want to integrate them within existing lessons about family relationships, and/or explorations of feelings and emotions connected to relationships. **Use of the films should be carefully considered and not without previous viewing or planning of related discussion.**

Teacher guidance

Before teaching

As the films contain sensitive and potentially upsetting material, you may want to inform parents and carers about the topic and content in advance of teaching. This can be a simple email, although in some cases it may be better to contact caregivers personally, for example if a child is in a similar situation to those shown in the films. This will enable the parent or carer to discuss the topic with the pupil and help them feel prepared for the lesson. You may want to share the animations and discussion questions/lesson activities directly with caregivers.

It is advisable to discuss the films with those pupils you know who are care-experienced or adopted ahead of the session (they may also have some valuable insight and suggestions for leading discussion) and give them the choice not to view the films with the rest of the class if they prefer. Reassure them that no personal information will be shared; the lesson will discuss examples from the films and any personal discussion that might start will be directed back to these broader points.

If they do wish to share their own lived experiences voluntarily then encourage and welcome this but be clear that this is not expected or required. You could ask for their insight and suggestions for the kind of questions that might help guide discussion in a distanced way.

Schools in England and Wales must have a designated member of staff to promote the educational achievement of looked-after and previously-looked-after children on the school's roll. If required, their advice and support can be sought both before and after the lesson.

Safe teaching and learning

You should read this guidance and view each film before exploring with pupils, considering its suitability for your cohort with care, especially if using with a younger age group.

The films contain sensitive content which may upset or impact some pupils, so a safe teaching and learning environment **must** be established before class viewing. There will be pupils in school who are themselves, or know others who are adopted and/or care-experienced; these children may be struggling with their own feelings and behaviour related to their living situation. There will also be pupils who are not themselves care-experienced but may be in a home situation which is unstable, abusive, or vulnerable, or feel fearful of themselves being taken into care. It is essential that any language used, or discussion comment, shows awareness of and sensitivity towards these pupils.

Ensure a safe environment for use by doing the following for each lesson in which the films are used:

- **Create or revisit ground rules**
Remind pupils of any existing ground rules you might already use or agree ground rules with them before the lesson. Examples could include:
 - The films are about real people – think about the words and language you use when discussing them
 - Discuss the situations and experiences shown in the films, not personal experiences (unless these are willingly and voluntarily given)
 - Any judgements should be based on what people say and do, not on who they are
 - Everyone has the right to pass
- **Encourage and respond to questions safely**
An anonymous question box or sticky notes can help pupils to ask questions privately and anonymously and enable you to prepare responses to questions you may not immediately be able to answer, or identify any potential safeguarding issues or disclosures.
- **Be sensitive** to individual pupils who may themselves be adopted, care-experienced or living in vulnerable family situations. Sensitivity is important even if you are not aware of any personal experiences in the class – working on the basis that there is at least one person who may be vulnerable ensures safe delivery for all. No-one should be placed under any pressure to discuss their own circumstances or experiences – any personal information or experience shared should be done so voluntarily and willingly (see note above regarding identified pupils).
- **Always work within your school's safeguarding and confidentiality policies and procedures**
This is especially important if a pupil makes a disclosure, directly or anonymously. If you are unsure of the procedures, seek advice from your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or contact the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000.
- **Signpost** students to sources of additional information or support if they need it, including named adults within school. Some external sources of support are given below.

Using the films

The films can be used flexibly to suit your teaching needs, depending on your cohort, scheme of work, subject/topic area, learning objectives etc. You can choose how to view them with your pupils, whether one or more in a lesson, over a series of lessons, or all at the same time. You should allow time for related activities, questioning and discussion, and you

may also want to build in some quiet reflection time at the end of the lesson before pupils leave the classroom.

Care is the state intervening when a child can no longer be safely cared for at home. The transition into care can be traumatic and destabilising, but it is important not to present care itself as wholly positive or wholly negative. It is a system that can and should be robust enough to fully support any care-experienced young person or child to thrive in it; we can acknowledge the issues care-experienced young people have faced, while staying hopeful and committed to their future. As one of the film's narrators says, care can be "a possibility".

Discussion and activities

The following notes are suggestions for ways to structure discussion around the films as a whole or develop further opportunities for learning and understanding. With film there are additional questions or considerations specific to that film's content.

The films contain examples of illness and behaviours that can occur in any home or family (e.g. drinking alcohol, taking narcotics, depression, arguments). However, for some pupils this may cause fear that they themselves will be taken into care. Before using the films explain that the reasons for children being looked after or adopted are complex, and it is a decision taken by professionals when a child's life or wellbeing is seriously at risk.

Introductory activities

Before showing the films, use an introductory lesson to create a context to learning. This could also integrate into existing teaching about families and relationships. Activities could include:

- As a class, or divided into smaller groups, ask pupils to write down a mind map with 'Family' in the middle. Around the outside, ask them to write down all the ways in which a family might look (e.g. 'a dad and children'; 'a dad, a mum, a brother and a sister'; 'two mums and a baby' etc.). Discuss responses as a class and ask if any types of family are missing. If no-one has included it, explain that some families might have adopted children, and in some the children may live with carers such as grandparents or other relatives, or with foster carers. Based on their lists, put together a class definition of 'family' which is inclusive.
- In a similar way, ask groups to come up all the things that they think defines a healthy relationship (e.g. care; love; friendship; laughing; trust). Alternatively, ask them to draw what they think a healthy relationship looks like, and write associated words around their drawing. Then ask them to do the same for an unhealthy relationship. Explain that a child is taken into care when a relationship between the child and parent(s) becomes unhealthy to the point that a parent can't care for them anymore, or the child is at risk.
- Find out what pupils know (or don't know) about adoption and/or the care system (whether these are facts or perceptions, or questions that they have) and collate their responses, for example on a graffiti wall. Keep the graffiti wall to refer back to during future discussion – pupils could also add responses to it in different colours as their learning and understanding about the care experience develops through viewing and discussion. Once all lessons have taken place you could use the responses to compare 'what we knew then' to 'what we know now' – this can also feed into assessment of learning objectives. **Note: be alert to any negative or baseless assumptions and judgements, and challenge these where necessary.**

Activities to follow viewing of the films

- Based on the experiences shown in the films, ask pupils to make a 'word wall' or similar of all the feelings and emotions, of all kinds, that Tai, Elliot and Molly describe. What were the different ways in which they showed these feelings?
- The films show the different coping strategies that Molly and Tai use. Why do they develop these ways to cope? Do you think they are helpful or unhelpful to them? Discuss different types of coping strategies that people use when they are finding things difficult, and what healthy or unhealthy strategies might look like.
- Ask pupils to choose one of the children featured and describe their life in the future: what do they think they will be doing? How might their lives be different if they had not been taken into care? How could they use their experiences to create a positive future?
- After viewing all the films, ask pupils what children like those featured would need to help them feel less isolated, scared, or angry in school. What kind of things could other people say or do to make them feel part of a class or school community if they didn't feel part of a family?

Background information about care and adoption

The following definitions and information might be useful in helping teachers respond to questions or comments:

Adoption

The legal process by which a child or siblings who cannot be brought up within their birth family become full, permanent and legal members of their new family. Adopters become the child's legal parents with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was born to them. (*Source: Adoption UK*)

Foster care

Most adopted children have lived in foster care for part of their childhood. Most foster placements are with foster families rather than in foster homes. Time spent in foster care can range from days to several years, and many children have more than one foster placement before being placed for adoption. (*Source: Adoption UK*)

The care system

Children and young people are taken in local authority care when they cannot remain at home because it is unsafe for them to be there, or because their parents cannot look after them. Taking a child into care is the most extreme intervention the state can make in family life: when a child is in care, the collective responsibility for their wellbeing falls to the local authority and their partner agencies. Seven out of ten children in care live with foster parents. The largest percentage of children in care (39%) are aged 10-15. (*Source: Become*)

Further resources

Classroom resources

- [The Adoptables toolkit](#) from Coram has lesson plans and videos for KS2 and KS3 enabling pupils to understand the issues facing adopted children at school. It also increases staff awareness of behavioural issues that can affect young people from the care system.
- [Dream On by My Pockets](#) - a short film about the day someone is moved into care.

Sources of support

- Adoption UK is a charity connecting and supporting those across the adoption community. They have a helpline, and welcome calls from all including adoptees, adopters, kinship carers and those in their support network: 0300 666 0006
- Become is a charity for children in care and young care leavers. They have a Care Advice Line to provide support and advice about the care system: 0800 023 2033
- Coram finds adoptive families for children, and supports children, young people and their families. They work to ensure that the voices of children who are cared-for and adopted are heard, and also provide training and resources for educators.

Curriculum links

This clip is relevant for teaching PSHE and RSE at KS2 and KS3 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 2nd and 3rd Level in Scotland.

England

Relationships, sex and health education (statutory guidance)

Links to expectations for:

KS2

- *Families and people who care for me*
- *Respectful relationships*
- *Mental wellbeing*

KS3

- *Families*
- *Respectful relationships, including friendships*
- *Mental wellbeing*

PSHE education (non-statutory)

Links to opportunities for learning within:

KS2

- *Core theme 1: Health and wellbeing/Mental health; Ourselves growing and changing*
- *Core theme 2: Relationships/Families and close positive relationships; Respecting self and others*

KS3

- *Core theme 1: Health and wellbeing/Self-concept; Mental and emotional health and wellbeing*
- *Core theme 2: Relationships/Positive relationships*

Northern Ireland, PD&MU

From the Northern Ireland curriculum for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding:

- *Investigate the influences on physical and emotional /mental personal health.*
- *Investigate the influences on a young person.*
- *Explore the qualities of relationships including friendship.*

Scotland, PSE

From the Curriculum for Excellence Health and Wellbeing Experiences and Outcomes:

- *Develop my self-awareness, self-worth and respect for others.*

- *Understand that adults in my school community have a responsibility to look after me, listen to my concerns and involve others where necessary*

Wales, PSE

- *Develop respect for themselves and others.*
- *Value and celebrate diversity and equality of opportunity locally, nationally and globally.*