



Guide to Adoption

Your guide to adopting a child with
Buckinghamshire Council
Adoption Agency



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Introduction

Thank you for contacting Buckinghamshire Council's Adoption Agency about adopting a child or children. We really appreciate you getting in touch.

Adoption is often the best outcome for children who cannot live with their birth family and will not be able to return to their care in the future. Adoption, as you may know, is a legal process whereby parental responsibility for a child is transferred by a court, from the birth parents to adoptive parents. **Parental responsibility means** the legal rights, **duties**, powers, **responsibilities** and authority a **parent** has for a child and their property.

We realise that this is an important decision that will not only affect you but also your family and friends. We are committed to supporting you at every stage of your journey - from your initial enquiry, all the way through the process and if you are successful, throughout your time as adoptive parents.

We treat all prospective adopters with respect and honesty and ensure that the process of assessment is as fair and as transparent as possible.

We hope that you will find this information pack helpful and informative. The pack takes you through the formal criteria for adoption and details the application process. We have also included some useful resources to help you along the way.

If you have any queries about the information contained in the pack, or require more detailed information at this stage, please do not hesitate to let us know.

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Buckinghamshire Council provides a range of adoption services

We:

- Recruit, assess, train and support prospective adopters.
- Assist in the planning and placement for adoption, of children who are not able to safely return to the care of their birth families.
- Provide assessments for adoption support and accessing the adoption support fund as well as some direct services, including support groups for adopted adults, adoptive parents and adopted children.
- Work with family and friend carers including foster carers and Special Guardians.
- Provide ongoing support for adoptive parents and their families including:
 - Daily advice-line, an opportunity to speak with support workers
 - a quarterly support group for adopted children
 - regular training workshops for adoptive parents
 - twice yearly social events for adoptive families
 - a monthly newsletter

We need:

- Adoptive parents for children aged 0-9 years
- Early permanence carers for children aged 0-2 years
- Especially adoptive parents who will consider children:
 - as part of sibling groups
 - of black or dual heritage
 - above the age of 3 years –
 - to care for children with disabilities and additional need of all ages

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1. Who can adopt and what factors are taken into account?

Age

Legally you have to be over 21 to adopt. There is no upper age limit but you will have to demonstrate that you have the necessary health and energy to be able to parent a child through childhood and into adulthood.

Health Issues

You need to be able to demonstrate that you have the health necessary to parent a vulnerable child needing adoption throughout their childhood and into adulthood. Separate guidance is provided about health and lifestyle issues in the Appendices.

Being married or in a partnership, or single

If you are in a partnership, either through marriage, civil partnership or a stable living arrangement, you can both legally adopt a child. Sexuality is not a barrier to adoption. You will need to demonstrate that your partnership is stable, permanent and will be able to withstand the challenges that adoption can bring. We would usually expect couples to have been together for at least 3 years.

Single people can also adopt. This arrangement can be seen as a positive choice for some children. As with people in partnerships, applicants will need to show that they have strong and supportive network of family and friends to call on when they need to. They will also need to consider arrangements in the event that single applicants become ill or unable to look after the child after adopting a child.

Your usual home (officially called Domicile and habitual residence)

For those who do not have European passports, this can raise some complex issues and legal advice can sometimes be advised to confirm that they can adopt. Legal requirements for domicile and habitual residence are met and this is their accepted legal home. Applicants must live in the United Kingdom, see this as their home and be able to demonstrate that they have permanent residence. You do not have to live in the county of Buckinghamshire but we usually say we will generally carry out assessments within an hour's travelling distance of our offices in High Wycombe or Aylesbury. This helps facilitate any future support arrangements. However, in some situation we may be able to accommodate particular placements where we feel the needs of the child will be met.

Accommodation

You will need to be in settled accommodation which can provide a safe environment for a child to live in. You may own or rent the accommodation. If you are planning building work or changes to your home please inform us to enable us to advise and assess any impact on the process.

The child will need their own bed and space for study, recreational and leisure interests. Most social workers would also consider it important for the child to have their own room, unless sharing with their own siblings. It would not be accepted for adopted children to share with birth children or previously adopted children that they are not related to by birth.

Birth children

A number of people who have birth children wish to pursue adoption. This can be for a variety of reasons including secondary infertility. Experienced parents often have parenting skills and knowledge which can be extremely valuable. However, there is research which indicates that birth

children should be at least two years older than any adopted child to maximise the likelihood that the adoption will be successful.

Those who have previously parented by this route also need to bear in mind that adopted children often require different parenting styles and methods to those in a family through birth. You do however need to be aware that some social workers prefer to match children with families without other young children, due to the research evidence that this can have a negative impact on placement longevity. Each family's circumstances are different so do discuss this with the social worker.

Fertility treatment

A number of prospective adopters have been unable to have children themselves and may have been through fertility treatment. Fertility treatment can be very demanding, physically, emotionally and financially.

It is important that once you apply to adopt, you focus on the process of adoption. We understand that people sometimes find it helpful to explore information about adoption and fertility at the same time, but please be aware that it is not possible to start the adoption application process while undergoing fertility treatment.

Experience has shown us that when fertility treatment proves unsuccessful, a period of adjustment is needed to come to terms with this loss and disappointment. This is necessary before applicants are able to move on to the different but equally demanding process of adoption. It is therefore important to allow some time to elapse after stopping fertility treatment where this has been unsuccessful, generally at least six months before the start of the adoption process. Many people take up counselling after ending unsuccessful fertility treatment, and this is something we advise. Counselling may also be suggested to you after initial discussions have been held about your individual circumstances, as it is critical that all affected applicants have processed their feelings about treatment.

We would also ask for a period of six months to have passed if you had a miscarriage to come to terms with this loss.

Previous partnerships

If you have children with a previous partner, all your children (or adult children if they are grown up) will need to be interviewed as part of the adoption assessment process and there will be a discussion with you about your ongoing involvement in their lives.

It is our practice to make contact with all relevant previous partners whenever applicants have parented together, or:

- If you have been involved in a previous partnership regarded as of significance, i.e. which lasted for over a year and/or was a live-in arrangement, whether the care of children was included or not.
- Or if you have children with a previous partner or have cared for children within a previous partnership

The previous partner will be asked if they are aware of any cause for concern, about each applicant caring for a child or whether they have known them to be violent, abusive or negative. It is appreciated that this is a sensitive matter which may raise issues of concern, but we are interested in establishing applicants' ability to parent. We understand that some relationships do not end amicably and will take this into consideration.

An applicant's outright refusal for us to contact ex-partners may have an impact on whether we can progress or not with your application. Please discuss concerns with us as early as possible if this affects you or causes you anxiety, however in all but the most unusual circumstances we will expect to speak to ex-partners.

Statutory checks and references

It is very important that you are honest and transparent with us from the start of your interest in adoption, and discuss any issues which might affect the outcome of your assessment.

(a) Disclosure and Barring Service (Police checks)

As adoption involves the direct care of children you will be subject to an enhanced DBS check. This will show any previous convictions, including cautions as a juvenile, this is because no offence is deemed 'spent' for this purpose, and will therefore show on any DBS. It is very important that you share with us at an early stage if you have a criminal record, or have been cautioned or arrested.

The safety and welfare of children is paramount and checks must be made in respect of applicants and anyone else over 16 living in the household. A person cannot be considered suitable to adopt if they have been convicted or cautioned for a 'specified offence'. A 'specified offence' is an offence against a child, or an offence concerning rape and other matters relating to sexual activity or an offence concerning pornography. (These are specified in the Adoption Agencies Regulations Part 1 Schedule 3) and detailed information is available if required.

Staff will exercise discretion in relation to other offences.

- **Failure to disclose previous cautions, concerns or convictions will likely result in the Adoption Service declining to progress your application any further.** We are only permitted to disclose any specific reasons for this decision to the person who has the conviction or caution. If you have lived abroad for any period (excluding short term work assignments or holidays) in the last 10 years, Police or good conduct checks may be required from the Country of Residence. Please raise any questions you may have about these requirements.

(b) Medical report (Adult Health Check)

A full medical assessment from your general practitioner is required. The medical report is sent to our medical adviser who provides written advice to us. A summary of the advice is available to the GP, prospective adopters and additional information may be sought or advice about health issues provided. (See more detail in the appendix giving guidance on health issues). The medical report is produced at the applicants' expense, but can be means tested and financial circumstances can be considered if this is likely to cause hardship.

(c) Personal references

Three personal references are required from each applicant – one must be a family member and the others should be from someone who is not related to you. At least one of them should have known you for 5 years, and all more than 2 years. It is useful for your assessment to provide referees who have known you across different stages in your lives and where possible to include those who are within easy travelling distance of where you live. This is because the information

they give will be reviewed and analysed with the additional information we receive and to enable us to consider what potential support may be available to you in the future. Also, in partnerships, couples will not be asked to provide a separate reference each.

Referees will be sent a questionnaire and then the assessing social worker will choose which three or more referees to visit and to produce a further written report. The referees need to know you and your home environment well and be able to comment on how you might care for a child through adoption. We reserve the right to request references from other individuals in your support network/families where the information gathered could assist in compiling a full picture of your circumstances.

(d) Employment references

These will be sought to verify information provided and views will be asked for if your work or voluntary work involves children or vulnerable adults. This also includes previous employment in these fields. These references are taken up at the beginning of stage 1 of the adoption assessment process. You should inform us if you have not yet informed your employer. We appreciate this may be a sensitive area for you but we do need to gather this information to assist the assessment process.

(e) Local authority checks

These will be made in respect of the local authority in whose area you live or have lived in the last 10 years.

(f) Health visitor/nursery/school

If there are already children in your family then checks will be made with the relevant services concerning their Education and Health. If you already have a child in your family the school, nursery or health visitor will be contacted to assist in gaining a picture of them and your family.

(g) Armed forces

SSAFA (the Armed Forces Support Charity) will be contacted regarding applicants who are serving or who have served in the Armed Forces. Information will also be requested on the permanent nature of your postings, employment or home circumstances if you are a member of the armed forces, in order to assist us in planning for children.

(h) Social media checks .

As well as the internet, more and more people have become regular users of social media. These platforms can contain a huge amount of information about individuals on an employment, social and personal levels. It is the responsibility of the adoption agency to ensure that applicants are suitable to care for children and young people. Buckinghamshire Council Adoption Service considers it to be good practice to undertake social media checks on prospective adopters during stage 1(stage 2 if fast tracked). [Taking care of your privacy and digital footprint | Childline](#)

Experience caring or working with children

In the adoption assessment, evidence is sought about the skills and experience that applicants have and this includes their contact with and experience of children. This experience can assist discussions during the assessment as well as providing important supporting evidence. Our view is that good child care experience is vital to a good adoption and we will expect you to engage in some child care experience outside of your employment.

If you have little experience of children outside of your family, you are recommended at the earliest opportunity to increase your skills through some voluntary work examples include: in a playgroup, nursery or school or in organised activities for children during school holidays. It is also expected that you make efforts to gain experience of caring for other people's children ideally in your own home (e.g. volunteering or friend's or family's children), to assist you in thinking through the changes you may have to make in the future. If we deem there is a lack of experience to evidence in your assessment in stage 2 of the process, this may cause a delay in progressing.

Individual circumstances

During the assessment there may be circumstances specific to you as individual applicants that, when considered, lead to us advising you if this is not the right time for the assessment to proceed. For example, an individual may have recently experienced a significant loss or change in their lives and it may be thought the assessment would be better pursued after a time of adjustment.

As previously stated, we do recognise how difficult the assessment process may feel and expect any dilemmas to be raised when they have been identified and open discussions. We will endeavour to be transparent in our communication with applicants, within the bounds of other people's confidentiality.

2. Information about the children

Today, most of the children requiring adoption have left their families of origin in difficult circumstances and the courts will have been involved, making the decision that they cannot safely return to the care of their own families. The children may have been living at home with family for some time before sufficient grounds for concern came to light and the decision made to remove them. Their birth family circumstances often involve some or a combination of the following:

- Misuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Domestic abuse
- Mental ill health difficulties
- Learning difficulties
- Criminality
- Troubled family circumstances leading to poor parenting.

The children are likely to have experienced some or all of the following:

- Effects of drug/alcohol misuse by parents during the pregnancy or in the child's early years
- Neglect and/or physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse
- Inconsistency, poor parenting, chaotic home environment, many moves and changes of carer/parent
- Special needs arising from disability or uncertainty about future development

These factors are likely to have impacted on their emotional, social and behavioural development and may well have long term implications for their future development. Some children continue to lack trust in adults and experience difficulties in forming and maintaining lasting close attachments to their new carers.

Some of the children will have developed greater resilience to these difficulties than others – depending in part on other significant relationships in their lives – e.g. brothers and sisters, other adult relatives or friends, foster carers.



Some examples of children being placed for adoption

Richard: White British aged 6½ years. Richard's Mother misuses alcohol and has some mental health difficulties. She depended on him when he was little and at times he seemed to be parenting her. He can be distracted by these worries and finds it hard to maintain concentration at school although he is slightly above average ability. He enjoys music and outdoor activities and has been in the same foster home for 2 years. Richard is white British. The plan is for Richard to have twice yearly letterbox contact with his birth mother.

Gareth and Sean: White British aged 3 and 5. Their mother uses drugs and originates from a travelling family. Their father is involved with criminality and is currently in prison. The children had a chaotic early life but were fond of their mother, who has maintained contact with them though not always regularly. She is immature and the court sought the expert opinion of a number of professionals before reaching the view that she was not able to put her children's needs before her own and that they would be best placed together for adoption. They have lived together in the same foster home for over a year and although there is some sibling rivalry, they are very close and need to be adopted together. They have a sister, Amy, aged 10, who is in a separate foster home. Permanent fostering is planned for her. Gareth and Sean are white British with some Irish heritage. The plan is for Gareth and Sean to have annual letterbox contact with their birth mother and twice yearly direct contact with their sister.

Jamal: Indian/ White British, aged 18 months. His mother has mental health difficulties and is currently in prison. His father's whereabouts are not known. He is believed to have some learning difficulties. Jamal has been in the same foster home for 9 months where he is doing well. He has older brothers and sisters who are being placed for adoption or fostered on a long term basis. Jamal's father is of Asian Muslim origin and his mother is white British non-practicing Christian. They are no longer in a relationship. A family is sought to reflect or actively promote his ethnic, cultural and religious heritage. The plan is for Jamal to have annual letterbox contact with his birth parents and annual direct contact with his siblings.

Folasade: Nigerian aged 5. Fola was subject to a child protection plan, as with her siblings she was left alone for 8 hours. Fola was living with her step-father and his partner. Unfortunately allegedly as a result of Fola's behaviour became more challenging in the past few months they feel unable to continue to care for her. Fola hit one of their children. Fola is falling behind in school and her speech is delayed. She appears a friendly happy little girl, but is clingy towards staff and wants to show affection to her carers.



3. The adoption assessment process

First Steps

Start to learn more about adoption:

- Attend an Information Evening
- Talk with a Social Worker
- Read from the reading list at the end of this pack

Are you ready?



We will answer all your questions

Next Steps

Arrange to come and meet a SW:

- Call 01494 586 349 (9am-5:30pm Mon-Thurs 9am 4:30pm Friday)
- Collect and complete your registration of interest (application) form
- Read from the reading list at the end of this pack

You decide if now is the right time



We decide whether to accept you

Stage One—Two Months

Initial assessment phase—lots to do—you will need to be available for some weekday meetings and take time to complete self-directed work

- You will learn more about adoption and provide more information about yourselves. Start child care experience if not already done
- References, medicals and checks will be done
- Start your Preparation to Adopt training (4 days)
- We will meet with you to see if it is appropriate to go to stage two

You can take a six month break



We decide if stage two is appropriate

Stage Two—Four Months

In depth assessment phase—More to do, you will need to be regular weekday meetings.

- Your social worker will meet with you about eight times and will explore your past, your motivation to adopt, your supporters and what needs you can meet.
- Your social worker will meet with at least three of your referees. They will also seek references from your child care experience
- Your social worker will write a report and you will be able to review this and comment. You will know what your social worker is recommending.
- You and your social worker attend adoption panel and their recommendations will be sought. The final decision will be made by a senior manager called the agency decision maker
- We start considering you for children towards the end of stage two so you need to be ready

4. The adoption process

Pre assessment stage:

- Reading and considering this information pack.
- Please contact the team if you are interested in taking your enquiry further. We will then give you the dates of the next information session and take more details from you about your personal circumstances.
- The information session gives you the opportunity to hear from experienced adopters and members of the Adoption Service. If, on hearing more information you would like to continue, please let us know so that we can make contact with you.
- We will arrange a telephone call or office visit with one of our social workers to answer any questions you may have.
- a Registration of Interest (ROI) form can be given.
- N.b all of the above will differ in Covid 19 time;, please email our duty mailbox; Adoption Mailbox adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk for the process.

Registration of Interest form - completed by applicants.

- The agency reviews the information received before formally accepting applicants on to stage one of the assessment. It is only possible to work with one agency at a time once your Registration of Interest has been accepted, and from then you enter into 'assessment'.

Stage one (adopter-led):

- A social worker is allocated to work alongside you. You will have a working agreement called the stage one Agreement. Homework tasks and forms are sent out. These include blank eco-maps, genograms, table for finances, a health and safety checklist and a self-assessment tool as well as resources for reading and further research.
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks (also known as 'police' checks) and statutory checks with other agencies are completed. If you are considering engaging in voluntary work, it is worth considering whether to enlist on the DBS update service to assist with this process. This will allow you to use the same DBS for other agencies for example if volunteering. SSAFA checks are completed for people who are currently or were previously employed in the armed forces.
- If you have lived abroad for any period (excluding short term work assignments or holidays) in the last 10 years, you will also need to obtain a certificate of good conduct from that country's relevant embassy.
- Applicants are asked to arrange and attend medicals with GPs. Once the medicals are completed advice is gained from the Agency Medical Advisor.
- Personal and employment references are taken up. Most adopters find it helpful to carry out research on adoption. The resource list provided should help with this but please contact your social worker if you need more help. Information can also be found on the CoramBAAF, Adoption UK and First4Adoption websites.
- We would encourage you to make contact with other adopters to find out more and we can assist you if you don't know any yourself.

- You will also be encouraged to take part in activities that build up your experiences working with or caring for children, as mentioned previously.
- It is essential that you share with us any significant changes in your life, and information about you – or members of your family with whom the child would have contact – which could impact on or cause concern regarding your capacity to provide safe care for a vulnerable child. Any failure to do this could impact on the outcome of the adoption application. Please ask us about this if you have any doubts.
- Following successful completion of stage one, including checks and references received, a decision made by the Team Manager whether you can proceed to stage two. This decision is made within ten days of all checks and references being received.
- Stage one should normally take no longer than 2 months. If there are any delays to checks and references being received or if you feel you need longer to explore whether adoption is right for you then stage one can be extended.

Preparation Modules

Preparation Modules take place 3-4 times per year and comprise of four whole days.

They are led by 2 experienced social workers who are also joined by an adoptive parent. The views of current birth parents are also represented, as are those of foster carers. There are usually between 8 and 16 participants in the course, all being at a similar stage in the adoption process.

The purpose of the Preparation modules is to provide information about:

- The range and needs of children to be placed for adoption.
- The significance of adoption for a child and their family.
- Skills needed to become an adoptive parent.
- The agency's procedures regarding assessment and placement.
- Contact issues and support to adopters after a child is placed as well as post Adoption Order.

What we ask of you/you both:

- To attend all of the sessions (if there are exceptional reasons why a session has to be missed, arrangements will need to be made to complete the session in another series), however this may delay your progress.
- To respect the confidentiality of the group and other 'ground rules' agreed on the first day.
- To provide some written feedback (reflective logs) about what you have learned during the Preparation Modules and about the presentation and content of the course itself.

Invariably prospective adopters can be initially apprehensive but this quickly fades and they generally find the course very interesting, informative and enjoyable. You are not expected to share personal information about your own circumstances in the group unless you choose to do

so. The nature of some of the accounts of the speakers and topics covered can sometimes heighten participants' emotions and may even give rise to a tear or two. This is to be expected for some and not a concern in any way. The overall feedback given is that participants value this course very much.

We will write to you at the end of stage one to confirm whether or not we will be able to accept you on to stage two of the adoption assessment. If there are any issues which arise during stage one your social worker will discuss these with you. On the rare occasions where you wish to proceed but we feel adoption would not be suitable for you, we will write to you and explain the reasons why. You would be able to access the Buckinghamshire Council's complaints procedure if you did not agree with the decision, and in any event are free to approach other agencies.

Sometimes prospective adopters decide they wish to take a break of up to six months between stage one and stage two of the adoption process. You can do so without your assessment being halted. All records and documentation submitted will be retained for future use, if you decide to take this route, or to stop your assessment at this point.



Stage two (worker led):

- When you wish to proceed to stage two of the adoption process you will need to write confirming you wish to proceed. Stage two should normally take no longer than four months and is completed when the agency decision maker has confirmed that you are approved to adopt.
- A social worker is allocated to complete the detailed Prospective Adopters Report through carrying out your Home Study.
- Stage two of the adoption assessment stage involves gathering information to complete the Home Study on the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)

The Home Study, during which an allocated social worker visits you at home.

The aims of the Home Study include:

- The worker and the prospective adopter coming to a joint understanding of their strengths and capacities to become an adoptive parent.
- Identifying areas where the prospective adopter may need further development and support.
- Giving the prospective adopter further information, support and guidance.
- Enabling the social worker to compile a report about their suitability to become adoptive parents, along with information from the checks and references and the training and preparation.
- Enabling the worker and his/her manager to make a recommendation to the Adoption Panel based on the evidence gathered.
- Providing to the worker evidence of your 'competence' as an adoptive parent, which will involve you in gathering this together and completing some tasks in between the home visits. The process for this will should be explained to you in the Preparation Modules and as part of the stage two assessment agreement.
- Building on information from stage one using it to inform discussions, including homework received and information from referees, previous partners and children of applicants (if applicable).

The assessment process is a significant piece of work for those involved. Many find it very interesting – and tell us that they have learnt something about themselves, with some commenting they can see the benefits of all parents going through it. It is important that you proceed to stage two when you have the time available to commit to the home visits. The assessment meetings will last approximately 2-3 hours and will involve discussing personal information and reflecting on your own experiences of being parented. Usually there will be in the region of 6-8 visits depending on circumstances (e.g. if there are already children in the family they will need to be seen with you as well as separately depending on their ages and understanding.) You will be asked to make yourselves available during the day. Please consider the implications of this if you work during these hours. As this is detailed and concentrated work, there will need to be negotiation about the timing of the visits. It will not be possible for all of these to take place outside usual office hours and occasionally you will be asked to meet at one of our offices.

The following information will additionally be gathered:

- Report from attendance at Preparation Modules
- Assessment of potential support needs

Your social worker will agree with you dates and times of visits to your home and make a plan with you about the work you will undertake together. You will be given a copy of the format used for the report to be presented to the Adoption Panel -Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)

The process can seem complex and daunting but it is important that you and the agency work together in collaboration. It is essential that you are open and honest throughout the process. There may be information that you are concerned about sharing with the assessing social worker but many issues can be resolved if they are discussed openly. Any failure to share information will be taken very seriously and may negatively affect the outcome of the assessment and its progress. In exceptional circumstances we may not be able to progress further. It may be reassuring for you to know that across the country the vast majority of applications presented to Adoption Panels are successful in their outcomes.

The Prospective Adopters Report

Regulations require the adoption agency to obtain information about the prospective adopters in the following areas:

- A chronology of the prospective adopter from birth
- A family tree with details of the prospective adopter, siblings and any children of the prospective adopter
- Racial origin, cultural and linguistic background
- Religious persuasion
- Description of personality and interests
- Details of previous family court proceedings in which the prospective adopter has been involved
- If married, date and place of marriage, if in civil partnership, date and place of that partnership
- If there is a partner – details of that relationship
- Details of any previous relationship, marriage or civil partnership
- Details of education, attainment and employment history and views of prospective adopters about these
- Confirmation of current employment and views about achieving a balance between employment and child care.
- Financial information
- Applicants views on adoption and wishing to adopt a child
- The observations of the prospective adopter about their own experience of being parented and how this has influenced them
- Details of any experience the prospective adopter has had of caring for children (including as a parent, step parent, child minder or prospective adopter)
- An assessment of capacity to provide for an adopted child's needs particularly emotional and behavioural development needs
- An assessment of capacity to understand and support a child through feelings of loss and trauma including when it affects their behaviour

- Information which indicates how the prospective adopter and anybody else living in their household is likely to relate to a child placed for adoption with them.
- An assessment of capacity to integrate a child into their family while having a spirit of generosity and empathy towards the birth family.
- A description of the wider family and their role and its importance to the prospective adopter along with their likely role and importance to any child placed for adoption
- Information about the home and neighbourhood and the degree of the family's integration with friends and social networks
- Reasons for wishing to adopt a child
- The views and feelings of the prospective adopter about:
 - Adoption and its significance
 - Parenting capacity
 - Parental responsibility and what it means
 - Providing a suitable home environment
 - Importance and value of education for a child
 - Importance of a child's religious and cultural upbringing
 - Contact with birth family

The approval process

The information gathered in the process of assessment is brought together in the Prospective Adopter's Report. The agency is required to give a copy of the report to the adopter(s) and to invite the adopter(s) to send in their views on the report within 5 days of its receipt.

The Report is confidential and not to be shared with others without the written permission of the agency.

The references and the medical reports are not included in the report sent to the prospective adopters but are presented to the Adoption Panel. These remain confidential to the agency. The adopters are invited to attend the Panel meeting, when their application to be approved as adopters is being discussed. Attendance is not compulsory and does not affect the Panel decision, but most prospective adopters are glad they attended.

The allocated social worker will help the prospective adopters prepare for the Panel and also ensure written information is provided to them about the Panel and its members. There are specific regulations on those who have to be represented on the Adoption Panel. A leaflet about

Panel and its membership is made available to all applicants. The role of the Panel is to consider the suitability of adopters to adopt and to consider whether a child should be placed with particular prospective adopters. They will make a recommendation on these matters to the Agency Decision-Maker (ADM) who is a senior manager in Children's Services. Panel members may also provide advice to applicants and Social workers.

The agency decision-maker will decide whether or not to accept the recommendation and can also express a view on advice given by the Panel. The decision is made within 7 working days of the ADM receiving the panel minutes and the agency must inform the adopters of the decision orally within 2 days and in writing within 5 days.

Stage two should take no longer than 4 months. However it is advised that you attend health/DBS appointments promptly and encourage referees to complete their forms promptly as this can also delay your progress.

When things do not go smoothly

It may be that before the full assessment is completed in stage 2, information is received that leads the social worker or the agency to conclude that the prospective adopter may not be suitable to adopt. In such situations, a 'brief report' is written which the prospective adopter sees and comments on before it is presented to Panel.

The Panel may recommend that the assessment continues or that the adopter is not suitable to adopt. The recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision-Maker. If the recommendation is that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt then the process is the same as if a full assessment had been completed (see below).

When a full assessment is completed and presented to Adoption Panel, if the Agency Decision-Maker is minded (considering) not to approve, the adopter will be notified. This is called the 'qualifying determination'. The notification will also include the reasons for this. The prospective adopter will also be advised that they have 40 working days to decide whether or not they wish to ask for their case to be considered by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM – explained below) or make representations to the agency and how to make such representations. The prospective adopters can also decide to accept the decision.

The Independent Review Panel is not an appeal system. The Independent Review Panel cannot overturn the agency's decision, but the agency must consider the view of the IRM Panel before making their final decision.

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

The Government has set up the IRM, which prospective adopters can choose to use if their brief or full assessment report is subject to a 'qualifying determination' by the Agency Decision Maker.

The IRM Panel considers the assessment reports and may seek additional information. It then provides advice to the agency, which it must consider before reaching a decision.

There is a charge for this service and the cost is met by the adoption agency. Information about the IRM is available on the GOV.UK website.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism

After Approval

The next stage concentrates on your continuing preparation to have a child(ren) placed with you and providing ongoing support to you.

Feedback

By the time you are approved adopters we will have been working with you for a long time and dealing with a lot of material. We seek feedback from you at different stages along the process by written questionnaire, and discussion with staff.



Matching and placement of a child

There are several ways that children and adopters can be matched with each other.

The Adoption team and children's social workers are aware of all the children locally who are or may become in need of adoption. The needs of the children are regularly considered in relation to the adopters awaiting placement.

- Exchange days are held nationally by CoramBAAF which adopters are invited to attend.
- Adoption Activity Days are held when adopters have the chance to meet and play with children needing adoption placements. Adopters attending need to be open to considering children with a wide range of needs.
- Adopters and children can be referred to the National Adoption Register where possible matches are identified.
- There is a publication which approved adopters can subscribe to which feature children awaiting adoption called 'Children Who Wait'.
- There are other matching services organised through the internet such as Linkmaker www.linkmaker.co.uk and www.newfamilysocial.org.uk the lesbian, gay and bisexual support agency for adoption and fostering applicants.
- Some adopters have circulated their details to local authorities, but it is recommended that you work with your adoption social worker before you do so.

**"It's not easy! It's stressful and frustrating but once your child arrives
it's like none of it happened!"**

Approved adopters can spend a period of time waiting for a suitable match with a child or children.

Your adoption social worker will complete a Matching agreement with you and maintain regular contact with you during this time. There may be discussions with you about several children before the 'right match' is identified.

Sometimes, despite all of our best endeavours, this does not happen – it will very much depend on the range of children needing adoption and the skills and experiences you have shown that you can provide to meet these children's needs. Increasing there are more prospective adopters hoping to parent babies than there are babies needing families.

Therefore those applicants who have stated they can only care for 0-3 age children may wait longer.

Regulations now require that there are at least annual reviews of your suitability to adopt – an adoption social worker will visit to complete this with you. If it is considered that you are no longer suitable to adopt then a report is presented to the Adoption Panel. As with the original assessment report, you see and comment on this and the process for recommendation and decision is the same as for the original approval.

There are opportunities during this time to further increase your knowledge of adoption and experience of children – through reading, training, practical experience and attending local adopter support groups.

When a possible match is identified the child's social worker will be given a copy of the adopters assessment report (PAR) to see if what they can offer matches the child's needs. If you are shortlisted the child's permanence report (CPR) will be shared with you along with other information such as a carers report and medical. You will then complete a short, medium and long term plan demonstrating how you will the child(ren)'s needs. The family finder and child's social worker will arrange to come and meet with you together with your social worker. During the visit they will give you more information about the child. Sometimes social workers visit more than one family so they can be sure they have found the best match for the child.

If you and the child's social worker still wish to proceed, you will be shown copies of reports and assessments about the child, medical information, and any school reports. You will have the opportunity to speak with the adoption medical adviser, any other specialist involved as well as the child's foster carers. At any stage as adopters you can withdraw your interest. Throughout the process your adoption social worker will offer support and advice.

The child's agency will prepare an Adoption Support Plan and Adoption Placement Report, which will include the agency's reasons for proposing the placement, the proposals for adoption support services and any contact.

The report will include the prospective adopters' views about the proposed placement. The prospective adopter will be given a copy of the report and asked to comment on it.

Adopters' information is presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration. A prospective match is then agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.

If the child is from another Local Authority then the Adoption Panel will be held in that area.

The Adoption Panel will consider the proposed match and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker as well as give advice on adoption support and contact and parental responsibility. Prospective adopters are invited to attend the Panel Meeting.

The decision of the Agency Decision Maker must be made within seven working days and the prospective adopters informed in writing.

If the decision is that the child is not to be placed with the adopters, there is no mechanism for making representations or to review the decision, though this would clearly need a great deal of discussion.

The child cannot be placed until the adopters have notified the child's agency in writing that they wish the placement to proceed. Before a child is placed with the adopters, an Adoption Placement Plan will be written, which the adopters will be required to consider.

The Adoption Placement Plan includes arrangements for reviews, exercise of parental responsibility, adoption support, contact, as well as the arrangements for the child and adopters to get to know one another before the child moves into their home.

When it is agreed that a child who is subject to a Placement Order can be placed with the prospective adopters they will remain with them on this basis until the Adoption Order is made. Adopters will be visited by the child's social worker at regular intervals alternating with your social worker. The placement will be reviewed after one month and then at four months by the Independent Reviewing Officer.

When an Application to court is made for the Adoption Order, reports for court are completed by both social workers. The Adoption Order is granted at a hearing usually only attended by the child's social worker. A separate Celebration Hearing is arranged for the child and family to attend with the adoption social worker.

The level and nature of adoption support will be agreed prior to the order being made. Contact arrangements will also be clarified. This could include Letterbox arrangements, direct contact and/or sibling contact.



Early permanence

Although it is not possible to place a child for adoption without either the court's consent or parent's agreement, it is possible to approve adopters as foster carers to enable the child to be placed as early as possible. Buckinghamshire Adoption Service is able to approve prospective adopters as adopters and as foster carers so that a child can be placed with them at an earlier stage.

Early permanence placements are selected for children where adoption is the likely but not certain outcome of care proceedings in the local authority's view. The benefits to the child of being able to make attachments to carers who may continue to look after him or her throughout childhood are significant. While this arrangement creates risks for the adopters involved, it does mean that adopters would care for a child from the point of removal, and therefore are much less likely to experience difficulties as a result of problems in the child's attachments due to changes in placements.

It is also possible to approve adopters temporarily as foster carers for specific children if it is felt that the child could and should be placed with them at an early stage and a Placement Order has not yet been made, for example when adopters are caring for an older sibling.

Further information about early permanence is available at; www.earlypermanence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FosteringforAdoption-Carers-leaflet-2017-updated-web.pdf

Assessment of adoption support needs

Part of the assessment and the report to Panel will focus on what adoption support services prospective adopters may need if they adopt a child. When a child is matched with adopters, any adoption support required by both the adopter and child will be explored and an Adoption Support Plan will be agreed. There are regulations that set out the range of adoption support services that local authorities must establish and maintain. The local authority has a duty to carry out an Assessment of Needs for adoption support services. They must also carry out the assessment to decide whether to provide services. Adopters can ask for an 'Assessment of Need' after the adoption order is made.

The range of services that local authorities are required to consider includes:

- Counselling, advice and information.
- Financial support (in the main established at the start of the adoption placement).
- Support groups for adoptive parents and adoptive children.
- Support for contact arrangements between adoptive children and their birth relatives.
- Therapeutic services.
- Services to ensure the success of the adoptive placement e.g. specialist training

The local authority placing the child may pay for the application fee that accompanies the adopters' application to the court to adopt the child placed with them. They may also pay expenses related to being introduced to the child. These payments are made regardless of the income of the adopters. Other forms of financial support are means tested and relate to the needs of the child being adopted – adoption allowances.

When a child is adopted into a new family, this new family is expected to take on the usual financial responsibility of caring for a child. Part of the preparation for adoption will be gaining information about state and tax benefits related to all children which can be claimed as soon as a child is placed with adopters. There will also be potential eligibility for adoption leave (similar to maternity leave and paternity leave). It is also important that prospective adopters begin to prepare financially for a child.

While the local authority has the lead responsibility for arranging adoption support services, other agencies especially Health and Education have a significant part to play. We support adopters to access all these services from these agencies.

As an adoption agency we provide some adoption support services to all adoptive families after the child is adopted which include:

- Two social events per year
- Quarterly newsletters
- Adopter led support groups to which professionals are invited.
- An assessment of adoption support needs by experienced adoption support workers, where this is requested.
- Training workshops
- Quarterly Activity for adopted Children and Young People separated by age groups.

Many adopters find membership of the charity, **Adoption UK** beneficial. Adoption UK was founded in 1971 by adoptive parents to offer support, information and encouragement to prospective and established adopters. This will give adopters access to the support services of Adoption UK, including local groups of adopters and buddy support as well as information and advice.

More information about Adoption UK is available on their website: www.adoptionuk.org.uk

Your adoption social worker will be part of a team that specialises in adoption and there is a system in place that enables you to access a member of the team during office hours and to the County's out of office hours service should the need arise. The Adoption Support Advice line is 01494 586626 and the mail address for the team is adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Connections to birth family beyond an adoption order

(a) Meeting the child's birth parent(s)

When a child is being placed for adoption, wherever possible, a meeting with the child's birth parents happens on a one-off basis, in a neutral setting, with workers present. Adopters who meet birth parents often find this to be a positive experience and will enable them to talk to their child more openly when he or she asks questions about their birth family.

(b) Letterbox exchange

Where face-to-face contact is not in the child's best interests after adoption, the agency has in place a 'letterbox exchange'. At the time the child is being 'matched' with adopters, the need for future contact with those significant to the child will be assessed. In all cases there will be a letterbox exchange between the adopters and members of the child's birth family. This involves exchanging information by letter, via the agency, without giving an address or second name. This provides a way of 'keeping the door open' for questions the child may have, which can be asked through the letters.

It is also so that the birth relatives know that the child is alive and well and to hear of their progress. Children placed for adoption do often worry about their birth family, remembering the difficulties that existed when they lived together.

It can be reassuring for children to learn of updated information. These arrangements have been well established over many years, involving exchanges in Bucks of over 300 cases. During preparation groups, experienced adopters and our letterbox co-ordinator share their experiences of this and answer questions from prospective adopters about contact issues.

(c) Staying in touch with others

In some instances, older children may continue to see members of their birth family (or others significant to them) after adoption, where this is in the child's best interests and where the adults can work cooperatively with this plan. Some children continue to see brothers and sisters placed elsewhere.

As well as brothers and sisters, there may be others the child needs to stay in touch with – grandparents, aunts and uncles and/or foster carers. They will be people who have played a significant part in the child's life and if they have, it will be important for the child to understand that they have not 'disappeared'. The child's needs for contact with others after adoption will be assessed before the child is 'matched' with prospective adopters. The assessment process for prospective adopters involves discussion about contact issues and the prospective adopters' views about these arrangements. There is support available over contact arrangements where this is required and if a face-to-face contact with others is involved after adoption, this may include a worker being present.

This is an exciting stage. You will be given detailed guidance about how to prepare for placement in the time that you are waiting after approval. After the Agency Decision Maker has agreed the match, a date will be set for an Adoption Placement Planning Meeting where you, the child's foster carer, together with the workers will agree the adoption placement plan and a series of introductory visits to the child. These will start by meeting the child in their foster home and spending time getting to know them and enabling them to get to know you and to begin to develop trust. This will need to progress at the child's pace, according to their age and understanding.

If you are adopting as a couple you will both have to be available for these introductions which usually take place over 1-3 weeks or longer depending on the age and needs of the child.

You will be taking the child out and visiting your home. It will be important for you to be able to care for the child at all stages of their daily routine and building a relationship with the foster carers will be an important aspect of a positive transition.

If the child is in education, the introductions will need to take account of this and meetings with others e.g. teachers, new school. The introduction programme will be reviewed part way through and a date agreed for placement. The agency must notify your GP, Health Visitor/Education Services (according to the age of the child) of the placement date. Legally the child cannot be known by a name other than the one they were registered with at birth without the agreement of all those who have parental responsibility for the child or the court, until such time as a court makes an adoption order.

Child Appreciation days, also known as life appreciation days

Child Appreciation Days enable adopters or foster carers to meet with significant people from a child's past. They provide a unique way of gaining an understanding of the child's view of the world, how their past experiences have affected their current behaviour, and the potential impact of a

new placement or other transition on all concerned. These can occur at any stage leading up to a placement, or even once the placement has started.

Placement

The placement day is a very special occasion for you and the child. It is also a major life event for the child who may react to this change in a variety of ways, which can impact on their behaviour.

Significant life changes all take time to adjust to and you will all need the time and space to do so. Your support networks will be important, though you may need to keep them at arm's length in the beginning, so the child can get settled with you before having to get used to others too.

Support will be on hand and there will be regular visits from your adoption and the child's social worker. They will need to see the child as well as you when they visit, and will come each week for the first month.

In the early stages you may have some mixed emotions as you adjust to this major life change, having worked towards it for a long time. You will be faced with new challenges on top of being a new parent to a child who has immediate needs. Although this is the outcome you have worked towards for so long, it can result in some feelings of being low in spirits as well as some elation.

We are aware of the impact of this and will encourage you to share any mixed feelings openly. Your worker will be available to offer support, advice and counselling and the advice and guidance of other experienced adopters can be on hand too. Your bond with the child will need to be allowed to grow over time. At such time as all concerned consider that the time is right for the child and for you, you will be helped to make an application to the court for an Adoption Order.

This is the end of this stage and the final stage in the adoption process – application to Court and making of the adoption order follows. In the following section, information is given about legal issues surrounding adoption and the application to court.

Authority to place a child for adoption

- A child cannot be placed with adopters unless the adoption agency has 'Authority to place'.
- An adoption agency would seek 'authority to place' after the Agency Decision Maker has agreed with this plan.
- An adoption agency may have 'authority to place' a child with adopters with the consent of the child's birth parents. Consent is given through signing a prescribed form and witnessed by a Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (CAFCASS) officers. This officer must be satisfied that consent is given unconditionally and will require a full understanding of the consequences.
- If birth parents are unwilling to give consent or they might later withdraw their consent, a Local Authority must apply to a Court for a Placement Order. The court may also make a care order at the same time
- A Court may not make a Placement Order unless the child is already subject to a Care Order (or the same conditions for making a Care Order apply). A Court has to be satisfied that a child is suffering or likely to suffer 'significant harm' and the harm is attributable to the care the child has been given or would be given if an order is not made.

- The Court uses a 'welfare checklist' to help them decide if these conditions are met. In addition, the Court can only make the Placement Order if the birth parents give consent or the Court is satisfied that the consent of the birth parents should be dispensed with.
- A Court can make a Contact Order at the same time as making a Placement Order.
- A Contact Order orders the person the child is living with to allow the child to have contact with the person in whose favour the order is made. A Contact Order can also be made at the same time as Adoption Order. However, under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 there is no presumption for or against contact when a child is being adopted.
- The Court places the needs and welfare of the child at the centre of its decision-making. In practice the Court also takes into account the views of the adopters.
- When the adoption agency has 'authority to place' through consent or a Placement Order, the adoption agency acquires parental responsibility for the child. The birth parents still have parental responsibility but the agency determines how this parental responsibility is restricted.

(These legal matters are quite complex – please ask us if you would find it helpful to explore this information further.)

When a child is placed

- When a child is placed with adopters, the adopters are delegated a level of parental responsibility to make certain decisions until the Adoption Order is granted.
- When a child is in the care of the local authority, their situation is reviewed at regular intervals. This reviewing process continues when a Placement Order is made and when they are placed with adopters.
- A review must be held within 20 working days of a child being placed with adopters and an Independent Reviewing Officer will chair the reviews.
- Before this first review is held the agency must visit the child every week for the first 4 weeks that the child is placed.
- At the first review, the pattern of further reviews and visits will be agreed. The next review must be within three months or earlier and thereafter every 6 months or earlier, until such time as an Adoption Order has been made.
- Prospective adopters may take a child out of the country for up to a month before such time as they are adopted. The child would need a passport in their original name and arrangements for the holiday would need to be discussed and agreed with workers concerned. The leave of the Court or the written consent of each parent is required for the child to be taken out of the country for more than a month before adoption.
- The child cannot be known by a different surname until such time as they are legally adopted unless the Court authorises this or the written consent of the parents is obtained.

Application to the court for an adoption

- An application cannot be made for an adoption order until the child has been in the care of the adopters for at least 10 weeks.
- Depending on the age and needs of the child and how things are progressing in the placement, it may well be that an application is not made until later than this.

- Once the application has been made to the Court, the birth parents may seek the leave of the Court to oppose the adoption order and could apply for a Residence or Contact Order in respect of the child. However, the Court would expect the parents' circumstances to have changed significantly for such leave to be given and any order would have to be in the interests of the child.
- The Adoption social worker will be able to provide support and guidance throughout this time.
- The Court will ask the adoption agency to submit a report about the child and the adopters, within 6 weeks of the application being made.
- The Court will have a formal hearing to consider the application and set out any actions required. This is called a Directions hearing. There will be a separate hearing to make the Adoption Order as this is a very special occasion for the child and for you to participate in.
- When an Adoption Order is made, the adopters gain sole parental responsibility for the child.
- The adoption agency and the birth parents no longer have parental responsibility.
- The adoption agency ceases to have a responsibility to visit the child but adoption support services may continue or a request for adoption support needs may be made at a later stage.

5. Conclusions

We hope that you have found the information in this pack useful in helping you consider whether adoption is appropriate for you. We have given you a lot of detail, but feel it appropriate you know from the beginning what adopting a child will entail. It can feel like a daunting process but adoption is about finding the right families for children needing adoptive homes and all children needing adoption are entitled to loving families who will promote and safeguard their welfare.

Being assessed as an adopter is a challenge but can lead to life changing opportunities at the end of the process. If you take the next step and contact the Adoption Team about taking your assessment further you will be asked to come along to one of our Information Sessions, when you can hear workers and adopters sharing their knowledge and experiences. Most adopters will speak of the rewards and satisfaction that adoption has brought to them and their families and that the time and energy taken make it worthwhile. Adoption, like all things in life, carries risks. When it does not work out as all would hope, this is very damaging – most of all for the child. We therefore want to work with you to minimise these risks so far as is possible. We depend on your honesty and openness throughout the process, so that we can help you to get things right for the child, identify your strengths and try to consider when you may need support.

Please do let us know any questions you may have.

Good Luck!



6. What you can do to progress your application and prepare for the assessment

Complete the 'homework' as requested, and contact the service if you are unclear about any of it.

You will be asked to carry out the following tasks during stage 1:

- Complete the **Disclosing and Barring Service (DBS) application** (sent to each applicant by email).
- To ensure the **Stage 1 Agreement** is signed and returned.
- A **Certificate of Good Conduct** obtained if needed
- To provide **Self-Assessment work for example: personal profile, relationships, motivation** for each applicant.
- To provide a **Chronology** for each applicant.
- To provide a **Genogram/Family Tree** for each applicant.
- To provide **Evidence of Reading** by each applicant.
- To take part in **Voluntary Work with children**, to be organised by each applicant.
- To provide **Evidence of discussions with other adopters** (Inform the stage 1 social worker if you want to link with local adopters).
- To provide an **Eco Map** (mind map of supporters) for the household.
- To complete a **Table of Finances** for household.
- To complete a **Health and Safety Form** for household.

Things to remember:

- Please also chase up your DBS at any time during stage 1 - 0870 9090 811. Contact Adoption Team for your DBS reference number prior to phoning DBS.
- Please Book Medicals, as soon as requested to and keep in touch with your GP to encourage them to promptly send the medical form back to the Adoption Team.
- Where applicable if you feel you need more time to complete stage 1, reply in writing if in agreement/requesting to extend stage 1.

Prospective Adopter's Actions, which will also smooth the process

- Confirm in writing if you are in agreement with continuing on to stage 2.
- Read about adoption
- Read about behaviour management tools e.g. therapeutic parenting
- Read about attachment, trauma and the impact it has on behaviour
- Read about adopted adults and children's experiences
- Watch relevant television programmes and videos
- Increase both applicants experience in caring for children *other than their own*, e.g. volunteer in scout groups, nurseries, youth groups. (You will need to wait until the DBS is returned, unless you have one already).
- Contact your referees and ex-partners where applicable and ask them to respond promptly.
- Chase your DBS check, as advised, when prompted by the service

7. How to complain, compliment or comment

We hope that you won't be, but in the event that you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service you have received please do let us know as soon as possible so that we can work with you to try to resolve the difficulty.

Please raise this in the first instance with your Worker or the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager.

Buckinghamshire Council has a complaints process that you are entitled to use and a leaflet is available together with this pack. The below is also the contact for compliments and comments, if you prefer they go to someone other than the worker involved.

The Complaints Officer is based at Walton Street offices, Aylesbury and is contactable by writing to:

Feedback and Complaints

Buckinghamshire Council

Walton Street

Aylesbury

Buckinghamshire

HP20 1UA

Or by telephoning: 01296 387844

Via the website – <http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>

Or by email – complimentsandcomplaints@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

For further information please contact:

Adoption Team

Third Floor

Council Offices

Walton Street

Aylesbury

Bucks

HP20 1UZ

01494 586 349

adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/care-children-and-families/adoption



**Buckinghamshire
Adoption
Service**

...preparing and
supporting you
through adoption
and after

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Provider

8. Adoption glossary

A

Adopted Children Register – a register maintained by the Registrar General of all legal adoptions in England and Wales since January 1927, including all registerable foreign adoptions since June 2003, registered on the authority of orders (or overseas equivalent) from the courts (or overseas equivalent) granting the adoption.

Adoptee, Adopted Person, or Person who was adopted – A person who joins a family by adoption.

Adoption agency – a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency.

Adoption – A permanent, legally binding arrangement whereby people other than the biological parents parent the child.

Adoption contact register – a database, maintained by the Registrar General, which allows adopted adults and their birth relatives to register their details if they would welcome contact or wish to have no contact. To be eligible for registration applicants need to be 18 years or over. Part 1 of the Register is for an adopted adult to specify with which birth relative(s) they are hoping for, or do not wish to have, contact. Part 2 of the Register is for any birth relative to register their desire for contact, or non-contact, with an adopted adult. If a link is made both parties will be notified, but only the adoptee will be provided with the current name and address because the onus is on the adopted person to make initial contact. Under prescribed conditions information may be divulged from the Contact Register to appropriate adoption agencies or intermediary agencies.

Adoption order - An adoption order grants complete parental responsibility (in summary, who has the legal right to make decisions about the child and their future) to the child's adoptive parents, and removes it from all others, including the child's birth parents and the local authority.

Adoption Support Plan – The unique, individual plan an agency makes for the support of the adoption of a specific child.

Adoptive Parent(s) – A person or persons who become the permanent parents with all the social, legal rights and responsibilities incumbent upon any parent.

Adoption service – a service maintained by a local authority within their area to meet the needs, in relation to adoption:

- of children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;
- persons wishing to adopt a child;
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians; and for that purpose must provide the requisite facilities.

Adoption society – see registered adoption society.

Adoption support agency – a registered adoption support agency or an adoption agency that provides intermediary and support services. This is usually the role played when a request is received by an adopted person or their birth relative to approach another party.

Agency – an adoption agency. Neither an Adoption Support Agency nor an Intermediary Agency is included in the definition of agency.

Agency decision maker – The agency’s decision-maker is a senior person within the adoption agency. National Minimal Standards 23.17 sets out the qualifications, knowledge and experience decision-maker must have. The person does not have direct management responsibility for the adoption panel but has the authority to make decisions on the agency’s behalf.

Application to adopt/Registration of interest – the formal request to be assessed and which can only be made to one adoption agency.

Appropriate adoption agency – the agency which placed the child for adoption or, if different, the agency which holds the relevant information in relation to the adoption. It may also be the local authority to which notice of intention to adopt was given.

Attachment – is the deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another. Children waiting for adoption are likely to experience some issues and difficulties in past relationships and making attachments to new carers.

Authority to place – the court orders that the adoption agency acquires parental responsibility for the child. The birth parents retain parental responsibility at this point, but the agency determines how this is restricted.

B

Behaviour issues -- Behavioural problems range from mild, short-lived periods of behaviours that challenge, which are common in most children, to more severe problems such as conduct disorders and refusal to go to school.

Birth certificate – When a child is born a certified document indicates the birth information of a person including mother’s and father’s name and the name given to the child at the time of birth. Once the adoption is finalised, the original birth certificate is amended reflecting the adoptive parents as the child’s parents and the original birth certificate is sealed and in many states remains confidential.

Birth father – The biological father of a child who made an adoption plan for the child, subsequently relinquished the child for adoption, or from whom the child was removed.

Birth grandparents – The biological grandparents of a child.

Birth mother– The biological mother of a child who made an adoption plan for the child, subsequently relinquished the child for adoption, or from whom the child was removed.

Birth parents– The parents, who conceived a child, subsequently relinquished their parental rights to the child or from whom the child was removed. Also referred to as the biological parents.

C

Care Order - When a child is made the subject of a **care order**, the local authority has legal responsibility for the child. This is called parental responsibility. Parents continue to also have parental responsibility.

Chronology – a brief outline of each applicant’s life including addresses, work history and major life events (births, bereavements, stressful and celebratory events)

Closed Adoption – An adoption where there is no contact between biological parents and the child/adoptive parents.

Contact – allowing a person contact with the child to be placed for adoption. Contact may take the form of indirect contact, letters and cards, and background information on the child's progress being sent via a social worker. In some cases there may be some form of direct contact where the child visits or stays with a particular person, or meets with siblings.

Contact Order – a contact order orders the person the child is living with to allow the child to have contact with the person in whose favour the order is made.

Counselling – information, advice and support. The latter may include therapy.

D

DBS Check – Disclosure and Barring Service, formally a Police check. The DBS makes the decision who should be barred from working with vulnerable groups. They maintain two constantly updated lists – one for those barred from working with children, the other for those barred from working with adults. Applicants can't carry out a 'regulated activity', in this instance adopting, if they are barred by the DBS.

Decision Maker – The responsible Individual who makes final decisions for the agency while taking into account the panel recommendations.

F

Fee – includes expenses.

H

Home study/Prospective adopters report – A three-part process required before a child can be placed with a family for adoption or foster care: (1) Written portion includes autobiographies, references, medical reports, financial statements, child abuse and criminal clearances and other written materials; (2) Social work process includes a series of visits in the applicants' home to discuss a variety of issues from the applicants' backgrounds to their motivations to adopt and their understanding of adoption and parenting; (3) Educational process includes training in adoption and parenting issues. The end result of this process is a written document completed by an adoption agency giving a summary of the applicants' family life. This document indicates approval of the applicants for adoption.

I

Information – information recorded or preserved in any form. It includes reports, letters, cards, or information preserved digitally or by other means such as audio-visual material or microfiche.

Intermediary service – a service provided for the purposes of assisting adopted adults and their adult birth relatives in obtaining the information they need to trace a relative and facilitate contact between them.

L

Local authority – any unitary authority, or any county council.

Local authority adoption service – see adoption service.

M

Match or Matching – The process of matching a specific child to approved adopters, taking into account the child's needs, wishes and feelings.

Matching Panel – The panel discussion, whether the proposed match is suitable for the child ending in a recommendation to the **Agency Decision Maker**.

N

National Minimum Standards -- Departmental advice containing the national minimum standards applicable to adoption agencies and adoption support agencies. Departmental advice containing the national minimum standards applicable to adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

O

Open Adoption – An open adoption involves the disclosure of identifying information between the biological parents and the adoptive parents. This may include face to face contact.

P

Parental responsibility—the legal duties, powers and responsibilities and authority a parent has for a child and their property.

A **Placement Order**, made under section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, gives authority to a local authority to place a child with adopters.

Placement - A term used to describe the point in time when the child comes to live with the adoptive parents in their home.

Protected Information – this is defined in section 57(3) of the Act. It covers any section 56 information (see below) that is also identifying information and any information obtained by the adoption agency from the Registrar General on application from an adopted adult under section 79(5) of the Act. It is also any information kept by the agency about an entry relating to an adopted person in the Adoption Contact Register.

Prospective Adopters Report – see home study.

R

Registration of Interest – see application to adopt

Registrar General – a Crown-appointed statutory officer who administers, through the General Register Office, the registration services relating to all births (including adoptions), marriages, civil partnerships and deaths in England and Wales.

Registered adoption society (known also as a voluntary adoption agency) – a voluntary organisation that is an adoption society registered, under Part 2 of the Care Standards Act 2000, by the registration authority responsible for the location within which the society has its principal office.

Regional Adoption Agency – a group of Local Authority Adoption agencies working together under one name to provide adoption service.

S

Section 56 information – information that adoption agencies are required to keep by virtue of section 56 of the Act and AIR Regulations. It includes identifying information and background information about the adopted person, the natural parents, the adoptive parents and others involved in the adoption.

Semi-Open Adoption – A semi-open adoption occurs when the potential biological mother or biological families experience non-identifying interaction with the adoptive family. In most cases,

the interaction is facilitated by a third party who is usually an adoption agency or adoption attorney.

Stage one – The initial process when the agency undertakes checks, including DBS, medical, references, and will take two months.

Stage two -- The second stage includes the home study and process prior to panel.

Social worker – a person who is registered as a social worker with Social Work England or the Care Council for Wales under section 56 of the Care Standards Act 2000 or in a corresponding register maintained under the law of Scotland or Northern Ireland.

V

Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) – see registered adoption society.

W

Welfare Checklist - The criteria considered by court in what is best for the child, set out in the Children Act 1989 (s1(3)).

The seven criteria included in the checklist under:

1. The wishes and feelings of the child concerned
2. The child's physical, emotional and educational needs
3. The likely effect on the child if circumstances changed as a result of the court's decision
4. The child's age, sex, backgrounds and any other characteristics which will be relevant to the court's decision
5. Any harm the child has suffered or may be at risk of suffering
6. Capability of the child's parents (or any other person the courts find relevant) at meeting the child's needs
7. The powers available to the court in the given proceedings

Appendices

- Appendix 1: The Government's values statement which underpins the National Adoption Standards. (Values p.5 National Minimum Adoption Standards)
- Appendix 2: Guidance about health issues
- Appendix 3: Useful Resources Web sites, reading list and contact details

Appendix 1 - The values statement which underpins the National Adoption Standards set by the Government

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

Appendix 2 - Guidance about health issues

- Adoption legislation requires that the welfare of the children is paramount and that the process takes account of the lifelong impact of adoption on the child. If there are physical and or mental health issues which could impact on adoption, please let us know about these from the onset.
- As with many aspects of life, adoption carries risk. As an adoption agency, we have a duty of care to minimise potential risk to the child in being placed for adoption. Given the lifelong implications of adoption for the child and their family, emphasis does have to be given to health promotion and optimising life chances for the child. The likely future health prospects of a long life are therefore important for anyone considering being adoptive parents.
- In considering the potential suitability of enquirers to adopt, the agency will take into account any medical implications which may impact on their likely future health and longevity.
- As a prospective adoptive parent for children it is extremely important for you and for any children who may be placed with you that you have a healthy lifestyle. Most children being placed for adoption have already had significant losses in their lives. Their behaviour may also be lively and challenging. It is our responsibility to ensure that, as potential future parents for them, your life will be as healthy as possible – to enable you to be able to look after them properly.
- Your lifestyle is one factor which influences your health and the length of your active life.
- We must be sure that you have the physical capacity to cope with children; your general level of fitness is important to enable you to withstand the physical demands of bringing up children.
- Research evidence shows that if your lifestyle is unhealthy with a poor diet and little exercise, you may bring up children in a similar way and they will then be at risk of developing health problems themselves. Where health issues exist we will discuss these with you at an early stage.

Factors for consideration:

- Smoking
- Exercise
- Alcohol
- Healthy Eating
- Serious medical conditions, both physical and mental

Smoking

There is considerable evidence to support the fact that children brought up with smokers have significantly increased health problems. Babies in smoking households are more likely to suffer from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and they are more prone to chest and ear problems.

CoramBAAF provide guidance about smoking in relation to adoption and its medical advisers have also provided guidance. It is the agency's policy that children under 5 and those with respiratory problems should not be placed in smoking households when there are equally suitable families who are non-smokers available. Because healthy young children needing adoption are heavily outnumbered by applicants seeking to adopt them, the reality is that applicants who smoke are putting themselves at a disadvantage.

Agencies looking for parents for young children are likely to select from available and equally suitable applicants who do not smoke. Regarding older children, it is known that the example set by adults has a stronger influence than health education on children's smoking habits - so if you smoke, the children are more likely to do so.

There is considerable research evidence to show that children brought up with smokers have significantly increased health problems. We are also concerned about the effect of your smoking on your own health and how this might affect any children placed in your family. The following statistics might help you understand our concerns about your health as a prospective adopter if you smoke:

- 30% of all deaths in the age group 40-65 and 20% of all coronary heart disease deaths are associated with smoking.
- Out of 10,000 young adults who smoke regularly 250 will be killed by tobacco.

We advise you to have quit smoking for a year. Help is available if you would like to give up or decrease your smoking and you can contact your GP. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/10-self-help-tips-to-stop-smoking/>

If you really cannot give up smoking, your application may still be considered, but you will not be considered for children under 5, or for those with health issues which would be affected by the effects of smoking. There are likely to be many similarly suitable prospective adopters who do not smoke. There are however many older children requiring skilled adoptive parents and you may have many excellent qualities for these children.

Exercise

Exercise is now accepted as being a major contributor to a healthy life, both for adults and children and you are advised to take regular exercise for your own health and also as an example to any children placed with you.

Alcohol intake

Your medical form will include details of your alcohol intake. The current government recommendations for maximum weekly alcohol intake are 14 units for a woman and 21 units for a man (one unit being the equivalent of a glass of wine or half pint of beer.)

An excessive alcohol intake is associated with many health issues including liver disease and mental health problems. It can also be associated with social and family problems and violence in households. Many children needing adoption come from these kinds of backgrounds and it is therefore particularly important that their new homes are stable and safe.

Weight problems/obesity

Someone who is overweight has a weight above the desirable level at which the greatest length of life can be expected. A scientific formula has been devised so that people of particular weights and height can be compared and categorised. The index is called Body Mass Index (BMI) and is the weight in kilograms divided by the height in metres squared. The desirable BMI is 20-25.

People with BMI over 25 have an increased risk of high blood pressure, chest problems, arthritis, diabetes, heart conditions, gall stones and back problems. People with BMI over 30 are clinically obese. There is a sharp increase in mortality (increased risk of sudden death) mostly from heart conditions. A BMI over 30 is associated with a considerable high risk of angina, sudden death, high blood pressure and all cardiovascular disorders (atherosclerosis). The length of time a person has been overweight is also a factor. If the person has been overweight for more than 15 years, there is an 85% risk of increased mortality.

Morbid obesity

People with a BMI of over 40 are in the 'morbidly obese' range. This occurs when a person has a weight greater than 200% of the ideal weight, or is 45kg over the ideal weight or weighs more than 136kg. The mortality rate is increased 10 times for younger people who are morbidly obese. There is an increased risk of pulmonary embolus, pneumonia, pancreatitis, serious accident, wound infections after surgery, gall stones and arthritis. Cardiovascular episodes account for 50% of deaths.

People with morbid obesity have an increased risk of sleep apnoea associated with sudden unexpected death during sleep, especially common in men. This group of people may have low self-esteem and higher rates of psychological problems. They can also suffer from social discrimination and may feel stigmatised by the public. Morbid obesity therefore raises major issues and would be of great significance in the adoption process.

Guidance from the Agency's Medical Advisers would be:

- Those in the 'morbidly obese' category (BMI of 40 and over) are advised to seek medical advice and to reduce their weight and BMI as a minimum to below 40, before proceeding further with the adoption process. Those with BMI over 30 should consider issues of diet, lifestyle, exercise and general health and discuss these with their general practitioner as appropriate.
- There may be other serious medical conditions, physical and/or mental which may have implications for adoption. These will be explored and discussed according to individual circumstances.
- Counselling can be sought to explain the dangers related to any of these or other health issues, in so far as they may affect the future wellbeing and health promotion of the enquirers themselves and for young and vulnerable children who need adoption.
- There is no 'blanket ban' on any groupings of people, without looking into individual circumstances. There may be instances where the agency's medical adviser provides advice in relation to matters of weight, smoking, alcohol intake or other health related issues. Such advice may require evidence of sustained change in lifestyle habits before the agency can proceed further with the adoption process.
- If, following advice and counselling, enquirers choose not to make recommended changes or do not accept the advice and counselling offered, the agency may decide not to take an adoption application.

Appendix 3 - Useful resources

All books are available either from the CoramBAAF <http://corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop> or any main online booksellers. Please inform us if you have any difficulties finding any books from this list.

Books good to read in stage 1 and 2:

- Colby Pearce - 'A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder'
- Margo Sunderland – 'Conversations That Matter: Talking with Children and Teenagers in Ways That Help'
- Richard Rose – 'Innovative Therapeutic Life Story Work: Developing Trauma-Informed Practice for Working with Children, Adolescents and Young Adults'
- Sarah Lloyd - Improving Sensory Processing in Traumatized Children: Practical Ideas to Help Your Child's Movement, Coordination and Body Awareness
- Sarah Naish- 'Therapeutic Parenting in a Nutshell: Positives and Pitfalls' and 'A-Z of therapeutic parenting'
- Vivien Norris & Helen Rodwell- 'parenting with therapy'

Other useful books;

'Adoption conversations' by Renee Wolfs.

'First Steps in parenting a child who hurts: Tiddlers and Toddlers' by Caroline Archer

'Next steps in parenting the child who hurts: Tykes and Teens' by Caroline Archer

'New families, Old scripts' by Caroline Archer

'Nurturing Attachments' by Kim Golding.

'Parenting Adopted Teens' - Rachel Staff.

'Related by Adoption; a handbook for grandparents and other relatives' by Hedi Argent

'The Incredible Years' by Caroline Webster-Stratton

'The Pink guide to adoption for lesbians and gay men' by Nichola Hill

'The Science of Parenting: How Today's Brain Research Can Help You Raise Happy, Emotionally Balanced Children' by Margot Sunderland

'What every Parent needs to know' by Margot Sunderland

'Teenagers and Attachment; Helping Adolescents Engage with Life and Learning - Edited by Andrea Perry

Examples from the 'Parenting Matters' Series: CoramBAAF

- 'Parenting a child affected by parental Substance Misuse' by Donald Forrester with Sally Baker and Jane Hartley

- 'Parenting a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder' by Brian Jacobs and Lorna Miles
- 'Parenting a child with Mental Health Issues' by Catherine Jackson
- 'Parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder' by Paul Carter
- 'Parenting a child with developmental delay' by Pamela Bartram and Sue and Jim Clifford
- 'Parenting a child affected by domestic violence' by Hedy Cleaver
- 'Parenting a child with toileting issues' by Kathryn Fenton and Ellie Johnson
- 'Parenting a child affected by sexual abuse' by Biddy Youell
- 'Parenting a child with emotional and behavioural difficulties' by Dan Hughes
- 'Parenting a child who has experienced trauma' by Dan Hughes
- 'Parenting a child with food and eating issues' by Jay Vaughan and Alan Burnell
- 'Parenting a child with sleep issues' by Jay Vaughan and Alan Burnell
- 'Attachment, trauma and resilience' Kate Cairns and Brian Cairns
- 'Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption' Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek
- 'Parenting a child with difficulties in learning caused by trauma' Anne Hurley with Kathleen Grace

simple videos:- (hover over text for hyperlink)

How a child's brain develops through early experiences (4 mins)

Human Connectedness and Attunement What Brain Science Has to Say About Love (8 mins 54 secs)

Trauma in the classroom: Learning lessons for neglected and abused children (5 mins 12 secs)

What is Therapeutic Parenting? (10 mins) Sarah Naish 'Inspire' training group

A whistle stop tour of the 'BUSS' Model. Sarah Lloyd, sensory Occupational Therapist (9 mins)

F.A.S.D Makes Me, Me (4 mins)

Books for children or to share with children- can be useful for birth children too

'Chester and Daisy Move On' by Angela Lidster (story about 2 bear cubs who are adopted)

'Dennis Duckling' series by P Sambrooks

'Tia's Wishes' by Helen Kahn (moving on to adoption)

'Tyler's Wishes' by Helen Kahn (moving on to adoption)

'Feeling Safe – Tina's Story' by Sheila Byrne and Leigh Chambers (about a girl who has to go into foster care)

'Living with a new family: Nadia and Rashid's Story' by Sheila Byrne and Leigh Chambers (about a brother and sister being adopted)

'Belonging doesn't mean forgetting: Nathan's Story' by Sheila Byrne and Leigh Chambers (4 yr old being adopted)

'Hoping for the best: Jack's Story' by Sheila Byrne and Leigh Chambers (an adoption that didn't work out)

The "Billy Says" Series - Joanne Alper (explores a child's feelings during her journey from an abusive home to a loving adoptive family.)

'Hey You; An Empowering celebration of growing up black' by Dapo Adeola

The "Nutmeg gets" series by Judith Foxon (titles on being adopted, managing painful feelings, contact issues, post-adoption support, problems in the school environment, and sibling adoption.)

'Spark learns to fly' by Judith Foxon (siblings going into care)

Useful websites

Adopter Hub: online support and training. <https://www.theadopterhub.org/>

Adoption UK: register becoming members and receive monthly magazine Adoption Today with articles about adoption, also access to free lending library and other resources.

www.adoptionuk.org

Beacon House therapeutic services and Trauma team. Excellent site for resources about developmental trauma and loss, for families and schools.

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

Central Government website: search using key words on numerous topics including adoption

www.direct.gov.uk

Coram BAAF: The Adoption & Fostering Academy is the leading membership organisation dedicated to improving outcomes for children and young people in care by supporting the agencies and professionals who work with them. www.corambaaf.org.uk

FAB parents: founded by Helen Drinkwater, F.A.B Parents (Foster, Adoptive and Birth parents) offers a road map and resources for adoptive and foster parents and the professionals

<https://fabparents.co.uk/>

FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) <https://nationalfasd.org.uk/>

Family Lives: General parenting website www.familylives.org.uk

Fertility Friends: Links and discussion on infertility, adoption, parenting after infertility.
www.fertilityfriends.co.uk

First4Adoption: is the dedicated information service for people interested in adopting a child in England (some e-learning too). www.first4adoption.org.uk

Home for Good: Church based initiative to give information on adoption and fostering and encourage recruitment. www.homeforgood.org.uk

NHS: Some children who are adopted from care may have additional or special needs. These can result from physical, mental or emotional difficulties or learning disabilities.
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/adoption-and-fostering/Pages/adoption-and-fostering-home.aspx

New Family Social: New Family Social is the UK network for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) adoptive and foster families. Whether you are still deciding how to form your family, are on the way to being a parent, or are busy getting on with family life, you can find others near you in the same situation to share your journey. www.newfamilysocial.org.uk

PAC UK: offers information, advice and counselling for pre-adoption, post adoption and permanency. www.pac-uk.org

Post Institute: A family-centred approach for helping children with challenging behaviours by Bryan Post <http://postinstitute.com/>

South East centre against sexual assault (SECASA) useful articles relating to trauma, abuse and the impact on children. www.secasa.com.au/articles/tag/child-abuse

Two good mums podcasts Laura Anderson, birth mother who has direct contact with her sons and adopters www.twogoodmums.co.uk
<https://twitter.com/lifeoflaurauk/status/1450861326599921670?s=21>