

Working with adopted children and families

Updated February 2024 following changes in the regulations

Art therapy practice with adopted children and their birth and adoptive families is subject to a regulatory framework. This is a different framework from any other client group and was put in place to look after the very specific needs of this client group.

What Is this guidance?

Art therapy sessions with adopted children and their families are required to be provided by an organisation which is Ofsted registered as an adoption agency, adoption support agency or for a local authority adoption agency.

These agencies must meet a range of legal requirements and are established to safeguard this client group some of whom have very particular requirements.

This is completely different from Ofsted registration of a school.

Do I need to be Ofsted registered to work with adopted children?

As an individual practitioner, who provides adoption support services such as art therapy, you need to be commissioned by

an adoption agency, an adoption support agency or by a local authority adoption agency. You then do not need to be Ofsted registered yourself.

What is the Adoption Support Fund?

[The Adoption Support Fund](#) (ASF) (now called the Adoption and Special Guardianship Fund) was established in 2013 to help pay for a wide range of services including therapy for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order families and children under Child Arrangement Orders. The government has committed to this funding until 2025.

Art therapy is included on the list of approved therapies that can be paid for through the ASF. The ASF enables adoptive families and their children to access regulated and approved therapeutic services.

This covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland but not Scotland. Scotland have different funding sources for children's therapeutic services. We are awaiting confirmation from BAAT Scotland about the differences and will update once this has been received.

Therapeutic services funded through the ASF can only be commissioned through an adoption agency, an adoption support agency or a local authority adoption agency who may apply for the ASF funding after an assessment of need, which is carried out by a specialist adoption support social worker and the adoptive parents. The adoptive family's case is then managed by the agency's social worker, who will have access to a range of signpost services. They are also the lead professional for the contracted art therapy provision, no matter where the art therapy intervention takes place.

What if the school I work in asks me to work with an adopted child

A school or practitioner cannot apply for the assessment or the fund. Art therapists who work in school settings only work with adopted children if the regulatory framework described above is in place. This is because although schools are regulated by Ofsted they are not specifically registered by Ofsted in relation to adoption work.

Even if you are asked to provide therapy that is not adoption-related eg work on a specific issue like peer relations, then it is likely that the child's experiences around adoption will be a factor in the therapy and therefore the work will be outside the remit of the regulations. Any issues arising from the work would not be covered by the therapist's insurance.

What if I am already working with an adopted child in a school setting or as a private practitioner and this is not funded through the ASF?

If you are already working with an adopted child in a school or as a private practitioner it is important to be open with the parents and the school (if they are involved) regarding the regulations.

Parents should be guided to their appropriate adoption agency and ask for a needs assessment so that the therapy can be commissioned and managed/supported as described above in order for the work to continue.

If this is not successful, then you would need to work towards an ending within an appropriate time limit with the child and aim for a smooth transition to other appropriate therapeutic support which works within the remit of the guidance.

These regulations do not apply to adopted people over the age of 18.

Data management and record keeping

Your work may be subject to sample submission should your contractor be inspected by Ofsted. This differs from a regular school-based Ofsted inspection.

Strict and up-to-date record keeping must be adhered to for all adoption casework and it is advisable to also be registered with the [Information Commissioners Office](#) (ICO).

Relevant Trainings

- [Working with looked after and adopted children and their families: complex trauma and art therapy](#)
British Association of Art Therapists
course, March 2024

Further reading

- [Introduction to adoption support agencies](#), gov.uk website
- [Working together to safeguard children](#), gov.uk website
- [First4adoption website](#), the national information service for people interested in adopting a child in England
- [CoramBAAF](#), supporting agencies and professionals who work with children and young people
- [Information Commissioner's Office](#) website