



## Information Pack

Thank you for your enquiry about adopting with Adopters for Adoption. We are delighted that you have taken this step with us.

We're an adoption agency specifically set up to have a positive impact on the way people are supported to become adoptive parents. Many people have thought about adopting but many are put off by the process, the length of time it takes and misinformation about who can and can't adopt. We positively welcome applications from all sectors of the population and we base our work on the belief that there are lots of people who can give children waiting for adoption loving and secure homes.

Adoption is a lifelong commitment and, while bringing many challenges, it is hugely rewarding. If you believe you are able to help a child waiting in care, Adopters for Adoption will help you decide whether adoption is for you.

This information pack includes an overview of the adoption process with Adopters for Adoption and leaflets about who can adopt, and the adoption passport.

You'll find further information on our website, including **Frequently Asked Questions**, our **Statement of Purpose** and a useful **Reading and resources list**.

Please take the time to read through this pack and contact Adopters for Adoption on 01527 573678 or email [AFAAdmin@adoptersforadoption.com](mailto:AFAAdmin@adoptersforadoption.com) if you would like to ask any questions or request a Registration of Interest application form.

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# Overview of the Adoption Process

## GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

### Contents

Introduction.....	2
Why Adopters for Adoption? .....	2
Information about adoption.....	2
Applying to adopt .....	2
Stage 1 .....	3
Checks and References.....	3
Preparation to Adopt Training Course .....	4
Completion of Stage 1 .....	4
Taking a Break .....	5
Stage 2 .....	5
Areas of Exploration in the Stage 2 Assessment .....	6
Approval as “suitable to adopt” .....	6
Family Finding and Matching .....	7
Link Maker .....	7
Information about children .....	7
Matching Panel.....	7
Introductions and Placement .....	8
The Adoption Order.....	8
After the Adoption Order .....	8

# Overview of the adoption process

## Introduction

Thank you for your enquiry about adopting with Adopters for Adoption. We are delighted that you have taken this step with us. This booklet is designed to give you an overview of the adoption process, from your initial enquiry through to the placement of a child with you and the Adoption Order.

## Why Adopters for Adoption?

Adopters for Adoption (AfA) is a national voluntary adoption agency, not a Local Authority. The main difference between a local authority and adoption agency is that local authorities have a responsibility to recruit families for the children in their care who are waiting to be adopted. Voluntary adoption agencies assess a diverse range of adopters from across the UK. They then work in partnership with local authorities to widen the choice of families available to their children.

At Adopters for Adoption, we have excellent links with local authorities across the UK and have been successful in bringing children and families together. Our staff are experienced adoption social workers who draw down on the latest research and best practice. They help and guide adopters from the outset of their journey to help achieve successful outcomes for children and their adoptive families.

*It's crucial that you feel comfortable with your adoption agency and that you choose the agency which feels right for you.*

## Information about adoption

This information pack gives information about our agency and the adoption process. However, we are always happy to tell you more about the process and to talk through your adoption plans with you. You may have specific questions about your personal circumstances or you may have questions relating to issues that we have not covered in the information pack. We will call you to check you have received all the information you need before making a decision, but do please feel free to call us at any stage with any questions you may have. Alternatively, you are welcome to request a Registration of Interest form.

## Applying to adopt

To make an application to adopt with Adopters for Adoption, you will need to complete a Registration of Interest (ROI) form. There are just three criteria that need to be met in order to be considered for adoption, so before requesting an ROI form, you need to:

- Be at least 21 years old
- Be living in the British Islands
- Not to have been convicted or cautioned for certain criminal offences (there are specific offences which automatically prevent you from adopting, but many do not, so if you have previous cautions or convictions, please call us for advice).

If you do not meet these three criteria, we would be unable to proceed with you at this point. There may be other circumstances that would mean that we would be unable to accept your ROI, such as **not having a spare bedroom**, so if you are at all unsure please contact us to speak to a member of our team.

If you meet the criteria above and would like to proceed, please contact us to request the ROI form. Generally, we request that these are completed digitally and returned via email, however if this is not convenient for you then we are happy to send postal copies to you. (**Please note:** we normally use email going forward in to the process to share secure documents and information.)

The ROI form is quite in depth and asks for a lot of information. Please try to complete all sections as carefully as possible as this will help avoid unnecessary delay going forward. If you are applying as a couple, please ensure that both applicants' information is filled in even if the information is the same.

When we receive your ROI form, we will decide whether or not we can accept your application and we will let you know within 5 working days. Your ROI form will be reviewed by a Team Manager, and they may contact you to ask for more information prior to making a decision. If for any reason we are unable to accept your application, the reasons for this will be discussed with you.

If we accept your application, you will then move in to Stage 1 of the assessment process.

## Stage 1

Once you have been accepted on to the process you will be sent an acceptance email, together with **our Stage 1 Pack for Prospective Adopters**, which includes a more in depth guide of what to expect throughout stage 1.

We will also start the process of allocating a social worker to undertake your stage 1 assessment. Your social worker will then contact you to introduce themselves and arrange their first visit. Your social worker will visit you two or three times in stage 1, to find out more about who you are, and to tell you more about the types of children that need an adoptive family. There will be a number of tasks for you to complete within stage 1, for example preparing a family tree and a visual map of your support network.

The focus of stage 1 is on gathering factual information about you. As an agency that finds families for children, we have a legal duty to obtain checks and references to ascertain that there are no safeguarding concerns. The checks and references we will need to complete in stage 1 are outlined below. We aim to complete stage 1 within two months, and therefore checks and reference requests are sent at the very beginning of the process, once we have accepted your Registration of Interest.

## Checks and References

- **A UK DBS Check** – the agency will send you a username and reference number on your acceptance email for the online section of the DBS to be completed. We ask that you have copies of your ID documents available for your first visit of your assessor. The cost of the DBS is covered by Adopters for Adoption.
- **Local Authority Checks** – You will have provided your address history for the last 10 years on your ROI. Each local authority that you have lived in over this time will be contacted to obtain a Social Services check.
- **Other Household Member Checks** – Any other adult resident of your property will be required to undertake a DBS and Local Authority Checks. As an example: Adult children, other family members, lodgers.

- **Medical Examination with your GP** – you are required to undertake a medical examination with your GP. The cost of these appointments is usually around £75 per applicant and will be payable by yourselves. You will be sent the Adult Health Medical Forms for this appointment to be booked.  
*Note: We request that you establish the date that your medical records begin with your current GP. If your GP does not hold your full Adult Health medical records we ask that you start the process of obtaining these from your previous GP prior to completing your ROI forms.*
- **Employment Checks** – We will send reference requests to your current employer and any previous employer where you worked with children or vulnerable adults. Any voluntary work you have undertaken will also require a reference to be obtained.
- **Previous Partner References** – We are required to obtain references from any significant previous partners that you may have had, especially if children were involved in the relationship. We understand that this can be uncomfortable, but it is necessary. If you no longer have contact, we will ask you to make every attempt to obtain contact information in order for a reference to be sent. If for any reason you would be at risk from a previous partner, we would not make contact. This should be highlighted on the ROI form and would be discussed with you further in stage 1.
- **Personal and Family References** – We ask you to provide contact information for two personal and one family referee *each*. If you are a single applicant we ask for four personal and two family referees. Please note that each reference cannot be living with or be the partner of any other referee provided, and must have known you for a minimum of two years.
- **Overseas DBS Check** – If you have lived or worked abroad for 12 months or more since you were the age of 18 you will be required to obtain an overseas DBS check. Any costs involved would be payable by yourselves.
- **School/Nursery Checks** – If you have a child currently living with you, we will ask you to provide details of their school or nursery for a reference to be obtained regarding their education, wellbeing, and relationship with others.
- **SSAFA Checks** – if you have ever been employed by the military/RAF/British Forces we will ask you to complete a separate application for a check to be obtained, ID documentation will also be required.

There may be other checks and references required, however these are decided on a case by case basis by your assessing social worker.

## Preparation to Adopt Training Course

In stage 1 you will also be invited to attend a three day Preparation to Adopt training course which will give you a greater insight into the needs of children that need an adoptive family, about children that have experienced abuse or neglect, and how therapeuting parenting can help.

This course is held on a Monday and the following Saturday and Sunday. These training dates are held in various venues around the country, however we can't always guarantee that we can offer you training in your local area as this will be based where the majority of prospective adopters are at that time.

If you have to travel more than 50 miles each way we will pay for accommodation for you.

## Completion of Stage 1

At the end of stage 1 your social worker will submit a report, and a decision will be made as to whether you can proceed to stage 2. If for any reason you are not able to proceed, the reasons for this will be explained to you.

If you are able to proceed, your stage 1 report together with a stage 1 completion letter will be sent to you. The completion letter will include an estimated date for you to attend Panel and you will need to sign and return this to us so that we can begin stage 2.

## Taking a Break

If you feel that you need a break prior to starting stage 2 of the process, you are able to take a break for up to six months. You are welcome to start stage 2 at any point within this 6 month gap, however if you exceed the six months for any reason you will be required to start the assessment again from the beginning of stage 1. This is because we need to ensure that all your checks and references are up to date.

## Stage 2

You will be sent our **Stage 2 Pack for Prospective Adopters** which includes a more in depth guide as to what to expect throughout Stage 2.

We will do our best to ensure that you have the same social worker throughout your entire assessment (stages 1 and 2) however if for any reason this isn't possible we will inform you and find a replacement. Your social worker will arrange between 5-7 visits with you in stage 2.

We aim to complete stage 2 in four months and you and your social worker will have a target Panel date that you will be working towards. Stage 2 will involve regular visits to your home and a more in depth assessment, aimed at drawing out the strengths, skills and relevant experiences that you bring to adoption.

This part of the process requires a lot of your time and attention, and your social worker is likely to set homework tasks for you to complete. We ask that you have nothing major going on at this time, such as house extensions, moving home and weddings. If you are unlikely to be fully available, we would suggest you consider taking a break before beginning stage 2.

## Areas of Exploration in the Stage 2 Assessment

- **Existing Children** - If you have an existing child or children, they will need to be fully involved in your assessment. Depending on their age, your assessor will ask to meet with them on their own on at least one occasion and will explore their thoughts and feelings with them.
- **Your own childhood** - Your social worker will explore your childhood, your relationship with your parents, their parenting methods and how this has shaped you and has influenced your own parenting methods.
- **Your Identity** - Your own identity, sexuality, heritage and culture will be explored in order to ascertain how you could support a child placed with you, and to ensure that you can meet their cultural needs and identity.
- **If applying as a couple** – Your social worker will explore how you support each other, and also look at your strengths and weaknesses.
- **Support Network** – Your friends and family network will be explored and we will look into whether they can support you practically or emotionally, and the importance of a support network will be explained.
- **Your Learning** – Your learning from the three day Preparation to Adopt training course will be explored and expanded on, as well as any additional training or research you have completed.
- **Your childcare experience** – Your experience of looking after children, whether in the family, or in a voluntary setting will be evaluated, to draw on your skills and parenting approach.
- **Your community** – Your social worker will ask you to provide information about your community and local, child-centred facilities.

At the end of the assessment, your social worker will write a report called a **Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)**. The PAR is made up of two sections. The first part summarises all the information gathered during your stage 2 assessment and contains your social worker's recommendation about your suitability to adopt. This part of the report will be shared with you so that you can add your views on the report and recommendation. The second part of the PAR is confidential and can't be shared with you as it contains personal references and checks provided by third parties.

If for any reason your social worker cannot make a positive recommendation for you, the reasons for this will be explained to you. You are able to request that your assessment goes to Panel, however your social worker will complete a short report instead of a full PAR.

## Approval as “suitable to adopt”

Your PAR will be presented to the Adopters for Adoption panel for consideration. The panel is made up of at least five people, each of whom are experienced in adoption, either personally or professionally. The role of the panel is to make a recommendation on whether you are suitable to adopt. They do not make the final decision. The final decision lies with the Agency Decision Maker.

The panel is held at our head office in Bromsgrove and you and your social worker will be invited to attend. You'll be invited to answer any questions our panel members have for you, it's also a great opportunity for the panel members to meet you in person after having read your PAR.

The minutes from the adoption panel outlining their recommendation are sent to the Agency Decision Maker who has up to 10 working days to decide whether you are suitable to adopt. You will be informed via telephone and letter of the final outcome.

Our aim is to be open and honest with you throughout the entire process, and if there are any concerns that we have we'll discuss these with you straight away, to see if they can be resolved. We ask that you are open and honest with us too.

If you are approved as suitable to adopt, you will begin the next stage of the process, which is called Family Finding. If you are informed at this stage that you cannot be approved, and if you disagree with our decision, you can either challenge the decision in writing or may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism who will look into your case.

## Family Finding and Matching

If you are recommended to be approved we arrange for you to speak to our Adoption Placements Manager, whose role it is to coordinate family finding. She will work with you and your social worker throughout the family finding and "matching" process.

### Link Maker

You will be given access to Link Maker, which is a national database where local authorities will upload profiles of children, and we will ask you to create your profile as approved adopters. It allows you to search for children, and local authorities to view your profile. It is a tool used to share information and to find the right families for children. Our Family Finder will work with you to co-ordinate your search and help you to register your interest in any children that you are drawn to. If you register your interest in a particular child, and if the local authority social worker is interested in finding out more about you, your social worker will carry this forward.

### Information about children

The child's social worker will wish to visit you to find out more about you, which also gives you the opportunity to find more out about the child. If both you and the child's social worker feel that you are the right "match" for the child, you will be invited to meet with:

- **The child's foster carer** - who can give you more information on the child's personality, their likes and dislikes
- **The child's local authority medical advisor** - who will have undertaken a medical check on the child and will have access to their medical history.
- **Other professionals** – this is judged on a case by case basis, but may include school teachers, nursery nurses or any other professional involved in the child's life.

Although these meetings present an excellent opportunity for you to gain as much information on the child to ensure you understand the child's needs prior to moving forward, you may also be asked questions by these professionals for them to ensure that they feel you would be a good match for the child. You will be involved in preparing an adoption support plan which reflects on the reasons for the match and anticipates any support you may need.

### Matching Panel

If all agree that the match should proceed, you will be invited to Matching Panel. This Panel is held at the child's local authority so may mean you need to travel. Matching Panel is similar to the AfA adoption panel and its main purpose is to explore how you will meet the needs of the child. Again, the Panel will make a recommendation and the final decision is then passed to their Agency Decision Maker.



## Introductions and Placement

If the match is approved, you then begin introductions. Introductions is where you will finally get to meet the child in person, and the aim of introductions is to help transition the child from their foster carer to you. This usually takes place over 7 to 14 days and involves you visiting the child in the foster carer's home and gradually taking on more of the caregiving responsibilities for the child. In the later stages of introductions, the child will usually visit your home and begin to settle with you. You social worker and the child's social worker will support you throughout introductions, and when everyone agrees that they are ready the child is "placed for adoption". The child is still a Looked after Child at this point, and although their day to day care is your responsibility, they are not legally yours and are still the responsibility of the Local Authority, who hold parental responsibility for the child until an adoption order is granted.

## The Adoption Order

The child's social worker and your social worker will continue to visit you for several months, to offer support including attending regular review meetings to discuss how things are going. When the child has been living with you for 12 weeks, you can then apply to the court to adopt the child and your social worker can help you with completing this application. The court will set a date for a final hearing to consider your adoption application. These court dates can sometimes take a few months to come through, but at the final hearing the court generally grants the Adoption Order. This means that you are given 100% of the parental responsibility for the child. You'll receive an adoption certificate which shows the child's new surname and replaces their birth certificate. An adoption order is irrevocable and a child has the same legal rights as any birth child (eg: right of inheritance).

## After the Adoption Order

You can contact AfA at any stage in the future should you need any support or advice. We offer bi-monthly support groups regionally before and after the adoption order and we also offer access to online training and various workshops which you are very welcome to attend, once approved as adopters. We encourage you to keep in touch and send regular newsletters to our adopters.

If you need extra help we can help you to approach your local authority to assess your needs. The local authority that the child came from has responsibility to support you for the first three years that the child is with you. After three years that responsibility transfers to your own local authority. The local authority, once contacted, has a duty to assess your needs and apply for funding for any therapeutic support that may be needed.

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We hope this brief overview of the adoption process has been helpful. If you would like to speak one of our team to talk through the process or to answer any questions you may have, or if you would like to request a Registration of Interest form, please do not hesitate to contact us on 0800 5877 791 or email [contact.usaa@AdoptersforAdoption.com](mailto:contact.usaa@AdoptersforAdoption.com) and we will be more than happy to help.

We look forward to starting your adoption journey with you.

The Adopters for Adoption Team

# 10 things about...

# ADOPTION

## 21+

### There is no upper age limit to adopt

Adopters need to be at least 21 years old and have the potential to provide care and support for the child through to adulthood.



### Single? No problem

Children have been adopted into stable, loving homes by single parents and couples, whatever their gender or sexual orientation, for many years.



### No ethnic matching

There are children from many different backgrounds waiting to be adopted. As long as you meet the child's needs you can adopt children of any ethnicity.



### It's quicker than you think...

In fact, you can now become approved as an adopter within six months and can have a child placed with you within three months after that.



### Disabilities or not, you can still adopt

Health problems and disabilities are not barriers to adoption, provided you can care for the child you adopt.



### Pets are allowed!

Provided your pet does not pose a threat to the child's health or safety, then it can be an excellent addition to the family.



### Renting, or worried about space issues?

To become an adopter in England, you don't need to be a home-owner, and you may have priority for council housing. If you have the space and security to care for children as they grow up you will be considered.



### Wage is no barrier

Being on low income or benefits should not stop you from becoming an adopter. You may be eligible for Tax Credits or other benefits and allowances, such as Disability Living Allowance and Carers Allowance if you adopt a disabled child.



### You can adopt if you already have children

...and you can adopt more than one child at once - some children will have siblings also waiting to be adopted.



### British resident?

You need to have been living in the British Isles for at least a year to apply for an adoption order.



Department for Education

Find out more at [www.first4adoption.org.uk](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk)

# The adoption passport: a support guide for adopters

Children adopted from care can have ongoing needs, and you and your child may benefit from support. This is the support adopters in England may be entitled to:

## For your child...

Children adopted from care have priority access to schools, which means that your child should be able to attend whichever school you think best meets their needs ([www.gov.uk/schools-admissions](http://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions)). From September 2014, they will also be entitled to free early education from the age of two ([tinyurl.com/first4early](http://tinyurl.com/first4early)).

If your child needs extra support, you can ask your local authority to assess their needs for adoption support services (see page 2). If you think your child may have special educational needs you can ask your local authority to assess these needs too.

## For you as an adopter...

Many adopters are entitled to adoption leave and pay when their child is placed with them ([www.gov.uk/adoption-pay-leave](http://www.gov.uk/adoption-pay-leave)). The law is changing to make this entitlement more similar to maternity and paternity leave pay, and it will include the right to take time off when you are meeting your child, before they move in with you.

Adopters may have priority for council housing ([www.gov.uk/council-housing](http://www.gov.uk/council-housing)). If you are living in council housing and claiming Housing Benefit or Universal Credit while waiting for a child to move in you can also apply for funding (Discretionary Housing Payments) so that you are not penalised financially while you have an empty spare room.

You are also entitled to a summary of your child's health from his or her local authority's medical adviser before he or she is placed with you, and to a life-story book to help your child understand his or her early life.

## Adoption Support Services

Local authorities provide and fund a range of support services for children adopted from care. These support services can include:

- counselling, information and advice
- help with behavioural, attachment and other problems
- money e.g. to help with special care needs, or for former foster parents
- help with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family
- meetings and events to enable groups of adopters and adoptive children to get together
- training to help adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive child
- short breaks for an adopted child with another carer
- help where an adoption breaks down.

Access to these services depends on your circumstances but you can ask for an assessment *at any time*, no matter how long after the adoption.

## Support Services Advice

Your local authority will have an Adoption Support Services Adviser to help you access adoption support and other specialist services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The NHS commissions health services to meet the needs of adopted children, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will produce new guidance so that your GP will understand the problems you may face. The Adoption Support Services Adviser's details should be available on the local authority's website.

Every adopter is entitled to an assessment of their adoption support needs, but local authorities do not have to provide support in response to an assessment. Which services you are able to access will depend on your circumstances. Future changes to the law will mean that local authorities must tell adopters about adoption support services and their right to an assessment, and will give those who receive support a choice about how that support is provided, either by a local authority or through a 'personal budget' to purchase services from a voluntary adoption agency or adoption support agency.

If you want advice on adoption support you can also contact one of the many adoption support organisations, such as Adoption UK ([www.adoptionuk.org.uk](http://www.adoptionuk.org.uk)) or the British Association for Adoption and Fostering ([www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)), or read the e learning materials soon to be on the First4Adoption web-site which will explore the effect of children's experiences on their development and the services available to help them.

## Which local authority?

The local authority that places the child with you is responsible for assessing your adoption support needs for three years after the adoption. After three years it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live (if different).

## Comments and complaints

If you are unhappy with the support provided by your local authority, or with the time taken to carry out an assessment, you can complain under the Local Authority Complaints Procedure. Thereafter if you are not satisfied you may be able to refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman ([www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)). You will also soon be able to raise general concerns with the new Champion for adopters, foster carers and special guardians.

**FIRST 4 ADOPTION** is the dedicated information service for anyone interested in adopting a child in England. It is managed by Coram Children's Legal Centre, Coram and Adoption UK, and supported and funded by the Department for Education.

- Call First4Adoption: 0300 222 0022
- Visit our website: [first4adoption.org.uk](http://first4adoption.org.uk)
- Follow us on Twitter: [@First4Adoption](https://twitter.com/First4Adoption)

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