

# Adoption and Muslims in England



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**Toolkit 1: For Social Workers And  
Professionals In The Adoption Sector**

# Contents

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- 3 Who We Are
- 4 About The National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG)
- 5 Why We Decided To Develop Toolkits For The Adoption Sector
- 7 BAME and Muslim Demographics
- 8 BAME Population In England
- 9 Muslims Are Not A Homogeneous Group
- 11 A Contextual Perspective Of Adoption In The Muslim Community
- 12 Common Issues That Muslim Prospective Adopters Face With Adoption Agencies
- 13 Life Stories p12-16
- 13 Aleysha's Short Story
- 14 Aisha and Her In-Laws' Story
- 15 Challenges With References
- 15 Challenges With Extended Family
- 16 Is It Religious To Remove Shoes?
- 16 Shake Or Not To Shake?
- 17 The Khans' TV story
- 18 Nadeem and Fatima's Story
- 19 Recommendations For The Care Sector
- 20 Considering a Child's Identity and Culture In Adoption
- 22 Understanding Religious Perspectives and Their Implication For Adoption Practice
- 23 Awareness and Community Outreach
- 24 A Good Practice Case Study
- 26 Some Areas We Would Like Agencies To Consider
- 25 Recommendations For The Care Sector
- 28 Support and Services We Provide
- 29 Glossary
- 30 References

# Who We Are

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My Adoption Family was launched in 2019 with the primary aim to raise awareness about the need for more adopters from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and Muslim communities and to improve the experience and support available to these families throughout the adoption process.

My Adoption Family is a member of the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG) and the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) Racial Disparity Group.

We hope you find this toolkit useful. On pages 12-19 you will see details of common issues that Muslim prospective adopters face.

Muslim adopters may also require guidance and reassurance as adoption often brings up specific concerns regarding lineage and naming, inheritance, Hijab, Mahram wet nursing and concerns about privacy and boundaries (see glossary on page 29 for definitions). My Adoption Family offer clear and confidential guidance around these areas to both adoptive parents and professionals.

For any questions not covered in this toolkit, you can email visit our website [www.myadoptionfamily.com](http://www.myadoptionfamily.com) or email [imam@myfosterfamily.com](mailto:imam@myfosterfamily.com) for confidential advice.



# About the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG)

The NARSG brings together all the major stakeholders in the delivery of adoption services across England and is made up of representatives from regional and voluntary adoption agencies together with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), Adoption UK and CoramBAAF with representation from Home for Good, My Adoption Family and New Family Social.

The NARSG are working towards four ambitions:



## Ambition 1: Reducing Delay



To reduce delay in children moving to their permanent family: we will reduce the time from entry into care to children moving in with their adopters, by recruiting the right adopters to meet their needs.

## Ambition 2: Diversity



To increase the diversity of adopters to better meet the specific and emerging identity needs of all children: we strive to ensure that adopters are prepared to understand and address the needs of the diversity of children with adoption as their plan for permanency.

## Ambition 3: The Adopter Journey



We will welcome all potential adopters and will ensure that everyone is treated with respect and receives an open, honest and caring response throughout their journey.

We will create a service that is inclusive of our diverse communities and groups, ensuring all feel equally supported and enable to adopt. We will build on the strengths and needs of applicants to prepare and support them to meet the lifelong needs of the children they will care for.

## Ambition 4: Raising The Profile And Understanding Of Adoption



We will raise the profile of adoption, by recognising and valuing the experiences of adopted people and their families. We will reach out to new audiences from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds to explain the life changing possibilities of adoption for children and families and increase the number of adopters registering their interest.

# Why We Decided To Develop Toolkits For The Adoption Sector

We developed Toolkits for the adoption sector with the aim to support prospective Muslim adopters, social workers, recruitment professionals, and Imams and other influencers who have an interest in adoption.

**The Toolkits are designed with multiple audiences in mind. They intend to give professionals in the field and prospective adopters a deeper understanding of the interplay between cultural and jurisprudential matters.**



At a communal level it will give community leadership, Imams, scholars and other influencers a better insight into UK legal frameworks, policies and procedures, and the challenges around them. It will also help quantify the care sector and the mammoth challenge of addressing the needs of the

estimated 4,500 children of Muslim heritage<sup>1</sup> and other 102,000 children in care<sup>2</sup>.

We have extensive knowledge and experience of the challenges faced by Muslim communities around adoption. Over the past few years we have engaged with over 60 leading figures from across the Muslim community, including researchers, adopters, faith leaders, influencers, care professionals and politicians. We have held three successful focus-group meetings on adoption and Islam, and documented first-hand accounts and life stories from over 30 care professionals and social workers, as well as 10 Muslim adopters and a range of Imams and faith leaders from across the UK. We have continuing engagement with a number of scholars from the Muslim community giving us access to a range of scholarly views and fatawa (ruling points on Islamic law) on topics related to adoption, and we have compiled a large number of questions and answers from our regular monthly Q&A sessions with Muslim adopters, social workers and faith advisors.

We identified a need to develop Toolkits for the adoption sector in order to meet recommendations that had been raised in various NARSG ambition group discussions and to address challenges that had been raised in several previous reports (Kutty, 2014, O'Halloran 2015, Karim, 2017, Karim et. al. 2018, Cheruvallil-Contractor & Halford, 2019, Miller & Butt, 2019).

1 Cheruvallil-Contractor, S.; Halford, A.; Phiri, M.B. (2021) 'The Saliency of Islam to Muslim Heritage Children's Experiences of Identity, Family, and Well-Being in Foster Care'. Religions 12 (6):381.

2 Statistics briefing looked after children, 2021, NSPCC

## These challenges include:

- A lack of targeted marketing reflecting diversity within the Muslim community
- A sense of additional scrutiny for those of Muslim backgrounds and how they are perceived
- Experiences of an unfair approach to questioning during the assessment process
- A lack of trust in authorities; fear of discrimination, prevent policies and Islamophobia
- The impact of poverty, multigenerational households, and lack of fluency in the English language
- Gaps in knowledge and understanding of the children's care sector and the adoption process
- A perception that Muslims will not consider or are not suited to adopting children of different backgrounds
- Stigma in the community about adoption
- Concerns around compatibility of Islamic laws with English adoption laws and policies
- The misconception that adoption is not permissible in Islam
- Lack of support for recruitment teams and social workers in managing faith and culturally sensitive questions
- A need for peer led support networks for Muslim Adopters
- The need to establish a safe space for social workers for reflective practice

We found that these challenges related to three distinctive areas of concern, each requiring its own Toolkit specifically aimed at audiences within that area and addressing the challenges that they faced.

We therefore developed three separate Toolkits:

### Toolkit 1

Aimed towards **recruitment and marketing professionals and social workers** from within the adoption sector.

This Toolkit will have a specific focus on addressing barriers to recruiting adopters and give advice on improving the journey and experience of BAME and Muslim potential adopters through the system.

### Toolkit 2

Aimed towards the **general Muslim community and wider population** to address issues around the process of adoption, Islamic perspectives on adoption practical guidance on adoption from a faith-based perspective.

### Toolkit 3

Aimed towards **Imams, leaders, and influencers in the Muslim community** and how they can promote adoption and raise awareness amongst their communities around the topic and need.



## BAME and Muslim Demographics

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The Muslim community is one of the fastest growing demographics in England and accounts for sizeable proportions of the BAME communities.

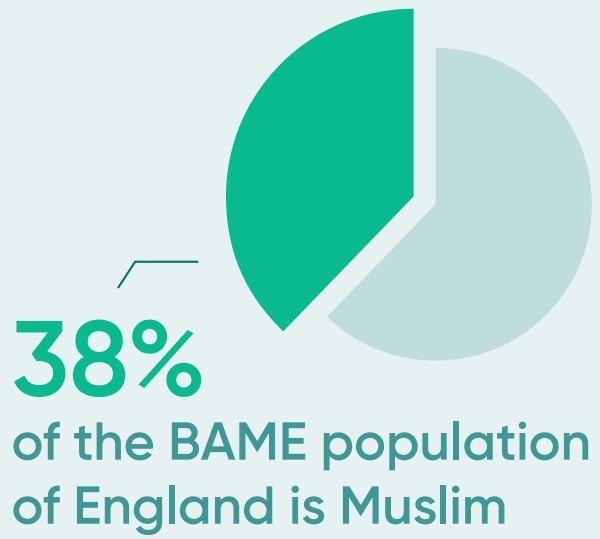
In 2001, there were an estimated 1.7 million Muslims living in England. This grew to 2.7 million in 2011. Based on this growth rate, we can estimate this number to grow to 3.5 million in 2021, and that would mean 6.5% of the 56 million people living in England are Muslims. Some council wards in England have over 50% Muslim populations and 12% of the people living in London are Muslim.

**Approximately 14% of England's population is BAME and that is around 7.84 million. An estimated 38% of the BAME population in England is Muslim.** (2011 Census data, Office of National Statistics )

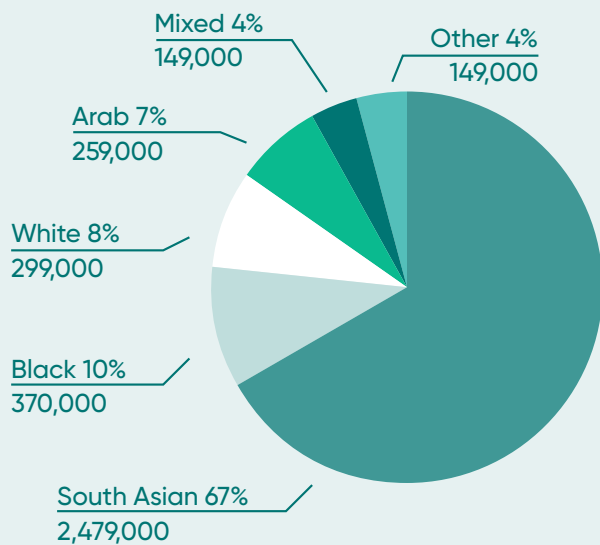
**"Research about the experiences of Muslim heritage children in the social care system in Britain is almost non-existent"**

- Miller and Butt, 2019

# BAME population in England



## Breakdown Of Muslim Population By Ethnic Groups



Some council wards in England have over **50% Muslim populations**

**12%** of people living in London are Muslim

Based on ONS 2011 Census data





## Muslims Are Not A Homogeneous Group

Globally there are 1.9 billion Muslims. Islam is the second largest faith group after Christianity which has 2.3 billion followers.

If 2 billion people are Christian, yet culturally, socially and politically diverse as to contradict each other – why do we keep expecting all Muslims to be carbon copies of a very specific Arab or Asian culture?

**The 3.5 million Muslims in England are not a homogeneous group, they come from many parts of the world and have a diverse range of cultures, languages, traditions and customs.**

Islam has core tenets including belief in one God (Allah), belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the final Messenger of Allah, believing the Qur'an is Allah's word and His guidance,

performing the five daily prayers, pilgrimage to Makkah for the Hajj once in a lifetime, fasting during Ramadan and giving Zakat the annual charity.

Whilst all Muslims follow the same Qur'an and the example of the Messenger, there are many ways Muslims choose to practise their faith and this often interplays with other non-religious cultural customs and traditions. This makes Muslims as diverse as Christians, and that diversity cannot be distilled down to digestible soundbites.

Up to 67% of England's Muslims are South Asian, and statistically they appear as the largest single group. However, this ethnic group is not homogenous either. It includes people from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan as well



as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. It is important to understand the intersectionality between these ethnicities and the diverse cultures they represent. Their traditions, social norms, languages as well as their food, dress and home life can all be very different.

First generation Muslims living in England who were born overseas may not have a strong grasp of the English language or may not fully understand British systems or cultural norms. They are more likely to have low educational attainment and many would have worked in traditional industries, often living in inner city areas amongst communities they are familiar with. Thus, will need additional support to successfully navigate the adoption process.

On the other hand, second or third generation British born Muslims may have a lifestyle which is closer to British family norms and their levels of education and understanding of local systems may put them in a stronger position. An extra effort would need to be made to make adoption appealing to this demographic by using social media and influencers who can connect this relatively untapped group.

**Besides this, 10% of the Muslim population in England come from Black communities.**

The majority of the Black Muslim communities are concentrated in the big cities of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. We know that Black children wait the longest to be adopted and again further efforts need to be made to reach out to these communities by working with key influencers and holding targeted marketing campaigns.

# A Contextual Perspective Of Adoption In The Muslim Community

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My Adoption Family has long held a focus on meeting the unmet needs of children and adoptive parents, without limiting our scope to Muslims.

The emphasis on preservation of life and faith are both over-arching aspects of Islamic teachings and the practical role model of the Prophet Muhammad encourages Muslims to be care takers for all, regardless of differences in faith or otherwise. Dealing justly with orphans and vulnerable children has been repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the Prophetic example), with huge rewards promised in the scriptures for acts of kindness and generosity towards children along with stern warnings of severe punishment against ill-treatment of young people.

In light of the above, recruitment professionals should also be aware of the contextual situation of the nearly 3.5 million Muslims in the UK, with a higher than average level of poverty and deprivation, a wide array of spoken first languages and in many cases a less than average level of fluency in English. 46% of Muslims live in the 10% most deprived wards in England<sup>1</sup>.

From our engagement with Muslim adopters we have anecdotal evidence that there are views in some areas of the Muslim community that adoption in the UK is perceived as forbidden or not allowed even though it is actually a communal responsibility<sup>2</sup>. We also know that as well as ignorance and stigma about adoption, there is a range of cultural practices and attitudes alien to Islamic teachings that lead to Muslim adoptive parents feeling treated as outsiders by their own community.

A further factor that we have identified is the mistrust of authorities and the reluctance to engage with services from fear of discrimination or being labelled extremist. Professionals need to be aware that there are already a number of negative experiences being shared by potential adopters that has compounded the lack of trust in adoption agencies and a genuine fear of discrimination and Islamophobia. In any recruitment drive, these need to be addressed first and foremost to enable a successful outreach.

**"Adoption in the British system is not always a familiar concept in more diverse communities."**

- Muslim Institute (2014)

These issues bring structural limitations and capacity issues within the Muslim community that hinder them rising confidently to the multi-faceted challenges of the care sector. Hence, a key thought for professionals in the sector is, what more can be done to support prospective adopters who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds?

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1 British Muslim in Numbers, Briefing, 2016, MCB

2 This is a minority view, though it has become prevalent in some quarters of the Muslim community due to misinformation

# Common Issues That Muslim Prospective Adopters Face With Adoption Agencies

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The ground level work between My Adoption Family and Muslim communities has uncovered areas of concern that perhaps not all adoption agencies may be aware of.

This Toolkit is designed to give professionals and practitioners in the adoption sector a better understanding of Muslim family dynamics and the underlying thought processes. For us, these have been common issues that we find ourselves addressing directly with the Muslim community and many of them are underpinned in the different cultures, values and lifestyles that Muslim families hold in contrast to common western cultures and values.

When due consideration has not been given to the traditional family model, customs and traditions, this can lead to prospective Muslim adopters having a poor experience, as has been reflected in some of these life stories. When these experiences are shared in the Muslim community they lead to a negative perception of adoption agencies in general.

We believe there is a perception within certain parts of the Muslim community that assessing social workers will be reluctant to approve prospective adopters because of the way their families live at home, their home set up and family models. Perhaps further research needs to be done to establish how accurate this perception is, but it is worth considering some of the points raised in the following life stories and examples of unconscious bias.

# Life Stories

## Aleysha's Short Story

We listened to a case of a single female from a south Asian heritage tell us about her desire to adopt a child of any age and any background.

She described how she had wanted to do this for a long time and finally, when she picked up the phone to a local adoption agency to start the process, she was asked about her background and ethnicity and told 'I'm sorry but we don't have any children that we'd be able to match with you'. That was the end of her adoption journey.

### Best practice considerations:

- Adoption agencies should consider the national need as well as their own local need in adoption. In cases where the possibility of a match may be seen as low for a person of a particular background or ethnicity we would advise agencies to consider the possibility of a match in other areas.
- A black couple may become excellent adopters for a white child and any decision to halt an assessment with a view that a match may not be possible on background or ethnicity should consider the precedent set by *Mander v Windsor & Maidenhead and Adopt Berkshire (2019)*.



# Aisha And Her In-Laws' Story

One Muslim couple lived with in-laws and their social worker felt this wasn't in the best interests of the child. The couple found this was implicit in the social worker's response and body language.

A complaint was made and a different social worker was brought in who saw the arrangement as a strength.

## Best practice considerations:

- Is there scope to consider the extra support the child would receive and could this also be a way for Muslim adopters to show they have wider support?
- Does this highlight a training need to help social workers develop a wider world view beyond a Eurocentric one that might help them see Muslims' requirements in a positive light?



# Challenges With References

A number of Muslims raised a point about challenges they faced in acquiring references.

It is normal practice for adoption agencies to request three references of which two are from friends of the family. It appears that some agencies have an expectation that the friend can provide a reference for both partners.

In reality, many Muslim couples socialise with other family members and friends of the same sex but are less likely to socialise with friends as a couple, it is very common in the Muslim community to see men socialise with men and women with women. For this reason, it is sometimes difficult for prospective Muslim adoptive couples to identify referees for them.

## Best practice considerations:

- Is it possible to show some flexibility and perhaps request references from two sets of referees as some agencies do?
- We are aware that in addition to seeking additional family references some agencies also request references from friends on both sides, which also overcomes this issue.

# Challenges With Extended Family

It is common to find households living as part of extended families, multi-generational households and the norm of siblings in birth families sharing bedrooms.

Many potential adopters have raised the issue of how they felt they were automatically excluded from adoption as their homes were perceived as not having enough space, while they saw no issue in putting two children in the same room or having a young child sleep in the same room as the parents.

## Best practice considerations:

- Avoid a blanket disapproval. Each situation should be considered on a case-by-case basis and where there are other family members within the household, could they be included in the assessment so additional checks are completed to satisfy safeguarding requirements?
- Although it is not common practice, there are examples of successful adoption where the adopted child was sharing a bedroom with birth children, or siblings sharing a room, and where no safeguarding concerns were identified.

## Is It Religious To Remove Shoes?

Many Muslim families have a policy of removing shoes on entry into the family home. One prospective adopter was asked if this was for religious reasons or simply to keep carpets clean and felt uncomfortable with this type of questioning.



### Best practice considerations:

- The influence of negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims within the media has to be considered. Muslim families can sometimes feel certain lines of questioning draw from negative perceptions or questions around extremism. At the same time social workers should reflect on the way the mind can internalise negative perceptions that then come out in the form of a bias, which is often subconscious.

## Shake Or Not To Shake?

A common question asked was whether it was okay for a male to shake the hand of a female Muslim or vice versa.

Again, this gave a feeling that the social worker might wrongly assume that the woman was in some way inferior to the man and should not be touched.



### Best practice considerations:

- Agencies should consider the need for safe spaces for dialogue around cross-cultural interactions. Some agencies work with their local mosque to create safe spaces where social workers and professionals can discuss these issues before engaging with the Muslim community. My Adoption Family holds regular Q&A sessions for these types of questions and agencies may also find that helpful.



## The Khans' TV Story

Many Muslim families choose not to have a television, for religious or other reasons. A number of individuals raised that they had faced an issue with the social worker around this.

In one example, a family felt they were misunderstood as to why they did not have a television and felt they were being judged as ultra-religious. They stated that they chose not to buy a television as they all watched their programmes on iPads and when they did have a television they simply did not watch much. They described how far the conversation went and how they felt obliged to say if they adopted a child who wanted to watch television, they would be happy to buy one.

### Best practice considerations:

- Rather than draw out a conversation based on an assumption, it would be better for the social worker to discuss with their manager in reflective supervision if they had concerns and whether that needed a consideration for a second opinion visit. An issue such as this also raises questions about whether consideration needs to be given to cultural awareness training for social workers.



## Nadeem and Fatima's Story

A common concern from Muslim men was around feeling judged as being domineering characters.

In one example, during a home visit the social worker asked the wife a question and she turned to her husband. Seeing this, the social worker noted that 'the wife had to refer to husband on matters and seek his approval.' The couple were not approved and felt discriminated against by the social worker who they felt had wrongly assumed that the husband had a hold on his wife based on a stereotype that Muslim men are dominant and controlling. The man then stated that the real reason his wife turned to him was because she was not confident in how to respond to the question posed to her due to her poor English. He further stated that if it were him that was asked a question in Urdu, he would have turned to his wife for support.

### Best practice considerations:

- We strongly advise professionals in the sector to hold back on assumptions and avoid drawing conclusions too early. In cases where culture and lifestyles are so different it is worth asking for a second view before concluding unsuitability and once a statement like the above is penned, it can be difficult to repair damage.





It is also worth mentioning that the majority of Muslim applicants for adoption that we have been in touch with wanted to adopt a newborn child or children under the age of two and many were simply told the agency didn't have any children.

The reasons why Muslim adopters ask for this has been covered in Toolkit 3, and it raises a key point about how recruitment professionals manage expectations and respond to these types of queries. We believe that a change in perception is required here as well as a need to respond effectively in a way that educates communities that the greatest need in adoption is around sibling groups, older children, children with special needs and children from Black backgrounds or a mixed heritage.

My Adoption Family understand the importance of creating a safe meeting space for social workers and professionals to be able to ask some of these questions and are already working with a number of agencies within the sector to ensure safe spaces exist. If you have any further questions that you need answering please email [lmam@myfosterfamily.com](mailto:lmam@myfosterfamily.com)

Over the past year, we have covered some of the following questions and our answers to some of these are in Toolkit 2 and may be useful to professionals in the sector:

- Is it OK for Muslim couples to only want to adopt Muslim children?
- Can Muslims adopt children of different backgrounds and religions to them?
- Can we bring up a child who is not from a Muslim background as a Muslim?
- How can I approach questions related to LGBTQ?
- What if the child rejects their faith, how would I manage this?

# Considering A Child's Identity And Culture In Adoption

Over the past two years, we have witnessed a trend with potential Muslim adopters who have been turned away by adoption agencies because the professional on the phone didn't feel they had children that were suitable for their race, culture or ethnicity.

The impact of difference has to be acknowledged but at the same time it should not be a reason to forestall a cross-cultural match. Similarly, where due consideration to race and ethnicity may be given, an approach which solely supports same-race adoption decision-making should have no place in today's adoption system. In 2013, the government declared same-race placement policies in adoption 'not child-centered

**"The impact of difference has to be acknowledged to be responded to rather than being blind to it. This is part of acknowledging the child's lineage and heritage, and as such is an important principle both in Islam and in terms of good practice for good mental health and emotional wellbeing."**

- Dr Rachel Abedi



and unacceptable'.<sup>3</sup> The 'due consideration' requirement in section 1(5) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 was repealed by section 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. Unfortunately, research indicates that matching processes continue to be based on religious and ethnic lines in a bid to find a "good match".

Professionals should have confidence to give their adopters more autonomy to initiate matches. While professionals may scrutinise potential matches, greater trust needs to be placed in adopters' capacity to identify a child with whom they feel an attachment. Professionals need to acknowledge there is an essential chemistry involved in such a process and some adopters often have a gut reaction to children. Some good practice would be to hold Adoption Activity Days which encourage the role of chemistry in forming a bond between adults and children.

We believe that a greater role for adopters in initiating matches would not endanger placements and would certainly lead to faster

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education (2013) 'Statutory guidance on adoption' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-statutory-guidance-2013>

matching. While we need to trust adopters more to start the process, the suitability of a child for particular adopters still needs to be established by professionals. A good example of adopter-led matching occurs when foster carers decide to adopt the child or children they are fostering.

Professionals need to be less prescriptive about the type of child they think adopters might be suited to. The belief that some adopters should be restricted to the adoption of a specific type of child is not correct. Prescribing the type of child that may be suitable for particular adopters, especially those from diverse multicultural or dual-heritage backgrounds, in some instances reduces the prospective adopter's confidence and flexibility. This may unnecessarily move adopters away from children whom they might love and for whom they would be very successful adopters.

**“Appreciating the complexity of the Muslim identity of a child can be a key element that determines the success or failure of a placement.”**

– The Muslim Fostering Project, 2018



# Understanding Religious Perspectives and Their Implication For Adoption Practice

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**Professionals need to recognise that there continue to be differing views within the Muslim community on whether or not adoption is permissible within Islam.**

This goes back to Chapter 33 (The Coalition) in the Qur'an, where verses 4 and 5 state adoptive children are not one's own biological children and it would be better to let them be known by their own parents' names. This is the point at which some scholars state that any adoption which involves taking another's child, giving them your names as parents and stating they are your own child is Haram (forbidden or unlawful) within Islam. This has led to a simple blanket understanding that adoption is unlawful and is addressed in Toolkit 3.

A second barrier is language, the English term 'adoption' has two possible translations in Arabic, Tabanni (taking a child as your own) and Kafalah (looking after) and of course one is forbidden while the other is either highly desirable or even mandatory. Professionals should be aware that a large cohort of Imams and scholars in the UK has other first languages and this compounds the issue of recruitment of adopters from within Muslim communities. Clearly, more direct work needs to be conducted with scholars and community leaders around adoption perspectives and the limits of language. For instance, a simple move away from referring to a child as a 'match' to a 'vulnerable child who needs a home' would be closer to the reality that looking after the child is a communal responsibility under Islamic law.

Muslims, while connected by a set of core beliefs and values, span a vast diversity of cultural and religious traditions. Either adoptive parents or children from Muslim backgrounds may have very different and unique experiences and practitioners should avoid generalisations. A significant number of Muslim adopters have raised concerns that questions around religiosity are sometimes presented as a case of deciding whether the adopter is following normative Islam or an extremist version.

My Adoption Family seeks to support professionals to ask these crucial questions in a culturally sensitive way and with the understanding that there is no single profile of an extremist. We believe it is our collective duty to support professionals in their role and their understanding of Islam. We can act as a critical friend or as a sounding board to challenge conscious and unconscious bias and understandings of Islam, the challenges Muslims face as well as vulnerability, discrimination and Islamophobia.

**Muslim adopters may also require guidance and reassurance as adoption often brings up specific concerns regarding lineage and naming, inheritance, Hijab, Mahram, wet nursing and concerns about privacy and boundaries. My Adoption Family offer clear and confidential guidance around these areas to both adoptive parents and professionals.**

For more information on these topics see Toolkit 3.

# Awareness and Community Outreach

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A core challenge is raising awareness of adoption within the Muslim community and accordingly Toolkit 2 has been developed for this purpose. An approach to this might well include highlighting the need for Muslim adopters to come forward to look after Muslim children from their local communities or across the country.

Professionals should consider this in their local or agency wide strategies and My Adoption Family can support that. At the same time, we feel the issues around Muslim adopters are substantial enough to be considered as part of a national adoption strategy.

For us, the next step is about understanding some of the core questions around the lack of Muslim adopters, in particular, the shortfall of Black Muslim adopters. Following this would be to build a better understanding of how well misconceptions are being tackled and agencies should consider how they minimise the barriers to Muslim adopter recruitment.

We believe that an essential priority to effective Muslim adopter recruitment is to have the

backing of local Muslim scholars who can help raise awareness within their communities and advise on the permissibility from an Islamic perspective. My Adoption Family work closely with the Muslim Council of Britain and have strong links with mosques and Imams across the country that can help. We have forged strong links with experts in Islamic jurisprudence who are able to answer key questions as and when they come up.

For further information on some of the faith-based topics refer to Toolkit 3 and for specific guidance on faith-based issues please email us [Imam@myfosterfamily.com](mailto:Imam@myfosterfamily.com)

# A Good Practice Case Study - the Muslim Welfare Institute and local authorities and regional adoption agencies



The Muslim Welfare Institute (MWI) in Blackburn Lancashire has worked in partnership with local authorities and adoption agencies to encourage and recruit adopters from local Muslim communities.

Hanif Dudhwala, the CEO and a local scholar, served on the Blackburn adoption panel as an advisor and together, the Local Authority and the Muslim Welfare Institute considered how adoption could be promoted within the Muslim community.

The MWI was able to make connections in the community with local Imams and scholars as well as mosques, madrasahs and other community organisations. The Local Authority were invited to speak at events to highlight the need for Muslim adopters and to present the Islamic perspective. This gave a very clear message that from an Islamic perspective adoption was a positive way to become a parent, and that the Local Authority were engaging positively with the community leaders to further understand Asian culture and seek to approve more Muslim families for Muslim children. Very soon, prospective adopters in Blackburn saw the MWI as the first contact for questions around adoption.

Together with the local adoption agencies, the MWI would organise awareness and recruitment events, as well as informal chats about the Islamic perspective on adoption and would put prospective adopters in touch with a local Muslim adopter, so they could learn more about the process and find answers to any further questions they had. They would then contact the relevant authority or agency to register their interest and start the process.



This led to a positive domino effect. Once the first Muslim family adopted through the MWI and had a positive experience, the word got out into the community and more families came forward. The local authorities and agencies had also invested in ensuring that their marketing resources reflected the local BAME and Muslim community, they held regular community events with Muslim adopters and shared positive stories of them on their website and through their newsletters. The local community found the website and marketing materials welcoming and this encouraged more



people to call in. Working with the MWI, the adoption teams were trained on how to handle the questions and parts of the process that prospective Muslim adopters might struggle with in a sensitive way.

Awareness and recruitment events were held at local venues including the mosque and madrasah buildings on weekday evenings. Parents would drop off their children to learn how to read the Qur'an and join the event. As food was provided, parents could have a bite to eat whilst learning about adoption and listening to stories of adopters and adopted children from the local community. As most parents doing the drop offs were women, they were specifically targeted in the marketing and encouraged to bring a friend. Today, many successful adopters have been recruited through these events.

The adoption teams learnt that a childless couple in the local community are often perceived with negativity and a lot of pressure can come from family leading to them feeling like they had failed in some way. The MWI was able to address this and would actively engage with couples like this and advise them

that their situation should be seen as an opportunity to adopt and a blessing from Allah, in turn helping them turn negative feelings into positive action.

Once they were seen as part of their local diverse community, the local adoption teams learnt better ways of engaging with them, information sessions were soon held in Urdu and culturally specific case studies were compiled. Most importantly they found they had the local elders and locally respected influential people in the community ready to listen to and engage with them. Now, the local community are hearing voices that over time will legitimise, normalise and promote adoption as a community obligation.

The process took time and almost 20 years on these events still take place, and the benefits of the positive engagement are still present in that Muslim families speak about their positive experiences.

**“An example of an adopter journey in those early days includes that of a local Muslim man who initially wished to adopt a relative’s child from abroad. At the time that was not possible and conversations began between him and the Local Authority in Blackburn about adopting a child from the UK.**

**He was able to discuss his situation with the Muslim Welfare Institute and build a positive relationship with the Adoption Service in Blackburn and after some months of consideration decided along with his wife to adopt from the UK. They were approved and although his wife’s English was not too strong at that time the Local Authority were able to link the family with an Asian social worker and also delivered preparation groups in Urdu. The family very successfully adopted a large sibling group of Muslim children.”**

- Karen Barrick, Adoption Now

## Some Areas We Would Like Agencies To Consider Are The Following:

Are you doing enough to raise awareness in the community about the need for Muslim adopters?

Does your website have targeted information and case studies for Muslim people or testimonials by Muslim adopters?

How do you tackle the Mahram issue?

Do you have targeted campaigns with strategies such as using Black Muslim families in your marketing materials?

Why do so few Muslims apply for adoption?

How do you address questions around changing the child's name?

Do you engage local Mosques, Imams, Community Groups, and other influencers?

Are any members of your team or panel Muslim?

How do you answer adopters who say they only want to adopt Muslim children?

Do you have Muslim adopters who attend or speak at any of your events?

How would you answer a prospective adopter who wants to bring the child up as a Muslim?

Do you recognize/celebrate important Islamic events, such as Eid and Ramadan?

Why do so many Muslims directly apply to adopt internationally?

How do you tackle stigmas in the community that stop people coming forward?

Do you have any awareness/recruitment events during periods of faith sensitivity?

If they do apply, are they disproportionately more unsuccessful at each stage?

Do you target and support single adopters?

Why do Muslim adopters feel the application process is difficult and intrusive?

Do Muslim adopters need a specialist support group for new applicants and approved adopters?

## Recommendations for the care sector:

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- Include religion in data collection for looked after children
- Enhance the faith literacy of social work practitioners and policy makers.
- Share Islamic guidance around adoption in the best interest of the child
- Ensure Muslim adoptive parents have access to advice on the issue of establishing Mahram relations
- Widen your outreach, information and recruitment work within diverse British Muslim communities to increase the number of Muslim adopters.
- Consider the practical impact of the removal of ethnicity from adoption law and guidance in England.

Adapted from Cheruvallil-Contractor, et al., 2018



# Support And Services We Provide

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My Adoption Family provides services to support both adoption agencies, prospective adopters and approved adopters.

MAF is not an adoption agency and we do not do assessments for prospective adopters. However, we do support them through the discovery phase of their journey, helping them understand the process, options and support available.

## My Adoption Family provides the following services:

- Information and education for individuals interested in becoming adopters via our website, social media and events.
- Faith and cultural literacy training for professionals in the adoption sector. This includes an introduction to faith and cultural literacy focused around the Muslim community, deep dives into challenging topics and specific guidance for assessment teams and management teams.
- A monthly Q&A session and webinar for those interested in adoption, as well as adopters and adoption agencies. This is safe and non-judgmental space where individuals can ask questions to improve understanding, receive faith-sensitive advice and help overcome misconceptions.
- We hold a National Adoption Friday every year during National Adoption Week. In preparation for this day we work with faith leaders to produce a sermon for all Mosques to deliver during this week in collaboration with Muslim organisations across the UK.



# Glossary

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**Hijab** is the modest dress code. The Muslim dress code for both male and female emphasises modesty in the way we choose to dress. It includes decorum when dealing with strangers in public as well as behaviour in our interactions with one another in private.

**Mahram** are close relatives. The word 'Mahram' includes individuals that are so closely related to each other that it is deemed impermissible to inter-marry and where the rules of Hijab are relaxed. These include connections such as parent-child, siblings, uncle-niece, aunt-nephew, etc.

**Radha'ah** is the Arabic word for breast-feeding. Islam confers the honorific status of mother to any woman who breastfeeds a child with her own milk during infancy. Islam considers the bond created by nourishing a child in infancy similar to being related to each other through blood ties.

**Shari'a** is Islamic law. It literally means 'a path to life giving water' and is considered guidance on how one should live their life to be in complete harmony.

**Yateem** is an orphan child whose father, or both parents have died and is in need of care and is vulnerable.

**Tabanni** is where the adoptive parents bring up a child and claims it as their own while hiding the child's true identity from them, this is something prohibited in Islam.

**Dharurah** means necessity, as in something that is usually deemed as impermissible but is allowed when there is a pressing need out a necessity.

**Fatawa** are ruling points or edicts on Islamic law. A single ruling would be called a fatwa.

**Kafalah** literally means sponsorship and comes from the root word meaning 'to feed'. The idea in kafalah encompasses numerous terms we use in English such as adoption, fostering, guardianship and other means of meeting the needs of children in care. A core element involves a 'commitment to take care of the maintenance, nurturing and protection of a minor, in the same way as a father would do for his son'.

**Haram** means forbidden or not allowed, something that Allah does not want a person to do

**Halal** means allowed, something Allah has made acceptable to consume.

**Qur'an** is the holy book for Muslims and the primary source of the religion. Muslims consider it as the literal word of God (Allah in Arabic).

**Sunnah** refers to the authenticated sayings, actions and tacit approval of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Ijmaa'** is the unanimous viewpoint of religious scholars on matters through scholarly deliberations based on primary sources though not explicitly mentioned in primary sources.

**Qiyaas** is the use of analogous reasoning to find common denominators that can help interpret general principles found in primary sources in order to reach conclusions on issues not common during the time of the Prophet.

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# Adoption and Muslims in England

Toolkit 1: For Social Workers And  
Professionals In The Adoption Sector

MAFT1OCT21 - Version 1

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