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ADOPTIVE PARENT'S WELLBEING ACTION PLAN



THIS PLAN IS ADAPTED FROM THE WELLNESS ACTION PLAN GUIDES AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE FROM WWW.MIND.ORG.UK. MUCH OF THE ORIGINAL MATERIAL IS PRESENTED HERE IN A SLIGHTLY ALTERED FORMAT AND SUPPLEMENTED WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IN ORDER TO MEET THE NEEDS OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS.



Helpful definitions:

As per the [Mind.org](https://www.mind.org.uk) guides, for the purpose of clarity, when we refer to 'mental health' in this plan we are using it in the broadest possible sense. Some useful definitions to terms used in this plan can be found below.

Mental Health problems

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common Mental Health problems

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Poor Mental Health

Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we're also coping with feeling restless, confused, short tempered, upset or preoccupied. We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences, and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.





As an adoptive parent, you are creating a family for a vulnerable child or children who will have suffered emotional trauma and have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences. Evidence shows us that this can have an impact on your day-to-day emotional health and wellbeing, including your mental health. Post-adoption depression and secondary trauma may occur and may lead to Blocked Care (Snow, 2024).

You may not experience all or any of the symptoms outlined below (and they will not last forever) but it is good to be aware of them. If you do, understand that this is normal in the context of your changed circumstances. It is important that you talk to your Adoption Social Worker (ASW), they will anticipate that you will need support, and you won't be judged negatively. Asking for support is a sign of strength.

Post Adoption Depression (PAD)

Post Adoption Depression is likened to postnatal depression. It shares the same presenting symptoms as generic depression although is also linked to other physical symptoms such as headache, stomach ache, aches and pains. These symptoms may be difficult to unpick from the normal changes which result from having a child to live with you for the first time, such as lack of sleep or busy-ness, reducing time to eat and so on. But you, your family and the professionals around you need to be alert to when this persists or is excessive.

Post Adoption Depression might occur when there is a mismatch between your expectations of adoption and parenting, and the actual reality of parenting a child you are only just beginning to know. You will have spent a long time through approval and training convincing professionals (and yourselves) of your ability to understand a child's lived reality and to parent them in a way that helps them recover, but when the child is with you, particularly in the first few months, you may feel that you are unable to meet these very great needs and feel overwhelmed and lost. The high expectations you might have had of yourself and parenting can lead to pressure on your emotional and mental health. (Snow, 2024)

Secondary trauma

Secondary trauma develops when an individual hears about the trauma of others and is directly affected. Symptoms are similar to post traumatic stress disorder experiencing intrusive images, sleep difficulties, problems with concentration, irritability and anger (Ottoway and Selwyn, 2016). As well as this, it can stifle or dull your ability to enjoy the pleasures of life, such as food and physical contact with others.

Blocked care

Describes the adoptive parent's emotional, physical and biological responses to children's insecure attachment behaviours (Ottoway and Selwyn, 2016).

Sometimes a child or young person will be so unresponsive to, rejecting and/or attacking of their parent's caregiving, that the adult no longer enjoys being with their child. As a result some of their brain systems shut down, they struggle to empathise with the child, no longer enjoy being with them and so do not seek out connection with the child. Parenting can become defensive and behaviour-focused as opposed to relationship-focused (Hughes and Baylin, 2012). Again, this may only be a short term response to the challenges of adoptive parenting and the key to recovery is through talking to others, including your ASW, and support.





WHAT IS A WELLBEING ACTION PLAN?

The Adopter's Wellbeing Action Plan was developed to support prospective adopters and adoptive parents. It is your plan and it is up to you how you use it.

A Wellbeing Action Plan reminds us of what we need to do to stay well as we parent our children and details what we can do to look after our own mental health and wellbeing. It also helps us develop an awareness of our stress triggers and responses and enables us to communicate these with the people who support us.

The Wellbeing Action Plan for Adoptive parents is adapted from the work of [Mind.org](https://www.mind.org), whose work in turn was inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide by people to manage their mental health.

Wellness Action Plans are a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not – to help us identify what keeps us well, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem during work or caregiving should you be experiencing one.

It also opens up a conversation with people in your support network and your adoption social worker, in order for them to better understand your needs and experiences and ultimately better support your wellbeing. If you are adopting as a couple, it might be useful to complete separate plans and to share them with each other.

How to get started

Plan some time in to fill in your Wellbeing Action Plan. Think about all the things that make you feel healthy and well now or those that have helped in the past but that may have fallen by the wayside. Reflect on the times you have found particularly challenging lately and explore these to see if you can see any themes, patterns or links with things that have happened to you in the past – are there particular situations that trigger you to feel pressured or stressed?

Once you've completed your Wellbeing Action Plan, it's helpful to review it monthly. This can help you log any learning or helpful practices from the previous month and understand your triggers. Things can change daily so it's important to keep on top of identifying what keeps you well and check the things you've put in place are working.

Sharing your Wellbeing Action Plan

A Wellbeing Action Plan can be a useful self-reflective tool, but can also be used in discussions with your social worker to help them understand important issues about you and what works for you and helps you. You can also use it in discussions with others in your household and support network to help them identify when your wellbeing may be suffering or help you put things in place to help you stay well.





MAINTAINING WELLBEING AS AN ADOPTIVE PARENT

Identify your triggers

We're all different. What affects someone else's mental wellbeing won't necessarily affect yours in the same way. Whether it's challenges at home or the current circumstance we all find ourselves in, we all have times where we feel stressed, upset or find it difficult to cope. For adoptive parents who are taking parental leave from work or who have given up work for a time, the loss of identity as a working person, as well as the financial adjustment needed, can affect our sense of self and self-worth. Working out what triggers poor mental health for you can help you anticipate problems and find solutions or start to make the adjustments needed.

Quick tip: Keep active Even small amounts of physical activity can boost our mood and overall wellbeing. It can be really difficult to find time for a regular routine to begin with so you might want to think about being outside with your child or children as much as you can (despite the weather!) or building in a weekly meet up with someone in your support network for a short walk or play in the park.

When we get stressed we can forget the things that keep us well. We can find ourselves mindlessly flicking through social media, comfort eating or watching random TV instead of doing the things that truly nourish us.

Reflect on the things that make you feel restored and energised and plan to make time for those.

Quick tip: Self-care - Familiarise yourself with the support available

Evidence suggests that feeling close to and valued by other people is a basic human need. Good relationships are important to our wellbeing. Ask your adoption service what support groups or options they have in place for connecting with other adoptive parents and familiarise yourself with the formal and informal support available. It can also be worth looking online for Wales or UK wide adoptive parent groups and forums. If you need help getting involved in any support services let your social worker know – lots of people need a familiar face or someone to go along with to a new group.

Taking short breaks whenever you can

No one can pour from an empty cup. We all need time to ourselves, doing the things that nourish our bodies and minds to keep our cups filled up. Ignoring your needs can lead to stress and burnout. As you build up your family and support network, the child can begin to enjoy spending time with other people which will give you some space. Explore with your social worker, other people in your home and support network how you will take breaks, however short, to rest and recuperate.

Remember it's okay to not be okay

We may feel different from one day to the next as situations change so it's important to be kind to yourself.





MAINTAINING WELLBEING AS AN ADOPTIVE PARENT

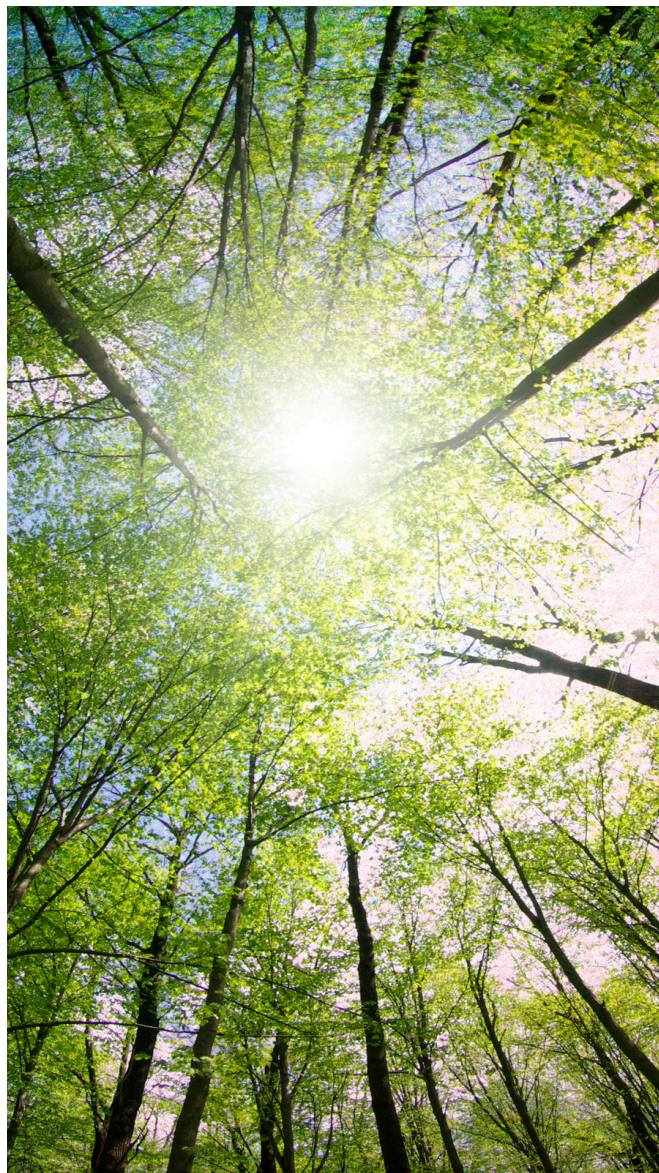
Connect with your adoption service

It can be easy to feel isolated from your adoption service whilst managing the day to day demands of caring. Make sure you prioritise time for your regular visits from your social worker and read newsletters or other communications to keep updated about developments within the service. There may be campaigns, forums, activities or consultation events that you could get involved in if you have an interest in taking an active role in the development of the service.

Celebrate the small successes

We all want to contribute and make a difference to the lives of the children we care for. We want to feel accomplished and that we've achieved something. So it's important to celebrate the successes, big and small. Some days that might mean a great leap forward, other days it could mean a tiny smile or something being a little bit easier than the weeks or months before. Try to identify one small thing each day or week and ask for the support of your social worker or people in your support network to help you notice these.

And remember, the impact of trauma affects a child in lots of different ways and for a long time – **it takes time** to help them recover so remove the pressure on yourself to be the perfect parent especially in the early weeks and months as you get to know each other and grow those lifelong attachments.



Quick tip : Get the basics right

Quality sleep, a good diet and proper hydration can make all the difference to your day. Be sure to keep yourself well hydrated throughout the day and if you are struggling to sleep, consider consulting Mind.org guidance.





ADOPTIVE PARENT'S WELLBEING ACTION PLAN



THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE WHERE YOU CREATE YOUR WELLBEING ACTION PLAN. THEY ARE FOR YOU TO COMPLETE, WITH SUPPORT IF YOU WISH, AND WILL HELP YOU THINK THROUGH THE AREAS IMPORTANT TO YOU TO MAINTAIN YOUR WELLBEING WHILST YOU ADOPT.





WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

How you work with your social worker and adoption service

As an adoptive parent, what gives you satisfaction / makes you feel good? E.g. seeing signs of progress in the child, feeling valued by people around you (give examples where you can).

Are there any characteristics of the way you work with others that your adoption service and social worker needs to be aware of? E.g. what conversations are you comfortable to have digitally and what do you prefer to be over the telephone or face to face? Do you prefer to figure things out together through talking or is it better to give you time to reflect and then discuss again later? Are you a morning person or an afternoon person?

Increasing your satisfaction in your parenting role

Is there anything your social worker or adoption service can do to help maximise the enjoyment and satisfaction you gain / hope to gain from being an adoptive parent? E.g. help you to notice signs of progress, put you in touch with other adoptive parents, keep you updated of events or training etc.





MAINTAINING YOUR WELLBEING WHILST ADOPTING

What helps you maintain your wellbeing and stay mentally healthy?

e.g. sports, social activities, time alone, 'switching off' to a book, some TV or video games etc. How often do you need to do these things to stay at your best?

Are there any situations or circumstances that cause your wellbeing to suffer or trigger poor mental health for you?

e.g. conflict with relatives/others? Something not going to plan; things happening in work; things happening in the lives of your children/ partner; any particular needs, circumstances or behaviours of your children that you find especially triggering? etc.

What can your social worker and adoption service put in place to proactively support you to maintain your wellbeing whilst adopting and minimise these triggers?

e.g. arrangements for getting in touch, buddies or peer support, frequency of social work visits, how discussions are managed, learning or development needs etc.





EXPERIENCING POOR WELLBEING WHEN ADOPTING

Are there any early warning signs that you notice or might be noticed by others when your wellbeing starts to decline?

Signs I notice

Signs people in my home might notice

Signs my social worker or adoption service might notice





EXPERIENCING POOR WELLBEING WHEN ADOPTING

How might experiencing poor wellbeing affect your adoptive parenting?

e.g. find it difficult to make decisions, struggle to prioritise tasks, more forgetful, difficulty concentrating, headaches, more irritable, less patient etc.

What actions would you find helpful if any of your early warning signs are noticed by you or others?

Actions I can take for myself:

Actions people in my home can take:

Actions my social worker / adoption service can take:





EXPERIENCING POOR WELLBEING WHEN ADOPTING

Seeking professional help

Remember: it's always ok to ask for help

[mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) recommends that you may wish to seek help if you're:

- Finding it hard to enjoy your life
- Worrying more than usual
- Having thoughts and feelings that are difficult to cope with, which have an impact on your day-to-day life

Contacting your GP is usually the first step to accessing professional help. Your adoption service may also be able to provide counselling support and the [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) website lists a wide range of support services for mental wellbeing.

Is there anything additional you would like to share to support your wellbeing whilst adopting?

