



Frequently Asked Questions

Contents

Adoption agencies and the adoption process

- 1 What is the difference between local authorities, regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies?
- 1 What is the difference between adoption and fostering?
- 1 I am currently with another agency but would like to change agencies.

Adoption agencies and the adoption process

- 2 How long does the process take?
- 2 How many personal references will I need to provide?
- 2 Will you need to contact my ex-partner?
- 2 Why do I need to do training?

Adoption agencies and the adoption process

- 3 Why do I need to have childcare experience?
- 3 Where will adoption panel be held?
- 3 Can I adopt a child from another country?
- 3 Do I have to have contact with my adopted child's birth parents and/or birth family?
- 3 I have adopted before. Can I adopt again?

Who Cannot Adopt?

- 4 Age
- 4 Residency
- 4 Criminal Record

Home, Health and Lifestyle

- 4 I do not have a spare bedroom. Can I still adopt?
- 4 I am planning some work on my house. Will this affect my assessment?
- 4 I have pets. Can I still adopt?

Home, Health and Lifestyle

- 5 How much money do I need to have?
- 5 Can I adopt if I am having fertility treatment or trying for a baby?
- 5 Is it true that we need to use contraception if we want to adopt?

Existing Children

- 7 I already have children. Can I still adopt?

Is adoption right for me?

My question is not on this list



Adoption agencies and the adoption process

What is the difference between local authorities, regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies?

Local authority agencies, regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies are the types of adoption agencies in the UK.

Both local authority agencies and regional adoption agencies have children in their care that they recruit adopters for. This means that local authorities will prioritise the types of families in their local area that they need for the children in their care and may approach their families first when identifying a family for a child. Adopters may be limited to the children within the area of the local authority or regional adoption agency.

Voluntary adoption agencies, such as Adopters for Adoption, do not have children in their care, but assess a diverse range of adopters from across the UK and then work in partnership with local authorities and regional adoption agencies to find matches for children nationally with the adopters they have recruited.

At Adopters for Adoption, we have excellent links with local authorities across the UK and have been very successful in bringing children and families together.

It is crucial that you feel comfortable with your adoption agency and that you choose the agency which feels right for you, so we encourage people to look around.

What is the difference between adoption and fostering?

The main difference between the two relates to parental responsibility. The role of foster parents is to look after children temporarily, or long term, until they can be returned to their birth families (if possible). Therefore, they do not gain parental responsibility and will have limited decision-making capabilities. Whereas, adoptive parents legally gain

parental responsibility when an adoption order is granted. An adoption order can not be reversed and means that the child loses all legal ties with their birth parents. This means the child becomes a permanent member of their adoptive family, often taking their surname and allowing the adoptive parents to make all the decisions a birth parent would.

There are also financial differences between the two. Foster parents receive a fostering allowance, whilst adoptive parents take on full financial responsibility for the child or children and do not receive an income. Although some local authorities may provide financial support depending on the needs of the child; this is called an adoption allowance.

I am currently with another agency but would like to change agencies.

Prospective adopters can only be registered with one agency at a time. Therefore, if you are in the adoption process with another agency, we would not be able to accept an application from you until you had formally withdrawn from them. We would advise you to speak to your current agency about why you might wish to leave them before doing so. There would be a requirement for us to contact your previous agency.



Adoption agencies and the adoption process

How long does the process take?

The adoption process is divided into 2 stages. The focus of stage 1, which takes approximately two months to complete, is to provide you with information about adoption and to gather factual information about you, your life and the reasons for wanting to adopt. A range of references and checks are undertaken in this stage. After this, prospective adopters can take a break or proceed to stage 2. At this point prospective adopters can decide to take a break of up to 6 months before proceeding to stage 2. Stage 2 involves an in depth assessment and should normally take four months. You must ensure that you have enough time and flexibility to meet regularly with your social worker and to attend the preparation training. At the end of stage 2 an assessment report is presented to the adoption panel, which you are invited to attend. The assessments end with a decision made by the agency decision maker about your suitability to adopt.

Once approved as adopters, the matching process begins. We are unable to put a timescale on this part of the process as it will depend on the child's needs and your preferences. If you work, you will need to have some time available during the matching process and introductions. You also need to take time off work in order to settle a child into your family. Given that children are likely to be quite unsettled, we ideally recommend 12 months.

There are frequent visits and lots of support is offered during a period of introductions and when a child is first placed in your family. Once a child has settled into your family, you can apply to the court to adopt them. When the court grants the Adoption Order, you receive an adoption certificate and are granted full parental responsibility for your child.

How many personal references will I need to provide?

You will need to supply contact details for six personal referees. If you are applying as a couple, this should include one family member referee and two non-related referees each. If you are a single person, this should include two family member referees and four non-related referees.

You should have known the non-related referees for at least three years, with at least one of them knowing you for a minimum of 5 years, and we recommend they are people who know you well on a personal level, preferably having spent time with you in the company of children. All of your referees will be asked to complete a written reference, and your social worker will select which three of your referees to speak with in more depth during stage 2.

Will you need to contact my ex-partner?

There is a requirement to make every effort to contact a previous partner when you have been involved in caring for a child together. At Adopters for Adoption, we also believe it is important to seek references from any significant previous partner, whether or not you cared for children together, unless there is a good reason not to do so.

We are aware that not all relationships will have ended well. Adoption assessors are used to speaking with previous partners and working out what is and is not relevant to the assessment.

Why do I need to do training?

Some children needing adoption have been abused, either physically or sexually, many will have been neglected and have not been given love or care. All will have experienced changes and uncertainty. As a result, children may be confused, fearful and/or angry about what is happening to them. They will need a great deal of love and attention to help them adjust to a stable family life. Our training will help you to understand and meet their potential needs.

Adoption agencies and the adoption process

Why do I need to have childcare experience?

Childcare experience is very important: the more experience you can gain during the adoption process and before being matched with a child, the better prepared you are likely to be for adoptive parenting. Many people will have the opportunity to gain childcare experience through caring for the children of family and friends and this should ideally include having sole care of a child or children, including overnight stays if possible. You can also gain experience beyond your immediate family or friends by volunteering, for example in nurseries, pre-schools or toddler groups.

Where will adoption panel be held?

The adoption panel will be held virtually, and you and your assessing social worker will be invited to attend.

Can I adopt a child from another country?

Yes it is possible to do this. However all countries have their own rules and protocols, therefore we recommend that you contact First4Adoption on <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk> who will recommend which agency you need to approach as we are not registered for international adoptions. You could also contact the overseas adoption helpline (see www.icacentre.org.uk).

Do I have to have contact with my adopted child's birth parents and/or birth family?

Adopted children need to know and understand their history and that the facts about their adoption are not kept secret from them. It is important to help children make sense of what happened in the past and to help them remember important people who were involved earlier in their lives. This can include maintaining links with birth parents, grandparents, siblings or foster carers. Being

open with the child about their birth family is important to help them develop a strong sense of identity and may help them integrate into their new adoptive family. Contact can be arranged through a letterbox exchange scheme managed by the local authority, with addresses kept confidential. Ongoing face to face contact with birth parents is rare, but can be very helpful, face to face contact between siblings is more likely to happen, especially with sisters and brothers placed for adoption elsewhere.

There is a detailed section on contact on the First4Adoption website:

<https://www.first4adoption.org.uk>

I have adopted before. Can I adopt again?

If you have adopted before, you are welcome to apply again, even if your previous adoption was not through Adopters for Adoption. Your assessment will be fast tracked, with stage 1 and stage 2 running concurrently. We will aim to complete your assessment in 4 months.



Who Cannot Adopt? Home, Health and Lifestyle

Age

Whilst there is a minimum age of 21 years, there is no maximum age to adopt. However, consideration will be given to the likelihood that you will be able to see a child through to adulthood and the age difference between yourself and the child. For example, younger children are more likely to be placed with younger parents.

Residency

You do not have to be a British citizen to adopt a child, but to adopt in the UK you must be legally resident in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, and have been so for at least 12 months. For the sake of the stability for any child placed you will need to have indefinite leave to remain in the UK. If you do not have settled status, we would advise you to seek legal advice regarding your residency status, prior to making an adoption application.

Criminal Record

If you or a member of your household have a criminal conviction or caution for offences against children or for serious sexual offences you will not be able to adopt. Other criminal offences will not automatically exclude you but will be taken into consideration during the assessment process, so please be open with us from the start.

We understand everyone has a past and this may not reflect who they are today, so please be open and honest with us about any convictions you have.

I do not have a spare bedroom. Can I still adopt?

We believe that every child deserves to have a space of their own. It is not unusual for birth children to share a bedroom, but is not considered to be appropriate for children who have not lived with you from birth. We ask that you are living in a property with a spare bedroom prior to making an adoption application.

I am planning some work on my house. Will this affect my assessment?

This will depend on the work you are intending to do. We aim to be as flexible as possible, however, in order to avoid delays, we would require any significant work to be completed prior to an application being accepted, so that you will be in a position to have a child placed with you, once you are approved.

I have pets. Can I still adopt?

Yes, you can adopt if you have pets. We recognise the value for children in being raised in a family that has pets. We would need to carry out a pet assessment in order to make sure there are no health, safety or compatibility issues. You would also be required to consider whether you could make arrangements to re-home your pet in the unlikely event that your pet and adopted child were not compatible.



Home, Health and Lifestyle

How much money do I need to have?

First and foremost, no one should be precluded from being considered as an adopter because of their income. However, we understand how stressful financial difficulties can be, therefore all prospective adopters have to be financially solvent, and possess sufficient money management (budgeting) skills to ensure that any child placed with them is going to have his or her material needs met, without causing undue pressure on the family budget. As part of the stage 1 assessment, we ask prospective adopters to complete a finance statement, which is then evaluated by their social worker. The finance statement should include the anticipated additional cost of caring for a child, as well as any changes in your income during your adoption leave.

Can I adopt if I am having fertility treatment or trying for a baby?

Whilst we have no hard and fast rules, as some agencies do, about how long you need to wait between the end of IVF treatment and pursuing adoption, we would need to be sure that you have emotionally come to terms with the end of that process. Everyone is different and people will process their feelings in a variety of ways. Some people will be ready and able to speak about adoption; others will not yet have got to the point of accepting that they will not be having a birth child. Fertility treatment would need to have stopped before being taken forward to the adoption process and you would be expected to take active steps to avoid a pregnancy until an adoptive child had settled in.

Is it true that we need to use contraception if we want to adopt?

Children need adoptive parents who feel completely committed to them. Once prospective adopters are approved and considering possible placements, they need to be able to focus on the children who may join them.

We are aware that some prospective adopters may have unexplained infertility, and although it may be very unlikely that they will fall pregnant, we would still advise them to use contraception to prevent a pregnancy. It would be really difficult for a child to be told that their social worker has found them new parents, only to then learn that they cannot go and live with them because there is another baby – or for this to happen shortly after the child is placed. For this reason, it is advisable that steps are taken to avoid a pregnancy.

If a pregnancy happens during the assessment process, the application could not continue, because the focus would inevitably be on the pregnancy and arrival of a birth child. Therefore if you are coming into the adoption process we would expect that you are prepared to avoid a pregnancy.



Home, Health and Lifestyle

I am a smoker. Can I still adopt?

Smoking will not automatically rule you out from adopting. Consideration will be given to this and to all health and lifestyle related issues.

Following medical advice, our policy is that no children under the age of 5, with a disability or health condition will be placed within a smoking household. Therefore, you could not be matched with a child under 5 years if you had not given up smoking for at least a year and will need to have given up smoking for at least six months before making an application to adopt.

Adopters who smoke E-cigarettes are considered as ex-smokers and therefore can be approved for children aged 0 to 5. However, they should not use E-cigarettes in front of children.

I have had a physical illness and/or mental health difficulties. Can I still adopt?

As an adoptive parent, you will need to have energy and will be expected to give care and support for your adopted child throughout childhood and into young adulthood. During stage 1, you will be required to have a medical to assess your physical and mental health as well as lifestyle issues such as weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. These issues may not be barriers to adoption unless they present as risks in the future. If you have resolved any with such difficulties in the past, we may consider that you have shown strength and motivation to deal with problems, which could demonstrate resilience and enhance your application.

If you have had or are still having treatment for a serious condition, you may want to speak to your GP first about whether they feel this could impact on your ability to adopt a child. If you have experienced or are currently experiencing a mental health problem you would not automatically be ruled out as an adopter, but we would need to carefully consider all the factors around the condition during stage 1, before making a decision. For example, if you have suffered from depression in the past, our medical advisor will need to understand the circumstances that led to depression and be reassured that you will be sufficiently emotionally robust to cope with the inevitable stresses involved in adopting a child. Some applicants have used medication, counselling and other therapies during stressful times in their lives, and we would look at how you have made use of this support. This would provide an indication of how you might manage stress in the future.



Existing Children

I already have children. Can I still adopt?

You can adopt if you have children. Whether they are biological, adopted, step-children or you are a special guardian or foster carer for a child (of any age) it will certainly not exclude you from adopting, whether they are living at home with you or have grown up. However, there will need to be an age gap of at least two years between your youngest child and an adopted child, with the adopted child being the youngest in the family.

If you are currently pregnant you would need to wait until your child is at least two years old before applying to adopt.

Children over 18 will require a DBS check and local authority checks, as will any other adult member of your household.

Is adoption right for me?

You may be gay or heterosexual, single or a couple, married, divorced, or living with a partner. You may already have children and feel that you still have space for another child in your family. If you feel that you can offer love and security to a child who has not had a great start in life, then adoption may be the perfect way to build your family.

If you are applying as a couple, it is important that you have been living together for at least two years. All relationships are deeply affected by becoming parents, and yours needs to withstand the changes adoption will bring.

You can apply to adopt if you are unemployed or disabled, and whatever your cultural and religious background.

Children need families from all sorts of different backgrounds and we positively welcome applications from all sectors of the population.

It is important to think about the timing of your application, as you will need to commit

time and energy to the adoption process and you should be ready to begin the “matching” process by the time you attend adoption panel.

We would advise you to avoid any major changes and to postpone your application if you are still considering other ways of growing your family, if you have recently had a bereavement, are planning on moving house, major building work or changing jobs. We would also advise you make arrangements to gain childcare experience before, or very early in the application process.

We want to support you to be as ready as you can be for adoption and are happy to advise you on your particular circumstances.

My question is not on this list

At Adopters for Adoption we believe that there is no such thing as a ‘silly question’ so please ask us anything you want to know about adoption. We will probably be able to answer your query, but if we cannot, we will do our best to find the answer for you. We would much rather that you ask us, rather than worry about something you are not sure about.

You can contact us on 0800 5877 791, or by email: ContactUs@AdoptersforAdoption.com

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