

One Adoption West Yorkshire – working to support you  
and your family



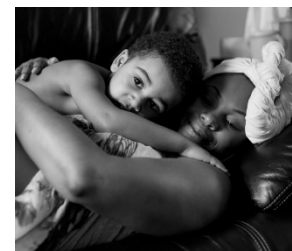
**HELLO** We're the multidisciplinary team who work as part of One Adoption. We come from a range of backgrounds – Social Work, Clinical Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Early Years and Education specialists and Occupational Therapy, and can work you at any stage of your child's life. We're especially pleased to be getting in touch with you at this stage of your life as an adoptive family because we know how important these early days are and want to be able to offer you help, support and advice if you need it.

To do this, we'd like to invite you and your child to come on a 12 week programme of activities with us. You'll be one of 8 families on the programme, all of whom have recently adopted a young child. Adoption brings lots of joy as well as lots of challenges, and we're keen to build on the strengths that you have as you get to know your child and establish your life together as a family.



What we'll do

We know that for babies and young children to really thrive, they need to be in loving, supportive families where they're protected from harm or too much stress. Baby's brains need an attuned adult brain to develop alongside – a parent or carer who can notice how they're feeling and what they need, and make sure that these needs are met.



We know that when babies don't have this, they get stressed and when they're stressed, their brain and bodies aren't growing as well as they need to. This affects developing children on a bodily as well as a psychological level. Babies who feel safe and happy do lots of moving within the context of the loving relationships around them. They have lots of good experiences of touch and nurture, and these allow them to grow into themselves on a bodily level long before they can talk or tell someone what's going on for them. Babies in frightening situations (in utero and once they're born) or who spend too much time under stress, don't have these same touch experiences and they don't move nearly as much as typically developing children and as such their systems can be compromised. They don't get to know themselves on a bodily level and their brain and central nervous system can't develop properly.



We'll spend a lot of time in this group thinking about children's bodily regulation and development, because it's the foundation for all other development. We'll talk a lot about three foundation sensorimotor systems, vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile – and while they might seem a bit

strange at this point, you'll soon know what we're meaning. It can help to understand a bit more about their development and functioning and there's some information at the end that you might find helpful.

On a psychological level, we know that being under too much stress can be really damaging to brain development – babies are born with a brain that has phenomenal potential, but how it actually develops is entirely dependent on the relationships and experiences that they have. We know that when babies and young children are badly treated, they can struggle to trust other adults or make good relationship. They can constantly be on the lookout for danger and thinking that the bad things that happened are going to happen again. When they're in this state of mind, they're not working with a part of their brain that will let them learn – they're just trying to survive. We'll spend a lot of time thinking about this too, helping you as you get you know your child and working with you to help them really connect to you and build pathways in their brains that are about feeling safe and cared for.



We're really lucky in One Adoption to have such a range of skilled professionals, and we can think with you about any worries or concerns you might have about your child. It's always best to ask. We'll have colleagues from the family finding team as well as all of the multidisciplinary team involved in the group over the course of the 12 weeks – just not all of us every week!

We are also really hoping that you'll make links with the other families who are part of this course with you and that, if they're helpful and supportive to you, those links might endure beyond the life of this group.



### **What we'll do each week**

The group will follow the same structure each week. We'll start by lying in a circle on our tummies and singing a hello song. Then we'll read a story together before we do the specific activities of that week. These games are all designed to work on areas of your child's sensorimotor and attachment systems that we know tend to be underdeveloped in children who have experienced developmental trauma. We'd really encourage you to play these games in between sessions too!

The structured part of the group will have a snack time and we'll sing a good bye song so that children know that part of the group is finished. Please don't worry if your child doesn't seem to want to join in with what we're doing – we're here to support you and for some children, doing these things at home will feel much more comfortable than doing them when we meet together.

We want to leave time at the end of every session for you to have the chance to chat to each other and also ask us any questions you might have, so we'll finish the structured part of the group half an hour before we



need to finish.

At the end of the group we'll think with you about whether it would be helpful to have a meeting with your adoption social worker and think about any other kinds of support that might be useful to you.

### **Where and when will the programme run.**

We'll meet each week at Leeds Gymnastics Club, which is Limewood Road, Seacroft, Leeds LS14 1AB.

Our aim is to offer this programme to children with an assessed need living within the One Adoption west region.

### **How will the programme be funded?**

We want to be able to offer this programme to children with an assessed need living within the One Adoption west region. Your place on the programme will be funded by the adoption support fund, and your adoption social worker will talk to you about this and is then able to make the application on your behalf.

### **How will we measure if it's working?**

As parents you're the experts in your children and we're hoping you'll be able to see changes in the way your child moves, their balance and coordination, how they manage everyday tasks like dressing and feeding, as well as how they let you know about, and manage their feelings. We hope that this way of working will support you get to know your child even better, and building their relationship with you is the most important thing that we can do. We're also going to use a range of measures to evaluate this programme – we'll complete a Boxall profile, we'll do a speech and language therapy assessment, we'll look at bodily regulation and development and we'll think with you about your experience of caring for the child. We'll do some of these at the beginning of the programme, some at the end, and some at both!

### **How to get in touch with us**

If you've got any queries, either now or when we get started, we'd really like to talk to you. The best way to get in touch with us is to email Sarah, on [sarah.loyd@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.loyd@leeds.gov.uk). Sarah only works with us one day a week, so it's helpful to know how to contact our administrator too – his name is Antoine Agricole and his email address is [antone.agricole@oneadoptionwy.leeds.gov.uk](mailto:antone.agricole@oneadoptionwy.leeds.gov.uk)

If you can't come to a group for any reason, please email us on the day of the group so that we know that you're not able to come.

## **Appendix**

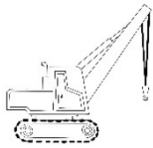


A longer explanation of the **Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems (BUSS) Model** – the more you can understand why we're doing what we're doing, the more you can do at home too!

This is a link to a webinar that Sarah did with two adoptive parents with Adoption UK as part of National Adoption week, 2020, <https://youtu.be/qvRFNu5Eu3Q>

In our work together we'll together about your child's foundation sensorimotor systems, and by that we mean:-

**The vestibular system** – if our body was a crane, the vestibular system would be



like the base of that crane. It helps us to feel grounded and gives a stable base for moving. On a bodily level, our base (or core) is our head, neck, shoulder girdle and trunk. The vestibular system has two main tasks. The first is to provide core strength and stability to our bodies and the second is what's called gravitational security – helping us to feel secure in our movements, being able to go down steps or jump up and down without it feeling precarious or as if the world is moving with us.

The vestibular system starts to develop in utero and once the baby has been born is always at work in response to gravity and movement. But we know that when babies are in frightening environments, they tend to freeze rather than move freely. Babies need to feel safe and contained to move and flourish in relation to their caregiver.

Children with under developed vestibular systems will often have poor posture and low muscle tone – they'll feel a bit saggy in the middle and might slide along walls or have poor balance and co-ordination. There might be a fearfulness about movement (you can often notice this when you watch a child going down a flight of stairs) or lots of sensory seeking behaviour – crashing, banging, whizzing around. None of us like to look foolish or as if we can't do things as well as the next person, and it's just the same for children. I find that children often use speed to make up for a lack of control and you might only notice how this system is working when you ask them to slow down.

**The Proprioceptive System** is all about the smooth, well-coordinated working of muscle groups. In this system the messages travel from the muscles and joints inside our bodies, up to the brain and Central Nervous System and back down to the muscles and joints, telling us how much pressure, force or strength to use in a movement.



Our proprioceptive systems are always working to give us information about where our bodies are in relation to our environment– you can try this by just closing your eyes and reaching out for something that you know is in front of you, like a drink. You shouldn't need to use your eyes to find your drink and you don't have to think about how to pick it up. Our brain will have been working hard without us being consciously aware of what it's doing, mapping out our environment, alerting us to

things we need to know about, deciding what we don't need to be consciously aware of. If you stop now and really tune into all the noises that are around you, you'll see how much our brain has been filtering out, so we can focus on what we're wanting to do without constantly being distracted. It's just the same on a bodily level, good proprioception is knowing what your body is doing without having to use your eyes to track or plan how your body is going to move or work – how much pressure or force to use in a movement. When you bend down from your chair to pick something up off the floor, you're not having to think about how far to lean forward or how to stop yourself toppling forward onto the floor – your body knows how much pressure or force is required for the movement.

Like all of our foundation systems, the proprioceptive system grows through repeated patterns of movement when a child is feeling safe and happy. Think of a baby learning to crawl – all those times of being up on all fours and then rocking



back and forward as their muscles and joints prepare for the movement – all of those movements are vital in developing bodily awareness – hands flat on the ground, wrist movement, the body getting used to being off the ground, supporting itself, eyes getting used to judging distance, the body working out how

much pressure / how much force to use. When you watch a young child at this stage of development, when they're moving from creeping on their tummies to crawling we see lots of trial and error – lots of overshooting the movements or not using enough pressure and collapsing back down. All of this builds up those neuronal networks about the position of our bodies and what we need to do to be moving around.

A child whose proprioceptive system is inadequately primed might struggle to know where the different parts of their body are (older children talk about not knowing what their feet are doing unless they can see them). If you don't really have a sense of where your body is from the muscles and joints inside your body a good way to find out is to move around a lot, or bump into things and we often see a lot of extra movement in children with underdeveloped proprioceptive systems. Movements are often poorly modulated – too floppy or too jerky.

**The Tactile System** develops from one that is primed for survival in the new-born baby, when all the receptors are alert to danger and function to protect the baby from harm. With nurture, love and care the system shifts from this defensive functioning to discriminatory functioning. As the baby no longer needs to be constantly looking out for danger because someone else is taking care of them, the receptors change so that instead of being alert to danger, they allow the child to begin to discern what they're touching. We're wanting the child to be able to stay tuned into the moment of an experience and explore, rather than being so preoccupied with protection and safety. Early feeding experiences are an important part of the tactile system. Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are often stuck in a defensive mode and their systems are on high alert.



This links very well with the **Limbic System**, the system that's all about what state of mind the child is in and it's helpful to think of it as the music that constantly plays in the background. It's the unconscious process that sets our state of mind –flight / fight / freeze – or a state of mind that allows us to stay in the moment of an experience, be able to manage the uncertainty of now knowing or letting someone else be in charge of things, and make and store memories and experiences in a way that they can be usefully retrieved when we're under stress. It's in this state of mind that children can start to play or learn; they need to be able to stay in the moment of an experience and be able to tolerate uncertainty or not knowing everything.

### These Systems are Underdeveloped not Broken

Understanding how the foundation systems typically develop and viewing them as underdeveloped rather than broken in children who have experienced early abuse and neglect underpins this model. This understanding allows us to take the child back through essential patterns of movements that have been missed, within the context of the safe and nurturing environment that foster or kinship carers or adoptive parents are able to offer. This can help to re-lay these foundations, re building the child's sense of themselves on a bodily level. This gives a platform for emotion regulation, building relationships and learning.



There's more information about the BUSS model in Sarah's books, 'Improving Sensory Processing in Traumatized children' and 'Building Sensorimotor Systems in Children who have experienced Developmental Trauma' (Sarah Lloyd, Published by JKP) if you're interested in learning more. We've got a few copies in One Adoption if you'd like to borrow one, or you can buy a copy on Amazon.