

Afro Hair and Skin Care Guide: For Foster Carers, Shared Carers, and Social Workers



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Introduction to Hair

It is essential that children learn that afro hair is beautiful, versatile, and needs regular care. However, it is unfortunate that many black/dual heritage children are told that their afro hair is "bad hair", "nappy hair" and that straight hair is better and easier to maintain despite its charm. This can foster a negative attitude towards washing and styling their hair. It is therefore crucial that trusted adults support and encourage the maintenance of their hair and work alongside them through any difficulties. However, parents/guardians often struggle to care for afro hair, especially if their child's hair is different to everyone else in the family which is often true of mixed heritage children. Also, good quality hair products can be rather expensive. Therefore, this policy can be used to advise caregivers, social workers, and parents on how to care for your child or young person's hair and scalp.

Introduction to Skincare

Caring for black skin requires a personalised and attentive approach. Because of the unique properties of melanin-rich skin, understanding its specific needs can lead to healthier skin and greater comfort. This guide offers essential strategies for achieving effective skincare.

Knowledge of products, personal health and safety

It is important to prioritise safe products, as some have been proven to be unsafe and blamed for many skin irritations, hair loss, and scalp conditions. Products containing sulphates, silicones and

parabens are particularly problematic and should be avoided. Maintaining open and ongoing communication with parents ensures the implementation of consistent and appropriate hair care practices.

Signs of improper hair care

- Lint balls
- Knotted hair ends (a clear sign that the hair needs to be trimmed)
- Dry scalp and dandruff
- Dry hair and shedding
- Traction Alopecia (hair loss often caused by too much pulling or hairstyles that are too tight)
- Chemical Hair Breakage from relaxers, texturisers and perming to straighten hair (causes hair to become thin, brittle and prone to breakage)

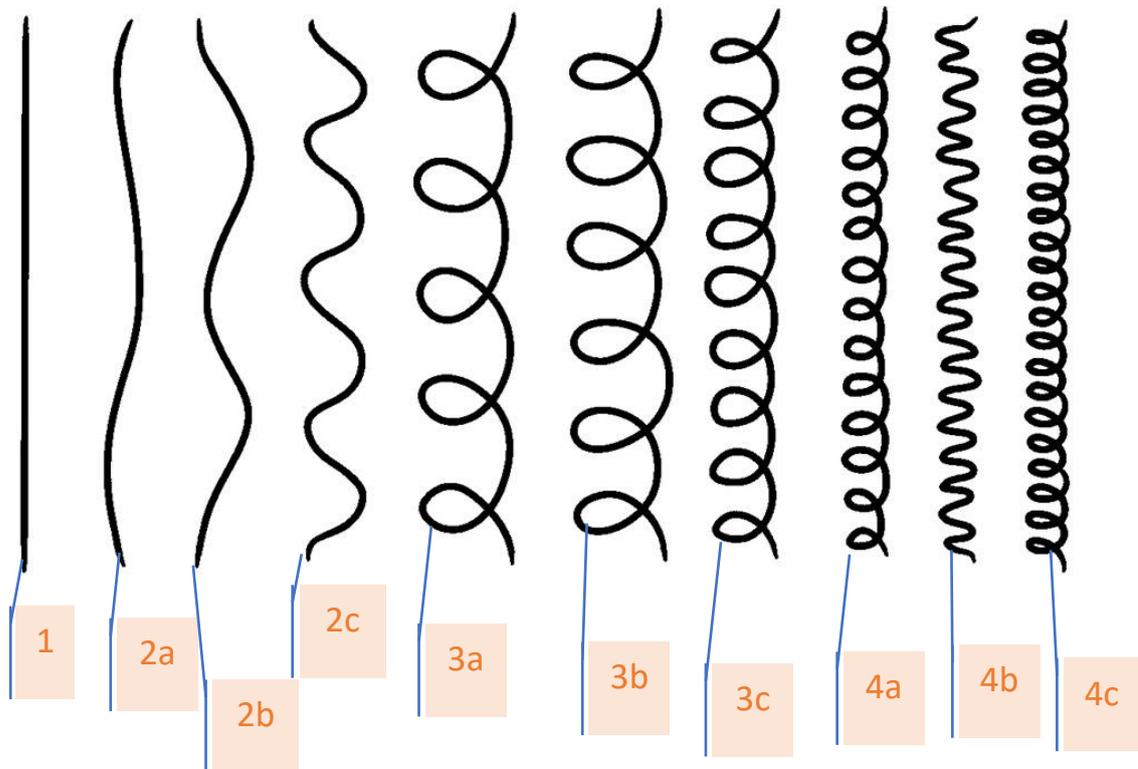
Ways to fix improper hair

- Using suitable natural oils keep the hair soft, shiny and lint free and are all in all great for tightly coiled, kinky hair. Some of the best hair oils are shea butter, jojoba oil, coconut oil and royal jelly. Meanwhile, hair oil made from petroleum jelly or mineral oil often should be avoided as they cause lint balls, fry hair and dandruff.
- Clipping off knotted hair ends will make the hair easier to comb.
- By adding castor oil to flaking skin on the scalp (every 5 days) and shampooing alleviates dandruff.
- The best way to grow natural hair back after it has been chemically straightened is to have it professionally braided until the permed hair can be cut off. In the meantime, shampooing the braids regularly will keep the hair soft.



Types of Natural African-Caribbean Hair

Hair Type chart



* For children who have used relaxers, it is essential to approach this topic with care and support. Helping them transition to their natural texture can foster self-acceptance and a positive self-image.

Type 1

1 dead straight (more European)

Type 2

2a slightly wavy (mixed heritage)

2b very wavy

2c curly wavy European

Type 3

3a loose curls

3b very curly drop curls

3c curly (corkscrews)

Type 4

4a Kinky - coil (defined coil)

4b Kinky – coil (z coil)

4c Kinky – coil (very tight coil)



Understanding the various types of natural hair is crucial for providing tailored care. This knowledge enables caregivers to develop specific routines that cater to each child's needs. African Caribbean hair, known as Afro-textured hair, has a unique texture and structure. This hair type features tight curls, which are often coiled or kinky, and has a flattened, oval shape. Its structure makes it prone to tangling and breakage. To care for African Caribbean hair, it is important to use gentle detangling methods and products made specifically for this hair type.



African-Caribbean hair generally is characterised by tight curly kinks and grows almost parallel to the scalp. 4a hair is made up of medium-sized, loosely packed S-shaped curls about the size of a crochet needle. This type of hair is easy to detangle and moisturise and is resistant to breakage. However, it is prone to dryness and

generally cannot hold protective hairstyles (e.g. braids, cornrows and faux locs) for more than 2-5 days. 4b has a fluffy, cotton candy look from afar. The curls bend in a zig-zag pattern and are smaller and more interlocked than 4a. As the curls are tight, the hair is prone to breakage and tangling. A 4c afro is made up of very tight, small springs or coils on each strand. The hairs tightly wind around themselves; it can easily snap or break without care. Since it hardly retains any moisture, moisturisers and sealants (oils and hair butters) will be your best friend if you have this hair type.

Structure and Texture:

Curl and Twist:

Afro-textured hair has a significant curl both above and below the surface of the skin. The hair shaft is flat with a twisted structure, creating weak points that can lead to breakage.

The density of scalp hair in African-Caribbean individuals is generally less than in other ethnic groups.

Care Needs:

Gentle Detangling:

Due to the hair's tendency to tangle, detangling should be done with a wide-tooth comb and gentle techniques, starting at the ends and working upwards to the roots.

Moisture:

African Caribbean hair is prone to dryness and requires regular moisturizing with leave-in conditioners and oils.

Protective Styling:

Protective hairstyles for natural hair are styles designed to minimize manipulation and keep the ends of the hair tucked away, thereby protecting them from damage and promoting length retention.

These styles include braids, twists, cornrows, bantu knots, buns, and ponytails, which help reduce exposure to the elements and decrease the need for daily styling. Protective hairstyles like braids, twists, and cornrows can help reduce friction and breakage.

Specialised Products:

Using products specifically formulated for Afro-textured hair is essential for proper care, moisture, and styling.

Limited Heat:

While heat can be used to style hair, it's important to use heat protectants and minimize its use to prevent damage.

Mixed Heritage children's hair

Mixed-heritage children's hair varies widely and is often classified as Type 3 in the curly hair system. This type includes sub-types: 3a, which has loose S-shaped curls; 3b, which features springy, tight curls; and 3c, which has tight, coiled curls. Some mixed-heritage hair can also fall under Type 4, which includes coily or afro hair, depending on the person's genetics.

Babies with mixed hair and afro hair usually start with fine, straight, silky hair that develops in the womb. The true hair texture often appears when they reach toddler age. Hair may become thicker or change slightly when they start school.

Where to Start

Remember, curls need moisture. Without moisture, curls become frizzy. While frizz is natural, it sometimes needs to be controlled.

Mixed-heritage siblings often have different hair textures. One child might have fine, dark, wavy hair, while another has golden, springy ringlets. Caring for each texture is similar, but one may need more product than the other. It's important

to find products designed specifically for your child's hair type.

Gentle Detangling

Curly hair often gets tangled, especially if you haven't found the right products yet. Learning to detangle hair without tears is very important for mixed-race children, as a big part of hair care time will go to this task. Here are some steps to make it easier:

1. Prepare Your Child: Give your child a toy or let them watch their favourite show while you detangle their hair. This can help take their mind off what you are doing. Know your child's hair type.
2. Use a Good Detangler: Find a good detangler. It should help the hair feel slippery, making it easier to untangle knots. It can sometimes help to use lots of water to wet the hair, then add lots of conditioner then go to step 3.
3. Use a wide tooth comb: To avoid stress, tears, and broken hair, use conditioner on wet hair or detangling spray depending on hair type, then use your hands to separate the knots. Using a brush or a Tangle Teezer first can cause more trouble. Your hands can gently feel and pull apart the knots, which is better for the hair.
4. Work in Sections: Always work in small sections starting from the roots and take your time. If you have to go out and your child has tangled hair, spray some conditioner or apply oil, then tie it in a couple of bunches for later. It is better to wait and detangle later than to rush and break the hair.
5. Detangle Before Washing: Always detangle the hair before washing it. Do not wash tangled hair, as it will create more knots. Take a moment to detangle first, then wash.

Co-Washing

Conditioner is great for curls. You may notice you use more conditioner than shampoo when caring for mixed curls, which is normal. Co-washing at

*Wash hair 1-3 times a week for mixed hair unless there is some skin irritation

* Gels might not be suitable for all hair types

*Wet hair before styling.

*For fine hair especially, do not tie too high/tight as this can lead to breakages



*



List of Essentials needed to care for black children's hair

To prevent breakage it is crucial to have the appropriate combs, brushes and products for your child. Creating a checklist of necessary tools and products for hair care ensures that you have everything needed for effective maintenance.

Please see below for a list of essentials.:

1. Wide tooth shower comb.
2. Tail comb for creating partings when styling.
3. Shampoo
4. Conditioner.
5. Coconut oil
6. Curl cream.
7. Spray bottle to fill with water.
8. Detangling spray.
9. Gel
10. Satin bonnet/durag/silk or satin pillowcase.
11. Large scrunchies.
12. Small black elastic bands for styling.



Tips for Reducing Stress During Hair Care

Take Your Time: Schedule enough time for hair care to avoid feeling rushed.

Let Them Choose Activities: Allow children to pick different activities to keep them engaged and distracted from combing or brushing their hair.

Have Hair Products Ready: Keep the right hair care products close by to make the routine easier and faster.

Section the Hair: Divide the hair into small sections. Apply a small amount of oil-based conditioner to the roots and then to the rest of each section.

Use the Right Tools: Use a wide-toothed comb or a broad-bristled brush to help untangle the hair and gather it into a style.

Detangling: Use a hair detangler before brushing or combing to help soften and loosen tight curls.

Styling Options for Girls: Girls' hair can be styled in braids, ponytails, or any other preferred style.

Styling Options for Boys: Boys can style their hair in any way they like using a brush or their hands.

Equal Attention for All: Some hair care methods for girls can also work for boys, depending on their hair length and texture. Caring for boys' hair is just as important as caring for girls' hair. Giving attention to hair care helps build a positive self-image and supports self-care skills.

- * Unlike 4a hair, 4b hair usually experiences a lot of shrinkage — up to 50-75% of the hair's actual length and 4c hair can shrink up to 75%.
- * Water is the best and cheapest moisturiser. Regularly spritz your hair and scalp with clean water from a spray bottle. After that, massage your favourite oil or oil mix into your scalp and hair to lock in moisture.
- * Some of the best sealing oils for 4c hair are olive, neem, castor (normal and Jamaican black), moringa, and amla oils. For hair butter, cocoa, shea, mango, and chebe are great.
- * It is important to remember that siblings may not have the same hair type and it is common for a child to have two different hair types e.g. coarser more tightly curled hair on their crown and finer more loosely curled hair around their face.

Washing

Implementing a straightforward washing routine that fits into a child's daily life can make care more manageable and enjoyable.

Wash Afro hair no more than once a week. Hair with 4B or 4C texture can be washed every 7 to 10 days or every 2 to 3 weeks, based on the child's age and needs. Washing every 7 to 10 days is often best to avoid product buildup.

Most shampoos can remove natural oils and make hair dry and brittle. Some people with Afro hair prefer co-washing, which means using only conditioner instead of shampoo. This method cleans the hair without stripping moisture. However, co-washing might not work for everyone, so choose what is best for each person.

Example of Afro hair Wash Routine



- 1. Wash:** Shampoo the hair, then rinse.
- 2. Condition:** Apply conditioner to wet hair.
- 3. Detangle:** Use a wide-toothed comb to detangle the hair with the conditioner still in.
- 4. Rinse Again:** Rinse out the conditioner.
- 5. Dry:** Gently squeeze out excess water using a towel or wrap the hair in a microfiber turban. Do not rub hair with a towel, as it

- can cause tangles and breakage.
- 6. Moisturize:** While the hair is still wet, add coconut oil and comb it through with your fingers.
- 7. Seal in Moisture:** Apply a layer of hair cream, like Cantu Coconut Curling Cream or Shea Moisture Curl Enhancing Smoothie.
- 8. Let it Dry Naturally:** Allow the hair to air dry. If using a hairdryer, attach a diffuser and use the lowest heat setting.

Blow drying

Blow drying makes hair easier to comb and style. After you've combed out the hair, oiled the scalp and twisted each section, remove the clips one at a time and blow dry each section individually. Blow-drying is most easily done section-by-section through the hair.

Type of blow dryer:

Use a blow-dryer with a comb nozzle attachment. Blow-dry each section, drying the ends first, and then drying the hair down to the scalp.



Preparing Your Child for a Hairdresser's Experience

Taking a child to a hairdresser for the first time can be a fun experience as well as exciting. Sometimes though, the excitement turns to fear once the child is separated from the parent and is experiencing a stranger touching them.

To prepare your child, here are some tips:

- Talk with your child a few weeks before and start continuously preparing her for the hairdresser experience the closer it gets.
- Make sure you let the child know she will need to sit still and the importance of her cooperating with the stylist.
- If your child starts to cry at the hairdresser's, ask the stylist if you can hold



your child's hand or let the child sit on your lap.

- Bring books, toys or other portable activities to entertain your child at the hairdresser.
- Based on the day of the week and time of day, your child may have to wait while the stylist rotates clients.

Braiding

Please be mindful that braiding can be painful for children if it is done too tightly. Overly tight braids can also cause headaches, redness or tiny bumps on the scalp and in severe cases tension alopecia.

Also bear in mind that elastic bands used for braiding should be kept to a minimum as they can damage the hair. Most types of 4 hair (4a,4b,4c) can hold braids and twists without using any elastic bands by applying a small amount of lock and twist gel to the ends.



Boys, Hair and the Barber Shop

Boys with African/Caribbean hair need proper care from experienced Afro-Caribbean barbers, so look for a barber who is patient with children and enjoys working with them (asking friends, neighbours and other parents for their

recommendations can help you find a good one).

Tips for finding a good Barber/Hairdresser:

- When you find a barber/hairdresser, watch them cut a child's hair to see if they are: patient, talk to the child, seem hurried, explain what tools will be used on the hair before starting. And afterwards is the haircut even, or does the barber/hairdresser leave uneven patches of hair?
- The barbershop/hairdresser should be clean and comfortable with conversations suitable for young ears
- When your child goes for their haircut the barber/hairdresser should clearly understand and take time to confirm the desired haircut from your child before proceeding.

* Brushes used on straight hair should not be used on afros.

* It is important to be age appropriate with styling products used, for example, styling gels may not be appropriate for young children but for young people/ teenagers they may be.

*Boys can also have their hair done professional at a hairdresser saloon.

Some Popular Boys Hairstyles

The Fade: hair is short on top and really short on the sides.

Care: >Wash hair once a week. Use a little oil and brush. >Get a trim every two weeks if needed.

The "All Even": hair is cut the same length all around.

Care: >Wash hair once a week. Use a little oil and brush. >Get a trim every two weeks if needed.

The Afro: hair is grown out a few inches.

Care: >Use a pick to comb the hair every day from top to bottom. >Braid the hair at night to

keep it neat (hair should be at least 5 inches long). >Wash hair once a week. >Go to a barber every three weeks for a clean-up. >Use a little oil to keep it soft.

Locs:

Care: >Wash hair once a week. >Twist new growth to keep it neat. >It takes a while for locs to form. Once they do, they stay together. >To remove locs, you need to cut the hair or depending on type they can be professionally unpicked to undo them which can be time consuming leading to a lot of hair shading in the process.

Bedtime

Wearing a satin bonnet or a durag to reduce tangling. An alternative for those who prefer not to cover their head while asleep is a silk or satin pillowcase is a good alternative.

*Children with very short/shaved hair do not need to cover it at night.



Skin care

Everyone's skin is different, regardless of colour. Many beauty brands say their products work for everyone, but darker skin often needs special care.

Darker skin contains higher levels of melanin, which offers some natural protection from the sun but also requires specific care. Melanin is a natural pigment that determines the colour of hair, skin, and eyes in humans and animals. Melanin-producing cells may be more susceptible to the effects of inflammation and injury, which may be more noticeable in dark skin than in light skin. It tends to be thicker and more prone to dryness, especially in cold or dry weather, and often benefits from regular hydration. One common misconception about black skin is that it does not burn, leading to the false belief that black people do not need to wear sunscreen. This is incorrect; everyone should use adequate sun protection. Sunburn is often difficult to see on darker skins and may not leave bright red marks like it does on paler skin. Visible signs of sun burn may not show until the skin blisters, peels or becomes extremely dry and scaly. Black and Mixed Heritage children should always be protected with SPF 30-50 sunscreen on sunny days.

Skin conditions that individuals with black skin may face

- Acne: Pimples, whiteheads, and blackheads.
- Pigmentation Changes: Areas of discoloration.
- Contact Dermatitis: Inflammation from irritants or allergens.
- Eczema: Itchy, dry, and cracked skin.
- Seborrheic Dermatitis: Scaly patches on the scalp and face.

Tips to care for black skin

1. Cleanse and moisturise daily.
2. Always wear sunscreen.
3. Consider treatments for hyperpigmentation.
4. Treat acne early.
5. Eat a balanced diet.

To support healthy skin, a suitable, age-appropriate moisturiser should be applied to children's skin every morning after washing, not forgetting to cover all areas of their bodies, especially the elbows, knees, hands, and feet, which are more likely to get dry.

Recommended Skin care creams and lotions for black and brown skin types

The following products are sold in Boots and other well-known pharmacies. They have all been tested and reviewed by one of our foster carers and are approved by UK Standards.

- Skin + Me
- Cerave Moisturising
- Bio-Oil Dry
- Goat Milk Cream
- E45 Lotion
- Nivea Moisturising Cream
- Cocoa Butter
- Aveeno Cream/Lotion
- Fenjal Luxury Hydrating Lotion
- Vaseline Intensive Care Aloe Soothe
- Childs Farm Moisturising Grapefruit



*Bruising can also be a lot harder to see on dark skin tones.

*Ringworm can appear differently on black skin compared to lighter skin tones. It may present as darker patches, rather than the typical red ring seen on lighter skin. The colour of the ringworm rash might be less noticeable on brown and black skin, making it harder to spot.

*Many black children are born with Mongolian Blue. This is a flat, blue-grey area of skin that is similar to a birthmark and is most commonly seen on the buttocks and lower back but is also common on arms and legs. These patches usually fade as the child gets older, but they can remain throughout adulthood. They cause no pain or physical problems, but children may feel self-conscious. If unsure if a patch of skin is either a bruise or Mongolian Blue consult a doctor.

Support towards maintaining hair

As a fostering service, we recognize that caring for the hair of African-Caribbean or mixed heritage children can be costly, particularly when regular visits to the hairdresser are necessary for maintenance. To help with these expenses, we are pleased to offer a discretionary payment of £100, which is available based on need. Requests for this support can be made through your supervising social worker.

This policy serves as guidance for all caregivers, including Special Guardians and Adopters. It is essential that you familiarize yourself with your child's hair and skin to address their individual needs effectively.

References

[Hair Care Initiatives for Black Children and Young People in Care — The Transformed You](#)

[About — The Black Care Experience](#)

[Afro-textured hair - The University of Nottingham](#)

[British Association of Dermatologists](#)

[The Black Hair and Skin Project - Seen](#)

Useful numbers

For more information on this policy please contact:

Northamptonshire Children's Trust
One Angel Square | Angel Street
Northampton | NN1 1ED
Tel: 01604 526961/01604 526962

In case of any emergencies out of office hours please contact:

Fostering Duty Email:

fosteringserviceduty2@nctrust.co.uk

01604 626938 or safeguarding MASH is 0300126 7000 (option 1)

Remember, whatever your hair type, your crown has a unique combination of the most beautiful set of hair strands.



