



Adoption Support Guide



Welcome to Adoption Tees Valley

We are the Regional Adoption Agency for the Tees Valley Local Authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton.

Our vision for Adoption in Teesside is:

“To achieve the best possible adoption outcomes for children and adopters, through provision of high quality and timely services delivered by an effective and financially sustainable organisation.”

Adoption Tees Valley aims to provide timely and accessible support to adopters and children, throughout their childhood and beyond where needed, to help maintain stable family life and positive relationships for good emotional wellbeing for children; adoptive parents and families; and birth relatives.

We believe it is crucial to your child and your family's future wellbeing that we provide you with support to help you when you need it, as far as we reasonably can, and that where we can't provide the right service, we signpost you to the right place to help you.

We know that for all adopted children there will be times when it is natural for them to want to know more about their early history, and for some, there will be times of challenge, as they work through understanding of their early life experiences as well potentially also being impacted by emotional, learning and physical challenges individual to each child. This can be daunting for adoptive parents- you may sometimes feel out of your comfort zone and wonder how you can best help.

This brochure sets out the Adoption Tees Valley support offer to your child, and your family, as you grow and build your family relationships together over future years.

We encourage you to be involved with ATV, right from the start, by coming to our engagement events and support groups. This will help you to get to know the team, and other adoptive families, where we know you will find friendship and support.

Referral Pathway

The Enquiry Hub duty system at Adoption Tees Valley provides a clear and structured route for adoptive families to make enquiries and access support. The duty system acts as the first point of contact, managing incoming enquiries, coordinating information gathering, and ensuring enquiries are recorded and progressed promptly.

Once an adoption support enquiry is received, a call-back is arranged for a social worker to speak with the family member. The social worker records the details as part of an initial adoption support assessment, which includes recommendations for appropriate support.

For families whose needs are more complex, a further assessment is completed by a social worker from the adoption support team. This assessment outlines the child and family's needs and makes recommendations for a therapeutic support plan.

This referral pathway ensures all enquiries are tracked, allocated quickly, and actioned consistently, supporting timely decision-making, appropriate allocation of resources, and clear communication across the Adoption Tees Valley service.

Additional Support Offers:

- * Youthy – A youth group facilitated by Adoption Tees Valley staff, aimed at supporting friendships and promoting a shared sense of identity among adopted young people. The group is open to all and takes place monthly. It is well attended, with approximately 20 children and young people participating regularly.
- * Children and Family Community Activities

Tier 1

- Regular support groups such as 'Stay and play'
- Family fun days
- Keeping in touch workshop
- Newsletter
- Young people groups
- Child and family support groups

Tier 2

Themed training sessions and workshops such as:

- Life story work and supporting families in telling about adoption.
- Understanding adoption for family and friends.
- Introduction to Non Violent Resistance Training
- Managing life at school
- Loud and Clear - early attachment group
- Future Stars Attachment and Sensory development
- Foundations for Attachments Training

Tier 3

Therapeutic interventions including:

- Assessment of therapeutic need
- Child counselling
- Play therapy
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Intensive adoptive parent support
- Support for schools
- Facilitated care team case discussions
- Therapeutic Support Interventions

The right level of support at the time

Tier 1 - Available to all families

CATCH adopter hub

The CATCH adopter hub is an online community of information and support for adopters, special guardians, foster carers and the professionals who work with them. Families can access:

- Peer support from other adopters via live web chat, email, and exclusive adopter forum.
- Programme of webinars on topics ranging from severe behaviour to emotional resilience
- E- Learning to top up your knowledge on attachment and how to support your child/ren
- Resources for schools - a range of specific materials to help children in education

Facebook

Would you like to be part of closed Facebook Community? This is run by Social Workers at Adoption Tees Valley and is a group that aims to share research and interesting articles about adoption and child development. It will also include details of local groups run by other agencies which families may like to access. To find the group click on Adoption Tees Valley main Facebook page and then click on the sub section groups – you will be asked 3 joining questions to verify your ID and connection to ATV.

<https://www.facebook.com/AdoptionTeesValley/groups>

Newsletter

We add all approved adopters to our mailing list, this means you will get our regular newsletter providing you with up-to-date information with everything that is happening at Adoption Tees Valley including new support initiatives and events. If you are not receiving our newsletters and would like to, please let us know.

Keeping in touch workshop

Would you like the opportunity to talk about the letters that you are writing to birth family. Do you have questions about the agreement and how that is managed? We will be running regular workshops where we explore all things keeping in touch.

Family fun days

We regularly hold family fun days such as summer parties, Christmas parties and children and young peoples support groups. We also run social groups for our young people during half term holidays and these are free of charge. Some of the groups we have held previously are Forest School, Air Trail and Hopetown. These fun days are a great opportunity for families to come together, make new support networks and for adopted children to meet each other.

Tier 1 - Available to all families



Education Advisor

Adoption Tees Valley have a dedicated Education Advisor who is full time member of our support team. The Education Advisor offers support to families pre and post placement with a wide range of education issues. The education advisor works closely with the virtual school teams and have strong links to the local authority so they can support families who may be experiencing challenges with their child in their school setting. The Education Advisor can offer advice and guidance to families when they are choosing an appropriate school placement and support parents to visit placements and speak with the staff group in a chosen setting. The Education Advisor is knowledgeable around all SEND related issues and can support families who are trying to access additional support for their child.

Young Peoples Group

Would your child be interested in taking part in a young people's group? Previous groups have completed media projects, contributed towards service development and have been involved in interviews for staff recruitment. The groups offer an informal space for your children to spend time with other young people who are also adopted. We try to offer activities that will appeal to the different age groups and pizza dinners usually goes down well.

Adopter Partnership Forum

Adoption Tees Valley's Adopter Partnership Forum is a monthly forum where adopters have the opportunity to have a voice and influence the development and direction of the service. We would welcome additional member to join the forum, please get in touch with us if you are interested.

Voice and Influence Group

The Voice and Influence group at Adoption Tees Valley meets once a month and is in place to give young adopted children/adults the opportunity to get together to discuss all aspects of adoption and to enable their voices to be heard throughout our service. At Adoption Tees Valley we recognise how important the views and experiences of young adopted people are and they definitely have a lot to say!

This group is available to young adopted people from the ages of 13-18.

If you would like to be part of any of the tier 1 services mentioned please email:
info@adoptionteesvalley.org.uk

Tier 2 - Training and workshops



Loud and Clear Music Project

Loud and Clear is a partnership with musicians from Sage Gateshead and Youth Music to bring music making to our children and families at Adoption Tees Valley. The Loud and Clear project has been running for the past 5 years at ATV with over 100 children having accessed this programme.

Research tells us that it's often in those very early years where having the chance to make music has the most impact. Under-fives change very rapidly, and music-making helps enhance their development in many ways. The Loud and Clear Early Years project is supporting young children to grow socially, emotionally, and physically; with vital speech and language skills developing in tandem with musical ones. In addition to all these essential developmental outcomes, music making is also bringing joy and happiness to young children and their families.

Youth Music's vision is that one day every child will have the chance to make music. We know it's those children experiencing challenging circumstances who often miss out on these valuable opportunities. The children in the Loud and Clear project have had a difficult start in life, and it's wonderful to see how music-making has allowed them to bond with their adoptive parents.

This is part of our early intervention offer at Adoption Tees Valley with an emphasis on proactive support that will bring families together in the early years of placement, promote the bond between children and their parents and enable families to connect and share their experiences whilst offering support to each other. Ultimately it is a safe space, that will offer fun friendly and playful opportunities for individuals to connect through the medium of music.



Tier 2 - Training and workshops

Future Stars

Adoption Tees Valley is proud to be able offer to families in our area an evidence-based intervention which combines sensory integration and attachment focused therapy.

This intervention has been developed by experienced attachment and sensory integration occupational therapists alongside a therapeutic social worker who has specialised in the impact of childhood trauma. It will be delivered over 14 weeks as a group programme for parents and children.

The programme has been designed to support adopted children who have had adverse early life experiences, trauma, and loss and aims to support the early attachment relationships between children and their parents.

The intervention will support children to develop their regulatory systems, emotional and behavioural responses, sensory-motor foundations, and positive attachment relationships, supporting them to meet their full potential, enabling them to progress and meet their developmental milestones, regulate their emotions whilst promoting social skills and peer and family relationships.

Children who have participated in this intervention have been seen to make progress in the way they respond to their environment, decision making, ability to understand and express their feelings, and make secure attachments.

The programme will be offered in small groups over a 14-week period and will be delivered by Future Steps Occupational Therapy in their state-of-the-art Sensory Integration clinic in Thornaby.

Sensory Integration activities will be delivered weekly in a group to parents and children. Therapeutic parenting education sessions which are based on Kim Goldings Nurturing Attachments programme will be delivered to throughout the programme, whilst the children get the opportunity to participate in supervised sensory rich play-based activities.

The programme also allows adopters and children to share their experiences and support one another over the course of the intervention and for some may promote longer term support and friendships.

This pathway starts with a MIM assessment. The MIM is a video recorded, play-based, interaction assessment that provides our team with an understanding of your relationship with your child, their attachment to you and your attuned reactions and includes a range of standardised activities.



NVR

Non Violent Resistance (NVR) is an innovative form of systemic family therapy, which has been developed for aggressive, violent, controlling, and self-destructive behaviour in young people.

NVR has been specifically developed for responding effectively to aggressive, violent, self-destructive, and controlling behaviour in children, adolescents, and young adults.

NVR is now being successfully used with anxious young people, whose obsessive-compulsive behaviour controls the family, or who isolate themselves socially, have become addicted to the internet, or refuse to go to school. A further area in which the approach is proving very helpful, is working with families in which young adults show 'entitled dependency', and young adults with ongoing serious mental health problems.



Foundations for Attachments

The 'Advancing attachments and trauma difficulties' course developed by leading clinical psychologist Dr Kim Golding who has over 30 years of experience, Kim works to improve the lives of children affected by early relational trauma.

This course will be delivered by Dyadic Development Psychotherapy (DDP) level 2 trained social workers from Adoption Tees Valley.

This is a short programme (18 hours) designed for those who parent children and young people who have relationship difficulties, especially those who have experienced attachment problems, trauma, loss and/or separation early in their life. It is hoped this programme will be helpful for any parents who are having parenting challenges and enable them to increase their emotional connection with the children and young people in their care.

This is a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme (Dany Hughes, 2009;2011). It introduces parents/carers to the four significant challenges of parenting children whose capacity to emotionally connect with them has been compromised. These are:

- The child experiencing blocked trust
- The child fearing intersubjective connection within reciprocal relationships
- The child experiencing high levels of shame
- The child miscuing their attachment needs through a pattern of expressed and hidden needs



Aims of the programme:

- Gain an understanding of these challenges and explore ways to build emotional connections with these children and young people. This can increase trust in reciprocal and attachment relationships leading to increased attachment security and reduced levels of shame.
- Understand how to provide support for behaviour alongside building these connections. This has been termed 'correction before connection'.
- Explore the dangers of blocked care when caring for children with blocked trust and understand the importance of looking after themselves.
- Understand the significance of exploring one's own attachment history when caring for children and young people with attachment difficulties.

Tier 2 - Training and workshops

The first part of the programme focuses on attachment theory and the development of different patterns of attachment. Participants will be encouraged to think about these patterns as adaptive to the child's early environment and how certain behaviours developed around this time continue to be maintained as they provide a level of safety and security for the child living in an adverse environment.

Small and large group discussion and specific exercises will be used to help participants to link this theory to the fostered/adopted children they care for or work with, enhancing their understanding of the particular behaviours and emotions displayed.

The second part of the programme considers the application of attachment theory to practice. Special consideration is given to the parenting model employed by Dan Hughes (1997). In this model, participants are encouraged to provide a positive family atmosphere where they are in a position to be able to control the emotional rhythm of the house.



The model also considers ways to avoid being drawn into confrontation that resembles the child's early experience. Through this, the participants are encouraged to think and learn about how to create a secure base within which the child may potentially develop the ability to regulate their own emotions. Of particular focus is the importance of emotional attunement and how discipline is recognised as important but should be accompanied by empathy.

While much of the training focuses upon the child and caring for him or her, part of it also addressed the needs of the carers and professionals involved with the child/young person, identifying their own personal stressors, when to seek out support and the importance of looking after themselves.



Telling about Adoption

Adoptive parents often worry about how and when to talk to their children about being adopted. Many adopted children have had a difficult and traumatic start to their lives. It is a huge responsibility for adoptive parents to communicate the circumstances of a child's complex, fragmented and often painful past in a way that will lead to understanding, resolution, and a positive sense of self. Many adoptive parents can feel ill equipped for this unique parenting challenge.

Who should attend?

Adoptive parents who have children placed with them. This will be helpful those to pre and postadoption order.

These workshops will enable parents and carers to:

- Understand why it is important to explain to children about their past and the circumstances that led them to being adopted
- Explore some basic principles of child development and identity
- Explore some of the challenges and dilemmas in telling and explaining
- Think about age appropriate explanations according to a child's developmental stage and level of understanding
- Develop confidence in talking with and supporting your child with their early history and identity
- Consider how contact arrangements impact on your child and their understanding of why they are adopted.
- Develop confidence in managing the impact of social media on your child's relationship with their birth relatives
- Choosing the best time and thinking of ways to share difficult information and for your child
- Practice telling and explaining and review some of the resources and tools available to assist in this on-going task.
- Theory to practice. Use case examples to apply the knowledge learnt over the 2 day workshop.



Tier 3 - Assessed Support Needs

Children adopted from care can have ongoing needs. Sometimes they can find it difficult to form relationships and display challenging behaviour. Adoption Tees Valley are here to find the appropriate specialist help for you and your child when needed.

Our Tier 3 offer to adoptive families starts with a full assessment of your adoption support needs. This will be undertaken by a social worker. It will help us to identify the most appropriate therapeutic intervention for you and your child.

Adoption Tees Valley work with local agencies who provide a range of interventions for children who may have experienced early developmental trauma and attachment difficulties.

Adoption support service and therapies

Here are some of the interventions that are available in our area:

Dyadic developmental psychotherapy (DDP)

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) is a treatment developed by Dan Hughes who has worked with adopters and their children for many years.

Play therapy

Play Therapy helps children work through difficult emotions/trauma using play. It is non-directive or child-lead and works with the relationship between child, the play and the therapist (known as the transference). Through each activity, the therapist tries to find meaning - a narrative, which she then reflects back to the child. Usually, the parent is not involved with the therapy. Practitioners are accredited by the BAPT and the Play Therapy Register.

Theraplay

Theraplay is a child and family therapy for building and enhancing attachment. It is directive - activities are directed by the adults (at first by the therapist and then by the parent). The parent is always involved in the therapy and the aim is to tailor specific activities and play to regulate the child and strengthen the parent/child relationship.

Filial Therapy

Like Theraplay, Filial Therapy combines family and play therapy principles and techniques and is structured to enhance the parent child relationship. Parents learn how to create a non-judgmental and accepting, understanding relationship with their children through play sessions conducted in the home. Unlike conventional therapy the child's parents are fully involved in their child's treatment.

Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing therapy (EMDR)

A psychological treatment method which stimulates the brain to reduce the intensity of distressing memories. A wealth of research has been conducted demonstrating its benefits in treating psychological trauma arising from experiences as diverse as childhood sexual and/or physical abuse or neglect and assault. You can find a therapist in your area at the EMDR Association website.



Non-violent resistance (NVR)

A psychological approach for overcoming destructive, aggressive, controlling and risk-taking behaviour. <https://www.preferredfuturenvr.co.uk/what-is-nvr> conduct training courses and therapy sessions for adoptive parents in our area.

Sensory Integration Therapy and Sensory Attachment Therapy

Sensory Integration Therapy aims to help the child re-organise or re-process sensory information in order to regulate emotional responses. Sensory Attachment Therapy examines how sensory processing and attachment patterns affect our capacity to regulate emotions and behaviour.

Individual sensory integration therapy is provided as direct one-to-one therapy, following a specialist assessment by an Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist or Speech and Language Therapist with postgraduate training in sensory integration.

This is just a brief guide to make you aware of what is available. This is something that you can discuss with your social worker as part of your assessment of adoption support needs.

You may be aware of other interventions that you think might be helpful and again, we urge you to discuss this with your social worker.

The process

The local authority that places the child with you is responsible for assessing your adoption support needs for three years after the adoption order. After three years it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live (if different).

Many of the services available in our Tier 3 offer need to be purchased from external providers, in most cases they are funded through the adoption support fund (ASGSF). The ASGSF is able to fund up to £3,000 per year, per child in therapy. This is currently under review by the Government with future changes expected in 2028 following the outcomes from current pilot schemes and consultations.

Once you are agreed on the kind of therapeutic support package that is right for you, your social worker will formulate a support plan. This is then sent to the relevant local service providers who will provide details of how they would meet you and your child's adoption support needs. You will be able consider the offers from service providers with your social worker to decide who you would like to undertake the work.

Where necessary your social worker will apply to the ASGSF to fund this work and once this is agreed work can start. It usually takes around six weeks for the funding to be agreed.

In order to ensure that any intervention is effective we will hold regular reviews with the organisation providing the service. Outcome measures will evidence the effectiveness of any intervention.

A Family's Guide to the Multi Disciplinary Team

At Adoption Tees valley, our mission is to provide the best possible future for the children in our region, who have a plan of adoption. We want to provide your child/young person with futures that are secured through understanding, relationships, support and advocacy.

Following the initial pilot of the MDT programme MDASS that was supporting adoptive families across the North East region we are delighted to have been chosen to continue this support at more local level which means families across Teesside will have early access psychology, SALT and OT as part of the assessment and support package that is being offered to their family.

Our Aim

The aim of the MDT is to create an empowering and enabling team to support the delivery of long-term change. We want to ensure 'the lived experience' of adopters, and the theory and research is the root of our foundations.

We aim to under-pin our work with evidence-based planning and want to empower you and your family, through meaningful and effective listening and collaboration. Finally, our aim is to identify the support needs of your children at the earliest stage, as well as increase the confidence of our families and the professionals who support them.





The Focus

- Achieve and support early performance
- Create sustainable change
- Provide measurable outcomes

By focusing on the above objectives, we will be able to work with our most complex children and their families and achieve some tangible results.

How it works

We are rooting our Multi-Disciplinary Team into our Adoption Support Practice across the whole service. Some of the benefits of this will be:

A holistic approach to support a comprehensive understanding of adoptive families' needs.

Early intervention to promote early permanence.

Preventing risk of family breakdown: using multiple lenses to understand the needs of your children and young people who are facing complex situations.

Hearing voices: Empowering children, young people and families through meaningful and effective listening and collaboration.

An equitable access to support for everyone across the whole region.

Tailored support to meet the individual needs of your children, young people and your family.

Psychology

Adoption Tees Valley is supported with clinical psychology support via Aspire Psychological Services. NICE is explicit that children with histories of trauma and disrupted attachment require support before difficulties escalate, not only once placement instability emerges.

How this links to adoption

- Adoptive families should receive early, proactive psychological input, not wait until crisis or breakdown.
- MDT involvement at the matching and early placement stages helps identify needs, reduce risk, and build stability.
- Early neurodevelopmental and relational formulation supports families to understand the child's internal world from day one.

Work With the Whole System Around the Child

NICE emphasises that attachment difficulties cannot be addressed through individual therapy alone. The system must be supported, attuned and emotionally regulated.

- Supporting adoptive parents, social workers, early permanence teams, schools, and wider networks.
- Providing reflective practice and consultation to help adults stay regulated, curious and connected.
- Ensuring the system responds with PACE, not behavioural control or punitive approaches.
- Creating predictable, relationally safe environments across home, school and professional networks

This is the heart of preventative adoption work.

Build Capacity, Not Dependency

NICE recommends strengthening the caregiving system so that adults become the therapeutic agents of change.

- Helping adoptive parents understand behaviour as communication.
- Supporting them to co regulate, repair, and build trust.
- Equipping them with trauma informed strategies that reduce escalation and shame.
- Ensuring they feel confident, not blamed or overwhelmed.

THE MDT MODEL

This proposal outlines a preventative, neurodevelopmentally informed, multi agency MDT service designed to strengthen placement stability from the earliest stages of the adoption journey. This model shifts adoption support from reactive crisis management to proactive, preventative, relationship centred practice, reducing long term costs and improving outcomes for children and families.

This service addresses these challenges by:

- Identifying needs early - Using NMT informed assessment and multi-agency formulation to understand the child's developmental profile before difficulties escalate.
- Strengthening adopters - Providing consultation, coaching, and relational support to build confidence, emotional resilience, and therapeutic parenting capacity at the start of their adoption journey.
- Supporting adoption social workers - Embedding reflective, formulation skills within the team so they can develop holistic, needs led intervention plans.
- Ensuring ASGSF support is appropriate - Sequencing interventions so families receive the right support at the right time, avoiding mismatched or overwhelming provision.
- Creating a coherent multi agency system - Bringing education, OT, SALT, psychology, and social care together around a shared understanding of need.

Speech and language

Helen is a highly specialised Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) who works with children and young people who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). As part of your assessment or as a recommendation from an initial assessment you may be offered time to discuss your child/young person's communication profile and the implications this might have for their ability to access language and learning, to communicate their thoughts and feelings, and to access interventions designed to support them. You can also discuss SLCN more broadly or any other SLT-related queries you might have. As part of this consultation Helen may go on to offer support to your family within your home or education setting, she will also support referrals for longer term support from your local SAL service.



Occupational Therapy

The occupational therapist within the MDT team plays a vital role in helping families understand and respond to their child's sensory, developmental, and functional needs. They provide early assessment to identify how a child's life experiences, trauma history, or neurodevelopmental differences may influence daily routines such as sleeping, eating, play, and relationships. Through tailored guidance, practical strategies, and modelling, the OT will support parents to create nurturing, predictable environments that promote emotional regulation and secure attachment. They also work collaboratively with social workers, psychologists, and education professionals to ensure families receive cohesive, holistic support, empowering parents with the confidence and tools to help their child thrive at home, in school, and in the community.





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