

# TESSA

Guide for adoptive parents



**AdoptionUK**

Teulu gyda'n gilydd  
Together we're family



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Adoption UK is the leading charity for those parenting or supporting adopted children. With over 6,000 members we are the largest voice of adopters in the UK. We work with adopters, adopted people, professionals and decision makers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We also work with kinship families and those parenting children with a special guardianship order.

## Why families need us

Being an adoptive parent is extraordinary, and most families tell us they would encourage others to adopt. But adopting can be tough. Three quarters of adopted children have suffered significant violence, abuse or neglect in their birth families, which has lasting impacts on their mental and physical health, relationships and learning. Adoption takes resilience, understanding and the right support from the start.

## What we do

We help adoptive families build brighter futures for vulnerable children. We offer community support, expert advice, therapeutic services and advocacy. In campaigning for improvements to policy and practice, we draw on our growing evidence base about the experience of adopters and adopted people.

As a registered Adoption Support Agency, Adoption UK Cymru has all the relevant policies and procedures required under the legislation and the Responsible Individual is the Chief Executive Officer for the organisation. The most recent Inspection Report can be found via our website [www.adoptionuk.org/wales](http://www.adoptionuk.org/wales)



## Vision

An equal chance of a bright future for every child unable to live with their birth parents.

## Purpose

To secure the right support at the right time for the children at the heart of every adoptive and kinship care family.

## Values



### We are open

We champion every adoptive and kinship care family - we value diversity, equality and inclusion.

We're honest about the realities of adoption and kinship care, and about what needs to change.

We work constructively with others - we stand up for great ideas, good decisions and excellent support for families.



### We are stronger together

We pioneer peer support in adoption and kinship care.

We enable families to build, and draw strength from, their networks.

We work with families to build an expert case for better support.



### We are determined

We won't stop until every adoptive and kinship care family has what they need to thrive.

We will empower every adoptive and kinship care family to ask for, and get, what they need.

Together, our community is a powerful force for change in the lives of the children we love.

# What is TESSA?

TESSA is a support service for Adoptive parents and their adopted child/children. It is an Adoption UK, nation-wide project, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund and National Adoption Service in Wales. TESSA supports and promotes therapeutic parenting to give understanding about the impact of trauma on a child's development and how parenting therapeutically can improve family life. It works with adoptive families to create bespoke support plans, to include:

- Psychological consultations;
- Training and coaching;
- Peer support;
- Support with schools;
- Tailored support from experienced attachment and trauma-accredited clinicians.

The goal is to help empower and enable families, creating the conditions for improved health and family wellbeing.

## Who is TESSA for?

TESSA is most suitable for a family where there is a willingness and ability to learn and reflect on their parenting and the relationships within their family. The family may be experiencing some issues with the child's behaviour at home or in school and need some clarity about what may be underpinning this behaviour and guidance on a more therapeutic parenting approach.

TESSA does not remove or replace a Local Authority's statutory obligation to assess and support adoptive parents. Thus, one of the first discussions Adoption UK will hold with an adoptive parent interested in the service would be about making contact with their Regional Adoption Service to ask for an assessment of need and to find out what therapeutic services they can offer. Adoption UK are unable to accept self-referrals into the service.

Each Regional Adoption Service in Wales has a TESSA coordinator who knows about the project and who is responsible for ensuring that staff in the regional service understand who TESSA is designed to help.

## Criteria for referral to TESSA

- Adoptive parents who have a child/children placed with them.
- Families who either have an adoption order granted or have applied for an adoption order.
- Families where the child/children have been placed for at least 12 months. (There may be occasional circumstances where a family will be admitted to TESSA before the 12 months is up subject to consultation with the AUK TESSA coordinator)
- Adoptive parents and their children who are experiencing some difficulties with behaviour at home or in school and would benefit from some clarity around what is underpinning these and guidance on therapeutic parenting approach.



## TESSA is suitable if adoptive parents are:

- Feeling unsure of how to deal with low level behavioural issues.
- Might benefit from short-term telephone support by, for example, a parent partner.
- Require information on issues such as life story, identity issues, teenage concerns.
- Require information on issues their child/children are facing at school.
- Are feeling 'stuck' about how to help/support their child.

TESSA can also be of additional support to parents who:

- Feel overwhelmed and are having difficulty coping as a family.
- Feel that they have lost 'parental control' within their house.
- Feel inadequate in coping with challenging behaviours such as child to parent aggression.
- Are having difficulties with challenging teenage behaviours.
- Feel they are losing or have lost the connection with their child/ children.
- Need support regarding birth family contact.
- Require advocacy and support at school meetings.
- Are worried about their child/children's moods, social interactions, sensory issues.
- Think their child/children require further support due to additional support needs such as FASD.
- Recognise their child/children are experiencing issues with sleep.

## How do adoptive parent/s make a referral to TESSA?

- All referrals need to be made through the Local Authority/ Regional Adoption Service or Voluntary Adoption Agency who undertook the initial adoption assessment or who are currently supporting the family in terms of post adoption support.
- Families should contact the relevant agency and ask to be referred to TESSA or send an email to [tessa.wales@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:tessa.wales@adoptionuk.org.uk). A member of the TESSA team will then contact the family and support them through the referral process.

## What happens after an adoptive parent makes initial contact with their regional adoption service/voluntary agency?

Decisions about the suitability of the service for families are made within the Regional Adoption Service or Local Authority. Staff in the post adoption support service or local authority (depending on what region the family live) will undertake an assessment of the family's support needs and make a decision about a referral to TESSA.

The regional TESSA coordinator will provide help and guidance to post adoption staff to ensure those parents who can most benefit from TESSA are referred into the project.

Once an assessment of suitability has been made a formal referral form will then be completed and sent to the TESSA manager for Wales. Adoptive parents can expect to contribute information to assist this referral.

## What happens when a referral is made to TESSA?

- When the referral is received from the Local Authority or adoption agency, the AUK TESSA coordinator will contact the adoptive parent/s to have a discussion and gather any additional information needed. It is anticipated that this will be done within 14 days of the referral being received.
- The services available under TESSA are tailored to an individual family's needs.

## Consultation with a psychologist

Following the discussion with the family, an in -depth consultation with a Clinical Psychologist within the TESSA team will be offered to the family. This Consultation meeting can involve all those adults who know the child best and by sharing their knowledge of the child a 'psychological formulation' is made. Additional historic paperwork or information may be needed to assist with this process. It is anticipated that this meeting will be held within 6 to 8 weeks.

- Following the consultation, a report will be written, and this will guide any additional services offered to the family through TESSA. This report is with consent shared with the Regional coordinator and Parent Partner.
- The family will be offered a Parent Partner who will provide additional peer support for the family from the point that the referral to TESSA is accepted and throughout the First Intervention.
- A service agreement will be provided to the family outlining the support that is being provided under TESSA and the expected length of time that this support will be provided.

## The TESSA group

TESSA will offer adoptive parents the opportunity to attend a group focused on therapeutic parenting. This is because fundamentally we understand that being an adoptive parent requires parenting plus! In order to give that 'plus' parents need to be informed, educated and most importantly, supported to be in a place where they can parent therapeutically.

The reflective group will be run by a psychologist and an adoptive parent and will run for six sessions and give parents the opportunity to gain more knowledge and awareness of how early experiences of trauma and neglect impact on their child/children's behaviour, communication, ability to learn, and how they form and engage in relationships. Every attempt will be made to ensure that the location of the group is within a convenient distance and at accessible times. The group is also being offered online due to Covid 19 restrictions. During the group parents will be able to explore and reflect on their own parenting approaches and strategies; from this parents are enabled to find ways to support their child/children more therapeutically.

The group also allows time and reflective space for parents to consider their own relationship, relationships with other people, and how they take care of themselves. The group views self -care as a vital aspect of therapeutic parenting as it is an important influence on a parent's ability to remain regulated and to have the necessary resilience to cope with and support their child/children.

It might not be necessary for all adoptive parents to attend this group. It will depend on their previous experience and knowledge. This would be fully discussed at the consultation stage with a clinician.

## Parent Partners

It is well established that adoptive families benefit from the support of people who have the direct experience of parenting an adopted child. This peer support is invaluable and supplements the support on offer from the practitioners. When a family is referred to TESSA they will be allocated a Parent Partner who is an adoptive parent. This person will be available for the family to discuss the issues, be a listening ear and offer empathy and emotional support, and help the family to review their parenting style, and link with the practitioners where necessary.

The Parent Partner role is similar to the Buddy scheme that is offered by Adoption UK, but it is an enhanced version with Parent partners being trained and supported in line with the TESSA model and they will be employed as sessional workers as opposed to volunteers. All Parent Partners will be recruited and supported by Adoption UK.

Parent Partners will discuss with the family how and when contact with them will take place to allow for the parent partner and the family to agree a bespoke service that suits all parties. It is expected that contact between the Parent Partner and the family will take place at least once a fortnight.

## Additional support services

TESSA offers a range of further support services that aim to enhance the support. These are usually offered as part of a group provision and in some cases for individual families.

This decision will be made as part of the reviews and assessments that take place throughout the family's involvement with TESSA, which are overseen by the TESSA coordinator.

Examples of the type of support services that could be offered include:

- Consultation and training with our accredited practitioner in Non Violent Resistance for families experiencing child to parent violence or aggression
- Training sessions/workshops on specialist themes including therapeutic parenting strategies, sensory issues, FASD, sleep etc
- Consultations and support with schools from our Education Officer
- Sessions to enhance family wellbeing

## Cost of the service

Interventions offered under TESSA will be provided free of charge to the family for the duration of their support as set out in their service agreement.

Adoption UK also offers other services such as training to which a family may be referred and which may on occasion be offered at an additional small charge. Any such services will be fully discussed with the family and only offered with their agreement.

## Service review and ending of support

The service provided under TESSA will be reviewed with the family on a regular basis and should the need for the support provided to come to an end, written notice to this effect will be provided to the family.

# Requirements for any practitioner or therapist funded through TESSA

Confidentiality and child protection are critical in high- quality support services. All clinicians working within TESSA are DBS checked, carry professional indemnity insurance, belong to a professional regulatory body and are required to abide by a professional code of ethics.

Additionally, they have been trained in Adoption UK's Insights training for professionals working in adoption.

This ensures that they have an awareness of adoption issues such as attachment and developmental trauma, struggles at school, post-adoption depression, secondary trauma, blocked care and the need for parental self-care.

TESSA will have regular, monitored reviews of its services. All aspects of the TESSA process will be monitored and evaluated by an external source.

## Making sure everyone is safe

In all organisations working with families and children, there is a requirement to ensure that the All Wales Safeguarding Guidelines are followed. Those working with TESSA will have robust and in-depth understanding and knowledge of safety for all members of an adoptive family and a robust Safeguarding policy and practice is in place. Records are kept regarding the family in accordance with statutory obligations and including the contact details, assessment, intervention offered and service reviews. These records are stored electronically within a secure server and are compliant with the relevant regulations regarding confidentiality, access and security. A family can access their records on request to the TESSA manager in Wales. In the event of a safeguarding issue a family can be assured that they will be treated with respect and information shared with others only where it is appropriate and relevant to a safeguarding investigation.

This service involves working across agencies in partnership so a family and the child in placement can be safeguarded within a robust service where there are clear lines of responsibility and communication.

Where a Parent Partner has a concern about a family they will have been trained in how to share these within Adoption UK's Safeguarding policy and procedure. Where a family has a concern about a Parent Partner, they can access the policy and procedure of Adoption UK or the adoption agency via their adoption social worker.



## If there is a comment, concern or reason for complaint

Adoption UK always endeavours to provide a sympathetic, courteous and professional service to its membership and service users. While we hope that our services will not give rise to any complaints, we will respond fairly, positively and promptly to complaints from the membership and service users when they feel we have not met their expectations or needs.

Furthermore, we are always pleased to hear members' and users' views on our services, so that steps can be taken to review and improve our services, as necessary. These views may be positive, as well as negative, and will be welcomed as constructive feedback on our work.

All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Our complaints policy and procedure is summarised, as follows:

- We have an informal and a formal complaints procedure.
- The policy differentiates between complaints about the provision of services, and complaints about the conduct of staff, sessional workers, or volunteers. In the latter case, complaints will be handled under the formal procedure by the Chief Executive (in cases relating to staff other than the Chief Executive) or the Chair of the Board of Trustees (in cases relating to the Chief Executive).
- The informal procedure is intended to be easy to use, quick and responsive to the complaint:
- Contact the Manager of the relevant service or the Chief Executive by phone or email.
- The Manager or Chief Executive will investigate the complaint and respond within seven days, providing an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the event complained about, the reasons for any unsatisfactory service and, if appropriate, an apology, what course of action will be taken to remedy the unsatisfactory service and what you can do next if you are not satisfied with the response.
- If the response is not satisfactory then you can use the formal complaints procedure, but you will not need to go through the earlier stages of the procedure, as your complaint will be dealt with by the Chief Executive.
- The formal complaints procedure requires the complaint to be in writing:
- The Manager or Chief Executive will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days and will investigate the complaint and respond in full within 10 working days.
- The response will provide an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the event complained about, the reasons for any unsatisfactory service and, if appropriate, an apology, what course of action will be taken to remedy the unsatisfactory service and what you can do next if you are not satisfied with the response.
- If you are not satisfied with the response, the complaint can be referred to the Chief Executive and/or Chair of the Board of Trustees for further consideration.
- If you are not satisfied with the Chair's response, the complaint will be referred to an independent adjudicator. The identity of that adjudicator will depend upon the nature of the complaint. The appointed adjudicator will have the necessary knowledge, experiences, skills and expertise to investigate satisfactorily the complaint. The independent adjudicator's response will be final.
- We will do all we can to facilitate help or support in making a complaint, where this is necessary.
- We keep a record of the number and type of complaints received in order to improve our services and provide relevant training. These records will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees. In addition, complaints about staff conduct or behaviour will be brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees (for the purposes of review) within three months of the complaint being received.

Contact us for full details of our Complaints Policy and Procedure.

## Contact details

If you would like to make a comment or require further information regarding this service, please contact us as follows:

### TESSA Wales

Email: [tessa.wales@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:tessa.wales@adoptionuk.org.uk)

Or if you prefer to call, contact us on  
Telephone: 02920 232221

### Adoption UK Cymru

Penhevad Studios  
Penhevad Street  
Cardiff CF11 7LU  
Email: [wales@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:wales@adoptionuk.org.uk)  
Telephone: 02920 230322  
Helpline: 0300 666 0006 (option 5)  
Mon - Fri 10.00am -2.30pm

Or you can contact the Children's  
Commissioner in Wales:

[www.childcomwales.org.uk](http://www.childcomwales.org.uk)  
Their job is to make sure children  
are safe, ensuring their voice  
is heard and their rights are  
considered by government.

As a registered Adoption Support  
Agency, Adoption UK is subject  
to regulation and inspection by:

### Care Inspectorate Wales

Welsh Government Office  
Rhydycar Business Park  
Merthyr Tydfil CF48 1UZ  
Tel: 0300 7900 126  
<https://careinspectorate.wales>

### Adoption UK Head Office

Units 11 & 12  
Vantage Business Park  
Bloxham Road  
Banbury  
Oxfordshire OX16 9UX  
Telephone: 01295 752240  
Email: [admin@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:admin@adoptionuk.org.uk)

### Children's Commissioner for Wales

Oystermouth House  
Phoenix Way, Llansamlet  
Swansea SA7 9FS  
Telephone: 01792 76500 or 0808 8011000  
Email: [post@childcomwales.org.uk](mailto:post@childcomwales.org.uk)

If there is a need to make a complaint about a public service,  
the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales can investigate as  
an independent body. They can be contacted at:

### Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

1, Ffordd yr Hen Gae  
Pencoed CF35 5LJ  
Telephone: 0300 7900203  
[www.ombudsman.wales](http://www.ombudsman.wales)



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#### Wales

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Email [info@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:info@adoptionuk.org.uk)

Adoption UK Helpline

0300 666 0006

[www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)



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For details on any of our policies on confidentiality, data protection, child and vulnerable adult protection, equal opportunities and complaints procedures, please contact any of our offices.

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