



Kent County Council

Adoption Service

Useful information for those thinking about adoption

Information Pack

This pack is aimed at potential adopters who are exploring the option of becoming an Adopter through Kent County Council.

The detailed information contained in the pack is specific to adopting a looked after child from Kent and the advice is for prospective adopters. We aim to answer some of your initial questions about adoption.

Our website www.kent.gov.uk/adoption also contains information that you may find helpful.

What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of giving a child the love and security of a family life, when they cannot live with the family they were born into. It is a legal procedure in which all the parental rights and responsibility are transferred to the adopters.

Once the Adoption Order is made in Court, adopters have full legal responsibility for the child. Legally, the child takes the adopters' surname and has the same inheritance rights as any birth child of the adopters.

Who can adopt?

Legally you need to be at least 21 years old to adopt a child.

Following the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 adopters can be single, married, in an unmarried partnership or same sex couples.

We actively welcome and encourage adopters from different cultures, faiths and ethnic backgrounds to apply to adopt in Kent. This recognises that Kent is a large county with a number of different communities from different social and economic backgrounds.

Why do children need adopting?

A number of children in social care are unable to return to their birth families for a variety of reasons. For the majority of these children a permanent adoptive home is likely to best meet their needs.

Adopters will need to understand the children's background and accept their upbringing may have been difficult. The majority of children requiring adoption will have come into the care of the local authority through a court order because of an abusive or neglectful childhood. These children may not have received sufficient, consistent or appropriate care and attention which will impact on their development.

Bringing up children is rarely plain sailing. However, adopters tell us that seeing their children thrive is immensely rewarding as well as challenging.

A very small number of children come into care as new born babies and whilst they will not be affected by the parenting they have received they may be affected by their birth mother's lifestyle during pregnancy.

Nowadays, children needing adoption are likely to be:

- aged two years and upwards (there are far fewer babies available) and/or
- need to be placed with a brother or sister.

Prior to moving to their adoptive parents, children will usually have been in foster care.

What do the children need?

All children need:

- love and acceptance
- security, safety and consistency
- physical care
- appropriate role models
- attention and stimulation
- fun, laughter, someone to turn to
- clear boundaries and acceptable discipline.

Would I make a good adoptive parent?

Children who need adoption have a birth family and usually a complex history both before and after entering social care, this will have life long effects.

We need a whole range of parents to adopt them but adoptive parents ideally need to be:

- adaptable and emotionally resilient
- able to value and understand the children's past experiences
- open-minded and can empathise with the trauma and loss the child will have gone through
- optimistic, energetic and have a sense of fun and enjoy children's company
- sensitive, tolerant and have a generosity of spirit
- able to have an acceptance of children as they are
- willing to learn and seek and establish a support network
- able to remain committed to the child through good and challenging times.

These qualities are often found in people who have developed good relationships and have a real interest and involvement with others. Sometimes, what they have learned from their own life experiences contributes to these extra qualities. Adopters need to accept that it may take time and a lot of effort before they start to see any results as parents to an adopted child. Being a parent, whether by birth or adoption, is not an easy job and parenting can be both challenging and rewarding.

What will I need to consider?

These are some of the important questions we will ask you to consider if you decide to make an adoption application:

- What knowledge of and experience with children do you have? Are there ways in which you can increase this if you feel you have little direct experience?
- What understanding do you have of adoption and the issues facing adoptive families?
- Are you willing to learn more?
- Do you feel able to take on board an adopted child's background and past history in a way that will help them understand why they were adopted?
- Would you be prepared to meet and maintain a link with important people from the child's past?
- If you have been unable to have children of your own, to what extent have you been able to overcome this? Why did you decide to consider adoption as an alternative way to bring children into your family?

When is it a good time to consider adoption?

When your lives are settled and no major life events are about to happen

It is not a good time if:

- you have suffered a recent bereavement
- fertility treatment was only completed within the last year
- your family are undergoing a time of major change e.g. moving house, changing job, your child starting a new school, etc
- you are experiencing financial difficulties.

How will I be helped to prepare for adopting a child?

Kent County Council will provide:

- advice and information at the outset to help you consider whether adoption is right for your family
- an Understanding Adoption Day to help you consider whether adoption is right for you
- a four day preparation course to introduce the main considerations involved in adoption
- additional information on all aspects of adoption during the assessment
- the chance to meet adopters with Kent County Council
- access to training events on adoptive parenting such as explaining adoption to children.

What support will I have?

Kent County Council aims to provide support to our adopters at every step of the process in becoming adoptive parents, from first enquiry to legal adoption, and beyond.

Before a child joins their new family we provide prospective adopters with:

- a duty adoption worker to speak to you about your interest
- adoption information days to help you have a better understanding of the challenges of adoption
- subsequent home visits to discuss your circumstances in private, prior to proceeding further
- an Adoption Social Worker allocated to you from the beginning of the preparation course through the individual assessment and the adoption process until any child who joins your family has been legally adopted
- carefully planned introductions to a child who joins your family
- a written adoption support plan for each child who is placed for adoption, giving details of all the arrangements to support the child and their new family
- an assessment of practical support required dependent upon the child's needs
- consideration of financial support.

Every parent needs support from time to time and there are local and national adoption support services. Kent County Council has an Adoption Support Service which provides a range of services to adopters, adoptive children and adults, their birth families and relatives.

What is contact in adoption?

For most adopted children it is beneficial to have continued links with important people from their past and this is likely to include a member or members of their birth family including siblings. For some children this may be in the form of:

- Occasional correspondence through the adoption agency (your address and identifying information will be kept confidential)
- Face to face contact arrangements with birth relatives or important people in the child's life.

We look for adopters who understand the importance of these arrangements in supporting a child's sense of identity and understanding about the past and that the child's need for contact may change as they grow older.

Kent County Council Adoption Process

We will help and guide you at all stages of your application to adopt.

1. Information pack

When you Contact us about adoption, we will send you an information pack. Contact details will be included if you wish to speak to an experienced adoption worker about your particular circumstances. Once you have spoken with the Duty Social Worker, they will consult with their manager and it will be agreed if you are ready to be invited to an Understanding Adoption Day.

2. Understanding Adoption Day

You and your partner, if you have one, will be expected to attend and participate in a one day Understanding Adoption Day. These are held regularly around the county and will enable you to increase your knowledge about adoption. You will explore your reasons for considering adopting and this will give you an opportunity to decide whether it is the right time to continue. You will learn more about the process and hear from other people who have adopted a child with Kent County Council.

3. Initial home visit

If you decide to continue, you will need to return the form from the Understanding Adoption Day and we will arrange for a member of the adoption team to visit you at home to discuss adopting in greater detail. We can consider whether there are particular issues to explore further, the adoption social worker will consult with their manager and potential adopters are then invited to make their formal application. If accepted they are invited to a Preparation Course.

4. Preparation course

You and your partner, if you have one, will be expected to attend and participate in a four day Preparation Course. The course teaches about adoption and involves large and small group discussions. The course encourages awareness of the feelings and actions of everyone involved in adoption, especially the needs of adopted children.

5. Adoption assessment, references and medicals

If you decide to continue, an adoption social worker will undertake an adoption addressment with you.. You will have the opportunity to discuss issues surrounding adoption and talk everything through together. It will involve gathering information about you and your situation. You will be asked to have a medical with your GP and various checks and references will be requested, including police checks. We will also ask to contact previous partners, particularly if the care of children was involved in your relationship. At the conclusion of the assessment a full written report will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do people adopt?
 - Desire to have children
 - Desire to have further children
 - Wish to provide a family for a child in need.
2. Who can adopt with Kent County Council?
 - Legally adopters must be 21 years old or more
 - All sections of the community and all kinds of backgrounds are welcomed particularly applicants with different ethnic backgrounds
 - Adoptive parents can be single people or couples in long-term relationships
 - Unmarried partners (of the same or different gender) will be able to jointly adopt a child.
3. I'm on my own. Can I adopt a child?
 - Yes - this has always been possible
 - Children can thrive with single carers
 - Adoption enquiries are welcomed from single carers.
4. I would like to care for a child, what is the difference between adoption and fostering?
 - Fostering is often a temporary arrangement and usually it is planned to return a child to the family home
 - Foster carers share the responsibility for a child with the local authority and the child's parents.
5. We are a white English couple. Can we adopt a black or mixed heritage child?
 - Kent will try at first for adopters who are of similar racial and cultural origin to the child needing a new family. When this causes unreasonable delay to placement we will consider adopters who have the ability to value and promote the child's racial and cultural background despite being of a different origin.
6. Where do the children come from?
 - Usually Kent children
 - Some children may come from our consortium partners (Medway, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Bexley and Bromley)
 - Occasionally from further a field
 - Have been living with foster carers
 - Usually separated from own family by court order.
7. How long will it take until we are approved as adopters?
 - The National Minimum Standards for Adoption state that the timescale for approval of prospective adopters is that the period from the acceptance of your formal application to approval should be no more than eight months. However, there may be good reasons for slowing down or putting the assessment on hold if there has been a sudden change of circumstances for applicants, such as bereavement.

8. What is involved in the assessment?

- The assessment or (or home study) is an opportunity for you to learn more about adoption and for us to consider your suitability to adopt and what children you would be best parenting. This process will take several months and is an opportunity for you to think through carefully whether or not adoption is right for you. You will be asked to have a medical with your own GP.

The following checks and references will also be undertaken:

- Criminal Records Bureau
- Local child protection agency
- Personal referees
- Family reference
- Employment references
- Financial reference if self employed
- Significant previous partners
- Adult children.

Your Adoption Social Worker will complete the prospective adopters' report (BAAF PAR). This is then presented during an Adoption Panel Meeting (to which applicants are invited to attend). There follows the Agency decision maker approval.

9. What costs are involved in adoption?

- The usual expenses of raising children
- No cost or charge for the assessment
- Medical fees (approximately £75 per applicant) and the cost of any medical updates
- Legal costs are paid by the agency when birth parents do not agree with the proposed adoption.

10. First steps to Adoption?

- Contact a Duty Social Worker to discuss your interest, on the telephone number given in your accompanying letter
- Invited to attend an Understanding Adoption Day
- Initial home visit to be arranged
- Attend a preparation training course
- Home study assessment
- Adoption panel for approval as prospective adoptive carers.

11. How long will it take for a child to be placed with you?

- It is difficult to predict, and is dependent on the children needing placement and the range of children you are able to parent
- Most agencies are short of adopters for the range of children they need to place (far fewer adopters for children over four years, larger sibling groups and children of all ages with additional complex needs and children from ethnic minority communities)
- We aim to find the right adopters for children within a few months, but sometimes it can take longer to ensure the best match is made
- Kent County Council also has strong links with other local authorities in the South East, through the Adoption Consortium. If a suitable match for a child cannot be found within Kent, we will work closely with our Consortium partners to avoid delay for children
- Approved adopters have the right to be referred to the National Adoption Register after three months
- The adopter's approval is reviewed annually and advice given if no placement has been made.

12. What should I do to learn more about adopting?

Becoming an adopter is a two way process – we will expect you to be active in finding out about adoption issues. We will help as much as we can and in addition you can:

- Talk with adoptive parents or anyone with direct experience of adoption
- Increase experience with children
- Read some books with an adoption theme
- Watch TV programmes on adoption topics
- Search the internet
- Join Adoption UK
- Look for related magazine and newspaper articles.

Some general books on adoption

The Adopters Handbook, Information, Resources & Services for Adoptive Parents

by Amy Neil Slater (BAAF 2006 3rd Edition)

A practical guide for adopters

The Adoption Experience

by Ann Morris (BAAF 2003)

A collection of personal adoption accounts primarily from the adopters' point of view.

Adopting a Child: A Guide for People Interested In Adoption

by Jennifer Lord (BAAF)

Beginners guide for anyone thinking of adoption.

Adopters on Adoption

by David Howe (1996)

A collection of first hand accounts on some of the main issues and challenges facing adoptive parents.

An Adoption Diary

by Maria James (BAAF 2006)

A personal view of the adoption process, right from the start, written by an adoptive parent

Approaching Fatherhood, a Guide for Adoptive Dads & Others

by Paul May (BAAF 2005)

A male perspective on adoption

Considering Adoption

by Sarah Biggs (Sheldon Press 2000)

A comprehensive and concise source of information for those thinking about adoption or those who have recently had a child placed.

In Search Of Belongings—Reflections by Trans-racially Adopted People

by Perlita Harris (BAAF2006)

Anthology of poetry, artwork, autobiography and oral testimony

Lesbian and Gay Fostering & Adoption

by Stephen Hicks & Janet McDermott (1999)

Gives an insight into adoption

Looking After Our Own, The Stories Of Black & Asian Adopters

by Hope Messiah (BAAF 2005)

For anyone considering adoption especially with different ethnic backgrounds

Attachment, Trauma and Resilience, Therapeutic Caring for Children

by Kate Cairns (BAAF 2006)

Offers an insight into family life with children who have experienced attachment difficulties, loss, abuse and trauma

Raising Adopted Children

by Lois Ruskai Melina (Harper Collins 1998)

Readable chapters on all aspects of raising children who have joined the family by adoption. An American publication originally, the book crosses the Atlantic successfully.

Real Parents, Real Children: Parenting the Adopted Child

by Holly Van Gulden and Lisa Bartles-Rabb (1995 available from BAAF)

Published in America originally it is an indication of it's helpfulness that this book can now obtained through BAAF. Holly's family fostered and adopted when she was a child and she has done the same for her own family, as well as becoming a respected psychologist and therapist with children.

Related By Adoption, a Handbook for Grandparents & Other Relatives

by Heidi Argent (BAAF 2004)

A brief handbook for grandparents-to-be and other relatives

Whatever Happened to Adam?

by Heidi Argent (BAAF 1998)

Stories of 20 young people with disabilities and the families who chose to care for them

Advice and useful publications can be obtained from:

BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering)
Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Road, London EC1N 8TS
Telephone: 020 7421 2600
Website: www.baaf.org.uk

Adoption UK
46 The Green, South Bar Street, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9AB
Tel: 01295 752240
Email: admin@adoptionuk.org.uk
www.adoptionuk.org.uk

Thank you for your interest in the Kent County Council Adoption Service.

Notes

Notes

This booklet is available in other formats and languages please contact
08458 247 247 for more information.