

Things to consider when starting a new school

Cover stories

It's worth helping your child to practise a 'cover story' so that they are ready to answer when they are asked questions about where they have come from. This could be a simple 'I've just moved into the area' – but it could be invaluable if they feel under pressure to give information. Practise this with your child, make it into a game and have some fun with it until they feel confident to fend off any questions they may not want to answer.

Challenges

Be aware that your child may struggle with the less structured times of the day such as playtime and lunchtime. They may also worry about the many changes during the day such as finding a different classroom. For some children changing for PE may be stressful. Talk to your child about potential flashpoints and let them know that you are thinking of them. Leave little notes in school bags or lunchboxes to 'connect' with your child during the day. In the early days it can be helpful to set the tea table before school or read half a book 'to be finished later' to reassure your child that you will be there to get them at the end of the day.

Jeremy the pocket mouse

For younger or very anxious children get a small cat toy type mouse and switch its tail with a longer piece of string and sew the end into their pocket. Spray the mouse with your perfume/aftershave and show your child how to cup the mouse into their hands, close their eyes and take a deep breath. Explain that this can help in times of worry or upset so that they know that you are thinking of them. At the end of the day you can ask Jeremy how his day was and you may be surprised at the detail of the answer.

Talking to the school

Talk to your child's teacher. Tell them (in confidence) that your child is adopted. You do not need to go into any detail about your child's previous experiences unless there is a specific reason to do so (it may seem ok to do this when your child is young but when they grow older it can be hard for them to know that everyone knows their personal experiences).

Knowing that your child is adopted can help the teaching staff to be aware of possible curriculum triggers (my family projects, mother's day) and enable them to understand and support your child. There may be extra resources that your school can offer your child if they struggle with playtimes and less structured periods. Some schools offer nurture groups or 'play mate bus stops' in the playground. Ask your school what resources they have, or can offer.

Safeguarding

Schools staff (like all professionals) have a duty to report any concerns, allegations or disclosures made by a child and your child will be no different. Knowledge that your child is adopted is important should they speak about any of their experiences whilst they are at school.