

Black hair care & skin guide

Information for carers

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in partnership with
Wokingham Young
Experts



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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ABOUT ME AND WHY I CREATED THIS GUIDE



"Growing up in care, I experienced firsthand how challenging it can be when the people looking after you don't fully understand how to care for your hair and skin. My foster carers didn't have the knowledge or resources to support me in that way I needed, and as a result I often felt different, like an outcast. Something as simple as washing my hair or styling my hair became a painful reminder that I didn't quite fit in.

Those experiences stayed with me and shaped me into the person I am today. I don't want any other young person to feel the way I did.

I created this guide to help foster carers understand the unique beauty, needs and cultural importance of black hair and skin. It's not just about routines and products it's about identity and belonging.

My hope is that this guide gives you the confidence, understanding and tools to care for the children in your home with love and respect so they can feel valued and proud of who they are."

-Destiny

INTRODUCTION TO OUR HAIR CARE & SKIN



Caring for any young child means caring for every part of who they are including their hair, skin and cultural identity. This guide has been created to help carers understand and celebrate the unique beauty of black hair and skin.

You'll find practical tips, products recommendations and cultural insights to help you provide the love, care and confidence every child deserves. Its not just about routines, it's about connection, pride and helping children feel seen and valued for who they are.

Black hair is rich in history, culture and pride full of its textures and styles that all tell a story. But it also requires specific care from gentle detangling to deep moisture to stop it from becoming dry. The same goes with skin that is rich in melanin which needs to be protected from hydration and love to stay healthy and radiant.



My Hair
A poem by Salena Fenton, year 3, Bearwood
Primary School

My hair is my crown
My hair is both my mum and dad
My hair reminds me that I come from African and Caribbean
queens
My hair is curly and coily
Sometimes it's not easy
Sometimes it hurts
But it reminds me I am strong and can do anything
My hair isn't a pillow
Please don't touch it
I can have braids, cornrows, twists and puffs
My hair can be everything and is everything
My hair isn't too big
Don't ask me to pat it down
MY AFRO IS MY CROWN

Wokingham Young Experts

This booklet has been developed in collaboration with our Young Experts team. A dedicated group of care leavers. We are passionate about children we care for and care leavers having a voice.

Each of us has had a unique journey- care leavers are people not a case or a job.

We use our experience to help shape services in Wokingham, making sure that adults who work here listen to and understand us. We work on projects across children's services. Our aim is to make a difference for other young people by focusing on co-production, empowerment and inclusion

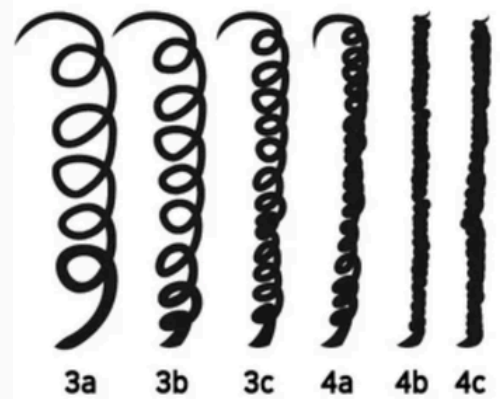


WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT HAIR TYPES?

The different hair types for young black children are generally categorized as Type 3 (curly) and Type 4 (coily), with categories like A, B, and C indicating the tightness of the curl pattern. Type 3 hair includes loose curls 3A to tight corkscrew curls 3C, while Type 4 hair features dense coils, from the S-shaped pattern of 4A to the very tightly packed, sometimes Z-shaped, coils of 4C hair.

Type 3: Curly hair

- 3A: Loose, voluminous curls.
- 3B: Springy, defined corkscrew curls.
- 3C: Dense, tight corkscrew curls that may appear more like coils.



Type 4: Coily hair

- 4A: Coils with a defined S-shape pattern.
- 4B: Coils with a "Z-shape" pattern and less definition than 4A.
- 4C: Very tightly packed, often "Z-shaped" or undefined coils with a high degree of shrinkage. This hair is often delicate and prone to dryness.

3A Hair type

Description: Big, loose curls (curling iron size)

This hair type is known for its bounce and volume, and it normally requires hydrating products to maintain curl definition and minimize frizz.

Key traits:

- Soft and shiny
- 3A hair features large, loose s-shaped curls that form distinct, well-defined loops.
- The texture is generally fine or thin, but it has its natural volume that gives it a fuller appearance
- 3A hair is known for its natural shine, reflecting natural light.

Common Challenges:

- Can lose definition in humidity
- Frequent heat styling and lack of moisture can cause damage, leading to breakage
- Product buildup can lead to making hair look dull and lifeless
- Dryness is very common due to its high porosity, 3A hair can be dry and lacks natural oils leading to flat appearance.



3B hair type

Description: Tighter ringlets (Sharpie size)
This hair type typically has a medium texture, not too fine or coarse and is known for its volume appearance.

Key traits:

- Voluminous, medium coarse
- 3B curls maintain a tighter configuration, providing a distinct look with defined ringlets.
- With a bit of moisture and curl cream, 3B curls tend to clump up beautifully.
- You don't have to braid or twist to see your curl pattern

Common challenges:

- Can get frizzy needs moisture.
- Curls can easily tangle if not detangled properly, requiring gentle combing or finger detangling.
- 3B hair may have a coarser texture compared to other hair types, contributing to frizz.
- The tight curl pattern can cause shrinkage, making it look shorter than its actual length.
- This hair is prone to frizz, especially in humid conditions or if not moisturised properly.



3C hair type

Description: Tight corkscrew curls (Pencil size)

This hair type usually densely packed together. This creates a lot of volume, but the curl pattern is also more prone to dryness and frizz because the scalp's natural oils are harder to reach the ends.



Key traits:

- Dense, full, fluffy
- 3C hair is naturally thick and dense, so even a small section looks full.
- You can achieve big, fluffy curls with a little effort
- With the right products (like curl creams or gels), 3C curls pop beautifully without needing twist-outs or braids for definition.
- With proper care, it can stay soft, hydrated and shiny for longer.

Common challenges:

- High shrinkage, needs heavy moisture
- Due to its fragile nature, 3C hair is prone to breakage but with regular trims and gentle handling is great with preventing damage.
- The tightness of 3C curls can cause them to tangle easily. But gentle detangling and use of a wide tooth comb can prevent bad tangling.
- This hair is prone to getting frizzy especially in humid conditions. But regular deep leave in conditioners can help manage frizz.

4A Hair type

Description: 4A hair is a type of coily or kinky-curly hair that is characterized by its tight, S-shaped coils that resemble corkscrew sized or pencil sized curls.

Key traits:

- Tight coiled pattern features tightly coiled, S-shaped patterns that are well defined.
- 4A hair is known for its high density, meaning there are many strands of hair per square inch of scalp
- Shrinkage can happen in 4A hair which can shrink up to 50% or more, making it appear shorter than what it is

Common challenges:

- 4A hair is naturally dry due to its coiled structure, making it prone to moisture loss.
- The density and fragility of 4A hair make it more susceptible to breakage, especially when not handled gently.
- The coiled nature of 4A hair can easily tangle, requiring careful detangling techniques.
- 4A hair can become frizzy, particularly in humid environments, necessitating the use of anti-frizz products



4B Hair type

Description: 4B hair is specific type of natural hair characterized by its tight z-shaped curl pattern.



Key traits:

- 4B hair has a zigzag pattern with tight curls that are less defined compared to 4A hair.
- It often has a wiry or cottony texture, which can feel fluffy and may vary from soft to coarse.
- This hair type tends to be voluminous but is also prone to shrinkage.
- 4B hair can experience moderate breakage if not cared for, requiring regular washing, condition and detangling.

Common challenges:

- Due to its delicate nature, 4B hair is prone to breakage requiring careful handling and regular moisturizing.
- The tight curl pattern can lead to tangling, especially if not detangled properly.
- Styles like braids and twists help reduce manipulation and protect the hair from damage. These challenges can be managed with proper care and styling techniques.

4C Hair type

Description: This hair type is the tightest and coiliest texture within the type 4 hair category. It features densely packed coils that may appear less defined unless styled, often resulting in a zigzag pattern.



Key traits:

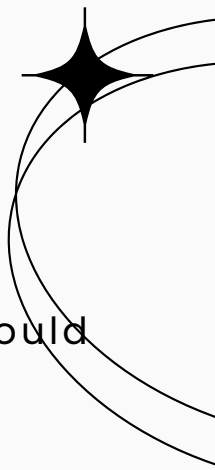
- This hair is characterised by tightly coiled curls that are densely packed together.
- 4c hair is versatile and can be styled in various ways, including afros, twists, braids and updos.
- Regular moisturizing is crucial to prevent dryness and maintain natural hair oils

Common challenges:

- 4C hair is prone to dryness due to its tightly coiled structure, making it more susceptible to breakage and frizz.
- The tight coils of 4C hair can break easily, especially when lacking moisture and proper care.
- Detangling 4C hair can be challenging due to the tight coils.
- Identifying the right hair products for 4C hair can be difficult. It's crucial to choose products that contain hydrating ingredients and are formulated specifically for this hair type.



NATURAL HAIR CARE TIPS



Here are some natural hair care tips that everyone should follow regardless of their hair type:

- **Regular trimming.** This helps prevent split ends, breakage and helps length retention.
- **Protect at night.** Always wrap your hair in a satin bonnet/head scarf or use a satin pillowcase to prevent friction, frizz and moisture loss.
- **Hydration.** Always ensure your scalp and strands are moisturised and healthy. Dry scalp and strands can cause breakage.
- **Gentle detangling.** Always detangle from ends to roots using fingers or a wide-tooth comb.
- **Limit heat styling.** This can damage afro hair. If you must use heat, apply heat protectant and use the lowest effective temperature.
- **A healthy scalp promotes hair growth.** Incorporate scalp exfoliation treatments into your routine to remove buildup and dirt.
- **Natural healthy hair styles.** Styles like twists, braids, bantu knots and puffs gently tuck the hair away and help it retain moisture, reducing pulling and breakage. When done properly, protective hair styles should feel comfortable, not tight or painful and should always be applied to clean moisturised hair. These styles are a positive way to care for hair while supporting a child's confidence and identity



DREADLOCKS

Dreadlocks are a hairstyle of rope-like strands created by braiding, twisting, or allowing hair to mat and knot naturally. They have a deep history, appearing in ancient cultures like Jamaica and India, and are now associated with various religions, cultural identities, and fashion. They can be formed naturally or with techniques like backcombing, palm rolling, or crocheting, and require specific care to stay healthy.



How to care for dreadlocks:

- It takes time for dreadlocks to mature they may look messy and frizzy at first
- Regular cleaning is a must but avoid over washing, which can make the hair look very dry.
- Use moisture products to prevent dryness and keep hair healthy.
- Dreadlocks need shaping to maintain shape. This can be done with techniques like palm rolling to keep them looking defined

Styling and maintenance

- Locking gels: Use water-based gels for starting locs and for retwisting. They provide hold without the residue that can be left behind and looks dirty.
- Retwist products: Gels and creams can provide a firm hold for retwisting, helping to control frizz and stray hairs.
- Scalp refreshers: Products that reduce itching and provide a soothing sensation are beneficial for the scalp.

Understanding dreadlocks

Dreadlocks are clean, healthy and a beautiful hairstyle when properly cared for. They hold deep cultural and personal significance, so it's important to treat them with respect and understanding.

Washing and drying tips

Dreadlocks should be washed every 1-2 weeks using a residue free shampoo. It's important to rinse them thoroughly and allow them to dry completely to avoid mildew or odour. Air drying or sitting under a dryer can help the process.

Encourage positive identity

It can help to compliment and celebrate a child's dreadlocks. Help them feel proud of their hair and its cultural roots. Learning about different dreadlock styles and traditions can be a great activity to do together.

Here are some recommended products for dreadlocks:

- As I Am Restore & Repair
- Taliah Waajid Love My Locs Honey-Fresh dry gel shampoo
- Mielle Rosemary Mint Scalp & Strengthening Oil
- Jamaican Mango & Lime Locking Gel
- Shea Moisture Manuka Honey & Mafura Oil Intensive Hydration Shampoo
- As I Am Dry & Itchy Scalp Care shampoo and conditioner

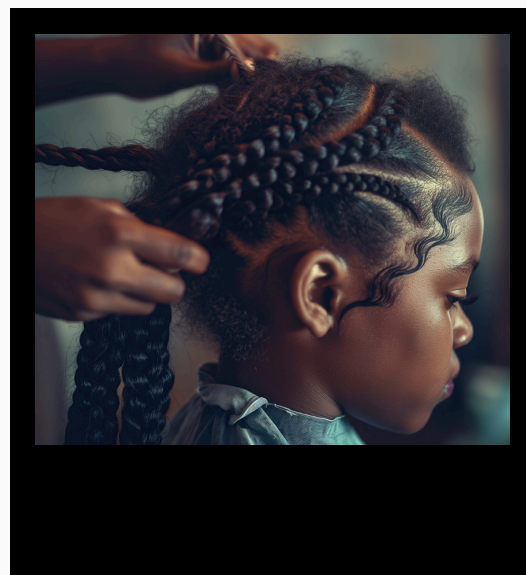
These products can help you maintain and care for your dreadlocks effectively.



BRAIDS

Braiding black hair is a art form that requires patience, practice and thorough understanding of hair texture, preparation and styling methods.

If you would like to learn how to do simple plaits or twists between salon visits, there are great video tutorials online. Start slowly, practice on extensions or a dolls head first and always make sure the young person is comfortable.



Learning about braiding:

Braiding is a traditional and skilled practice that can take time to learn. As a carer you don't have to become an expert, but understanding the basics helps you support a young persons needs. You can start by learning how braids are made, how tension affects the scalp and how to maintain them properly.

How to maintain braids:

- Wash braids regularly by using shampoo and water to cleanse your scalp and hair, removing product buildup and dirt that can be hard to remove at the end
- Moisturize your scalp by adding natural oils like almond or coconut oil to control flakiness and dryness
- Protect your braids at night by using a satin or silk scarf even a bonnet to cover your braids and reduce friction and frizz keeping them fresh
- Change up your hair style. Don't keep your braids in for longer than eight weeks to maintain scalp health
- Avoid wearing braids in tight hairstyles. You can wear them in as many different styles as you want. However, you want to be strategic about how often you change things up. If your braids are constantly in tight looks (like high ponytails, buns, Dutch braids, etc.), they're more at risk for frizz, breakage and weakening along the roots and edges. Just cut back on how often you wear them to avoid any pulling and tearing.

Taking out braids:

Braids should be kept in for no longer than 8 weeks, depending on the style and hair type. Leaving them in can cause tangling or breakage in the hair. Take your time and gently unplait them from the ends upwards, being careful not to cut the natural hair. After all the braids are out, spray the hair with conditioner water to help remove the buildup when using a wide-tooth comb to detangle the hair. After that has been combed through, wash and condition to restore moisture. It's normal to shed hair, that's just natural. Allow the hair and scalp to rest for at least a week before putting in a new hair style to keep it healthy and strong.

Tightness and comfort :

When braids are first done, it's normal for them to feel a little snug for the first day or two as the hair settles. The style should feel secure but never extremely painful.

If the young person says their scalp feels sore, itchy or they have small bumps around the hairline the braids are likely too tight. In that case it's important to loosen them slightly (for example gently easing the braids at the base) or contact the stylist for advice.

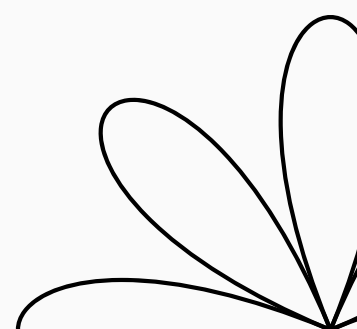
Cultural and emotional importance:

For many young people, braids are more than a hairstyle. They are a part of their cultural identity, creativity and pride. Taking care of their braids respectfully helps them feel seen and valued. Always use positive language when talking about their hair and let them take the lead in choosing styles.

Care kit:

You may not know what to include in a care kit so I'm going to share a few things that will help care for their braids.

- Sulfate-free shampoo
- leave-in conditioner or braid spray
- Natural oil (almond, jojoba or coconut)
- Satin scarf or bonnet
- Spray bottle with water
- Wide-tooth comb (for detangling before re-braiding)





RELAXERS

Talking about hair choices

If a child requests a relaxer, explore why. It may be tied to fitting in, peer pressure or self image. Try to encourage positive hair affirmations and expose them to role models with natural hair. If chemical treatments are still what they want they should be made with parental consent and with professional guidance from a stylist who specialises in afro-textured hair



Understanding hair relaxers

- Chemical relaxers are products designed to permanently straighten naturally curly hair or coily hair
- They work by breaking down the natural protein bonds in the hair shaft, which can make hair appear smoother and easier to manage but it also makes the hair more weaker and more fragile

Why relaxers are not recommended for young children

- The scalp and skin are more delicate in children making them highly vulnerable to chemical burns and irritation.
- Relaxers can cause hair damage such as breakage, thinning and long-term hair loss if not applied correctly or if overused.
- Recent research links some hair relaxer ingredients to hormonal disruption and reproductive health issues.
- Identity and self-esteem can play a factor as it's important for black children to see their natural hair as beautiful. Using relaxers early can send a message their natural hair needs to be fixed.



Hair product guide

3A-4C



Recommended hair care products

Shampoos & conditioners

Use gentle, sulfate-free products that cleanse without drying the hair.

- Shea Moisture Coconut & Hibiscus Curl & Shine Shampoo & Conditioner
- Maui Moisture Curl Quench + Coconut Oil
- Cantu Shea Butter Cleansing Cream Shampoo & Hydrating Cream Conditioner
- Aunt Jackie's Oh So Clean Moisturizing Shampoo

Leave-in conditioners & creams

Theses help lock in moisture and keep hair soft and manageable.

- As I Am Leave-In Conditioner
- Curl Smith Curl Conditioning Oil-in-Cream
- TGIN Butter Cream Daily Moisturizer
- Cantu Leave-in Conditioning Repair Cream
- Mielle Organics Pomegranate & Honey Leave-in Conditioner

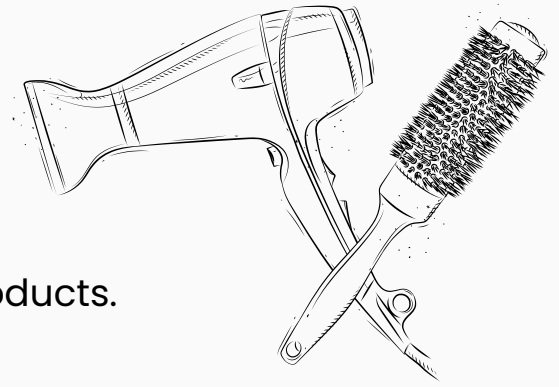
Styling products

Used to define curls, reduce frizz and protect from dryness.

- Camille Rose Curl Maker
- Aunt Jackie's Curl La La Define Curl Custard
- Eco Style Olive Oil Gel (lightly applied)
- Design Essentials Almond & Avocado Curling Cream

Oils & moisture sealants

Oils seal in moisture after applying leave-in Products.



- Jamaican Black Castor Oil
- Coconut Oil
- Argan Oil
- Olive Oil

Night-time & protective care

- Cover hair with satin or silk bonnet or sleep on a satin pillow case
- Use protective styles like braids, twists, puffs or cornrows to reduce tangling
- Re-moisture and refresh curls with a water-based spray in the morning

Simple routine example

Wash day (Weekly or Bi-weekly)

- Shampoo scalp gently
- Apply conditioner and detangle with a wide-tooth comb
- Rinse and apply leave-in conditioner
- Apply cream and oil to seal in moisture
- Style in braids, twists or puffs

Daily Care:

- Spritz with water or curl refresher
- Add a little leave-in or cream if hair feels dry

Natural hair is versatile, beautiful and full of character.

With patience, consistency and love every curl and coil will flourish.



Caring for Black and Brown Skin

Black skin is rich in melanin, which offers some natural protection from the sun but also means it can be prone to dryness, uneven tone and sensitivity if not cared for properly. Every child's skin is unique this page will help you to keep it healthy, clean and glowing.



Daily skin care routine

Cleanse

- Use a gentle, fragrance-free cleanser
- Look for products labelled “hydrating” or “for sensitive skin”
- Cleanse morning and evening

Products like:

CeraVe Hydrating Cleanser, Dove Sensitive Skin Body Wash, Aveeno Daily Moisturising Wash

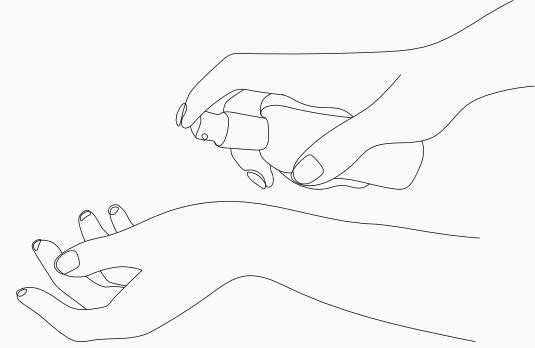
Moisture

- Black skin tends to lose moisture quickly so regular moisturising is key
- Apply body lotion or cream straight after bathing, while skin is still slightly damp
- Use richer creams or butters

Products like:

Shea Moisture Body Lotion, E45 Cream, Palmer's Coco Butter, Aveeno Daily Moisturising Lotion, Vaseline Cocoa Radiant

Sun protection



- Even melanin-rich skin can burn and is still at risk of sun damage and skin cancer.
- Choose a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher sunscreen everyday.
- Look for invisible or tinted formulas to avoid white residue on darker skin tones.

Teen skin & Breakouts

- Hormonal changes can lead to spots, acne or oily skin this is completely normal
- Encourage gentle care, no harsh scrubbing or picking
- Introduce a simple 3-step routine: Wash, Cleanse, moisture
- If acne is severe or painful speak to a GP or dermatologist

Products like:

CeraVe Foaming Cleanser, The Ordinary Niacinamide Serum, Simple Oil Balancing Moisture

Bathing & General care tips

- Avoid long, hot baths – they can dry out their skin
- Use soft cloths or hands not harsh sponges
- Keep nails trimmed to avoid scratching eczema-prone areas



Common concerns in black skin

- Dryness or ashiness – Apply a thick moisturiser twice daily. Shea butter or cocoa butter are great options.
- Eczema or irritation – Use a fragrance-free sensitive skin product like E45, Aveeno or Cetaben. Speak to a GP if it flares often.
- Hyperpigmentation (Dark Marks) – Don't use harsh bleaching creams. Use SPF daily and gentle consistent care. Marks fade naturally over time.
- Ingrown hairs (especially for teens) – Encourage gentle exfoliation and avoid shaving too closely. Use a warm compress if they appear.

Emotional & cultural care

- Black and mixed-heritage children may need reassurance that their skin tone is beautiful and doesn't need to be “lightened” or “changed”.
- Encourage positive self-image and representation
- Black skin is not tougher it still needs gentleness, moisture and daily care

“ Your skin is beautiful, strong and worthy of care”

Key takeaways for carers

- Use gentle, hydrating products
- Sunscreen matters for all skin tones
- When in doubt, ask for professional guidance or visit a pharmacy for advice

