



Bedfordshire  
county council



# Adoption Services - From Approval Onwards

Approved - What Next?

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# Approved – What Next?

**Congratulations on your approval as a prospective adoptive parent. We hope this booklet will help to explain what happens next.**

## Choosing Families for Children – How it's Done

As soon as you have been approved your name will be added to our adopters' waiting list.

We will send you a form which you can use to refer yourself/ves to The Adoption Register for England and Wales if in 3 months' time there is not a possible match with a Bedfordshire Child being considered for you. Except in special cases where you are offering a particularly unusual resource, we would not expect you to be referred to The Register for at least 3 months after approval.

It is our aim, where possible, to match Bedfordshire Children with our adopters. It is much easier for everyone, especially the child, if he or she does not have to make a new start in a completely different part of the country away from all that is familiar.

After the Adoption Panel, when adoption has been agreed as the plan for a child, Adoption staff meet with the child's Social Worker. At this meeting the child's needs will be clarified, steps of planning identified and we will begin to consider which adoptive families might be suitable to meet the needs of the child or group of brothers and sisters.

The birth family, the Social Worker and the child/ren will all have ideas about what they want for the future.

We like to offer the child's Social Worker a 'shortlist' of families who might be right for the child.

The families' Form F's are sent to the child's Social Worker and the Adoption Social Worker sees the written information on the child.

There may be informal discussions between the Social Workers to clarify any areas of uncertainty before the Adoption Social Worker for the families being considered, the Family Finding Social Worker and the child's Social Worker meet for a formal pre-matching meeting.





This meeting considers the child's needs in great detail and the capacity of each family to meet these particular needs. Some of these needs are issues about religion and ethnicity, others relate to needs to do with disability or attachment for example.

We need to ensure we have the Medical Advisor's report so that we have key medical information available.

We will only identify a family and consider a potential match if the view of the professionals involved is that the family can meet all of the child's identified essential needs. All being well, as a result of this Pre-Matching Meeting, a family likely to be well equipped to meet the child's needs will be identified.



Before approaching a family we also try to gauge how likely it is that the Court will sanction our plan for adoption.

Most children placed for adoption now have been removed from the care of their parents by a Court, which considers them at risk of significant harm.

A Children's Guardian will have been appointed to represent the child's interests and views to the Court. We would usually want to know that the Children's Guardian is supporting the adoption plan before we approach a family.

## How Will I Be Approached?

First your Adoption Social Worker will visit you to discuss the child and his/her needs. Usually the report on the child (Child Permanence Report) and the Medical Report will be left for you to consider.

We will ask you to acknowledge receipt of the documents in writing and confirm that you will keep them safe, treat the information as confidential and return them to us if the child does not come to live with you.

We will want to think carefully about the child and his/her circumstances before letting your Adoption Social Worker know if you want to take the discussion further.

If you want to be considered for this child, the Social Workers for the child will come to visit you with your Adoption Social Worker. There will probably be lots of questions you want to ask – you might want to make a list in advance but we also suggest you make some notes during the meeting.

This meeting has two purposes. You will be gaining information to help you decide if you want to be considered for the child(ren). The child's Social Worker will also have questions for you, as he/she will be deciding if you could be the right parent(s) for the child he/she is responsible for.



If the child's Social Worker decides you are not the right family for the child that can be very disappointing but it is a situation which adopters need to know can arise.

If it is a young child with a fairly straightforward history you may be sure after the meeting that you want to go ahead. If the circumstances are more complicated you are likely to need more information before deciding if this is what you want.

The Social Workers may arrange for you to have written reports, e.g. from schools or a psychologist, and you may well need to talk to doctors, psychologists, therapists or teachers working with the child. We may show you a video of the child to help you think what he/she would be like to live with.

It may be helpful for you to talk to the child's foster carers who can fill in lots of detail about day to day life with the child.

Once everyone is sure they want to proceed, there will be a Matching Meeting, chaired by an Adoption Manager, where the child's Social Worker, Family Finding Social Worker and your own Adoption Social Worker will decide whether to recommend a potential match to the Adoption Panel. If a match is recommended you will be sent an Adoption Placement Report, a Restrictions on Parental Responsibility Form and an Adoption Support Plan. You need to consider these documents carefully and have up to 10 days to complete, sign and return them to your Social Worker. The Match must be considered by the Adoption Panel to see if they agree with the Matching Meeting recommendation. You will be invited to attend the Adoption Panel as you were for your approval.

As happened when you were approved, the Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker, which he/she must take into account when deciding if a particular family are right for a particular child.





## Legal Proceedings

Now the Adoption and Children Act 2002 is fully implemented, unless parents are agreeing to adoption a Placement Order will be necessary before we can place a child with adopters. Even if the parents are agreeing they will need to sign formal consent documents before we place a child with an adoptive family.

Occasionally we approve adopters and line everyone up for a placement only to find that the Court does not agree our plan.

This situation is clearly very distressing for adopters and your Adoption Social Worker will support you if you end up in this situation. Unfortunately, so that delay is not created for children, we need to ask you as the adults to take some risks, knowing that you may get hurt.

## Introductions

Once the Agency Decision Maker has agreed, 'the match' can go ahead and introductions can begin.

You may already have a photo and even a video of the child but at this stage the family book you have prepared for the child/ren and maybe a video of you and your family can be given to the child to help them to get to know you.

You will be invited to an Adoption Placement Planning Meeting where arrangements will be made for the introduction period when you and the child are getting to know each other. This meeting will also be attended by the Foster Carers and the Social Workers allocated to each party.

At the meeting an Adoption Placement Plan will be prepared which covers all the arrangements for placing the child/ren with you. You will have a copy of the plan and, before the child is actually placed with you, you need to confirm to us in writing that you are happy for the placement to go ahead.

Your first meeting with the child is usually kept brief and will be in the foster home. Gradually we increase the time a child spends with you in your home.

We know from research and experience that introductions are a stressful and tiring time for everyone – often a time of lots of highs and lows – but it is important to take them steadily.

The length of introductions will be from a few days for a young baby up to several weeks for an older child. During the introductions not only will you be able to get to know the child but you can get a lot of helpful information from the Foster Carers.

The purpose of the introductions is two fold: not only to move the child gradually to you but also to let everyone check out if it really is the right placement for all concerned.

You need to be in close touch with your Adoption Social Worker and to tell him/her how you are feeling. It is much better to pull out during introductions than to have a child placed and then realise it is not right.

Midway through the introductions there will be a Review to check how everyone is doing, to review the introduction plan and confirm the placement date.



## Post Placement Support

Once a child has joined your family you and they will need support as you adjust. The child's Social Worker will visit and will need to see the child alone as well as with you.

Your Adoption Social Worker will also be available to support you with visits and to help negotiate for other services your family may need.

The following may form part of your support:

### Individual Visits

Your Adoption Social Worker will continue to visit to offer help, advice and a listening ear while you settle down together.

The child's Social Worker will call to offer similar help to your child. This Social Worker is also responsible for supervising the child's health and welfare until the day comes when you become the child's legal parent.

Regular Review Meetings (see page 9) will be held until the adoption is finalised. These are opportunities to check that all is going according to plan.

### Groups

You may have joined Adoption UK, which holds group meetings locally. You will also be offered the opportunity to be referred to the Adoption UK "Buddy Scheme" and receive telephone support from a trained adoptive parent. You may choose to take this up at any stage in the process.

## Training

As soon as you are approved your Adoption Social Worker will give your details to our training officer and arrange for you to receive a list of our training courses for carers and adopters. We think you will find them useful and helpful at any stage from approval onwards. This opportunity will continue after the Adoption Order has been made.





## Adoption Financial Support

It is possible to receive financial help for some children throughout their childhood. This financial support depends not just on the child's needs but also the adopter's income and outgoings, which are assessed.

Children who require financial support are typically those who are more difficult to care for because of disability or emotional needs, or are part of a sibling group.

If you wish to apply for adoption financial support your Social Worker will request that the means test forms are sent to you.



One off grants may also be available subject to assessment to meet a particular need of an adopted child.

We would normally expect you to provide basic furniture and equipment for your adopted child but Bedfordshire will pay a Settling in Grant for each child we place for adoption.

We will also reimburse for expenses incurred during introductions i.e. mileage and occasionally other expenses as agreed by the Adoption & Permanence Support Team Manager.

## Benefits and Tax Credits

We advise you to claim Child Benefit and Tax Credits as soon as a child is placed with you for adoption.

Your Adoption Social Worker can refer you to our Welfare Benefits Service who can assess and inform you of your entitlement to benefits.

If you qualify you will also want to apply for Statutory Adoption Pay. You can access information from [www.berr.gov.uk](http://www.berr.gov.uk) or by ringing 0845 0150010.

If one partner is taking Statutory Adoption Leave, the other may want to claim the 2 weeks Statutory Paternity Pay.

## NHS Registration

We shall be sending your GP a report on the child's health so that he or she has the necessary information to take over the health care of the child.

Until an Adoption Order is granted the child will need to be registered and known by his/her complete birth name.



## Statutory Child Care Reviews

Until a child is formally adopted he or she will remain subject to child care reviews (known as LAC reviews or Looked After Children Reviews) as he or she will still be formally looked after by the Local Authority.

These reviews are chaired by a Review Manager and are to check that everything is being done as it should to meet a child's needs and to review the Adoption Support Plan. Your Social Worker will be able to tell you more about these reviews.

You will be part of these reviews once a child is placed for adoption with you and we are likely to ask if the review can be held in your home.

The child will also be involved in a way appropriate to his/her age and wishes.

The first review needs to take place within 4 weeks of the child coming to live with you. Another review is needed within 3 months of the first and thereafter at intervals to be agreed – but at least every 6 months.

## The Adoption Register for England and Wales and The Consortium

When you are approved as adopters we will send you a form which you can use in the future for referral to the Adoption Register.

Occasionally if you are offering an unusual resource, by agreement with you, we will refer you to the Register at once so that you can be considered for children nationwide who are waiting for adoptive families.

In most cases after 3 months if no child has been matched with you by Bedfordshire and we are not at the point of identifying a possible 'match' for you among the children we know are likely to need adoption in the near future, then we will

ask you if we can refer you to our Consortium. This will mean you can be considered not just for Bedfordshire children, but also for children our partners in Luton, Milton Keynes, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire know are awaiting adoption.

At the same time, if you so wish, your details can be put on the Register.

As a result you would be considered for children from all over the country. You yourselves may at this point want to look in the journals like 'Be My Parent' and 'Adoption Today' to see if you think you could parent any of the children featured.

If you are considering a child from anywhere other than Bedfordshire, elements of the matching process will differ as another agency will be involved.

Your own Adoption Social Worker will work closely with you throughout the matching process and after a child is placed.

## Review of Approval

If you have been approved for a year and a child has not been placed we will need to carry out a review of your approval. We will also need to review your approval if there has been a significant change in your circumstances. Reviews are chaired by an Adoption Manager, usually in your home. If for any reason continuation of approval is not recommended, Panel will consider your case and you will be invited to submit your views and to attend.



## Update of Checks

Your medicals and CRB disclosures need to be updated at least every 2 years.

## The Legal Process to Adoption

Legally, you can not submit your application to adopt to a Court until a child has lived with you for 10 weeks. However, in practical terms you need to have some time to settle into being a family before you make your formal application to a Court.

Adopters can choose to apply to the Family Proceedings (Magistrates) Court or the County Court.

If your child is 'looked after' by Bedfordshire County Council we will reimburse the cost of the Court fee as long as we are supporting your application.

Your Adoption Social Worker will assist you in completing the application forms.

You should normally ask the Court for a serial number so that your name will be kept confidential.

When completed, your three copies of the application form, together with your marriage certificate (if appropriate), any decree absolute, the child's birth certificate and the required fee should be forwarded to the Court.

The cost of the application fee will be reimbursed once your paperwork is lodged with the Court.

The Court will also want copies of the Court Orders relating to the child's legal status. The child's Social Worker will help with this.

The Court will ask Children's Services to submit a report which covers all the circumstances leading to the adoption. This is the 'Annex A Report', which is completed by your Adoption Social Worker and the child's Social Worker together.

If the case is complex there may be a Directions Hearing, otherwise you will be notified of the date for an Adoption Hearing.

The child must attend. If you wish close family or friends to attend Court with you, please discuss this with your Adoption Social Worker.

## The Adoption Hearing

The Hearing will be quite informal and may be over quite quickly. You will usually be allowed to take photographs.

After the Hearing your personal documents will be returned to you in due course.

Many adoptive parents hold their own celebrations after the adoption hearing.

## Adoption Orders and Certificates

The Court will send you a copy of the Adoption Order. This shows your child's birth name, as well as his or her adoptive name, and also shows the names of the birth parent(s).

You should keep this document in a safe place.

The Registrar General is required by law to keep a record of all adoptions. He will send you a short certificate which shows only your child's adoptive name, and he will explain how you can get a full certificate if you want one.



The certificate has details of the Adoption Order and shows you as your child's adoptive parents. These adoption certificates take the place of birth certificates for legal purposes.

The full certificate notes that it is a copy of an entry in the Adopted Children's Register. The short certificate does not show this information.

## Talking to your Child about being Adopted

All adopted children need to be brought up knowing about their adoption from an early age.

If you are adopting a baby or toddler, you will probably find it easier to start telling your child before he or she can even understand the word 'adoption' and go into more detail when he or she starts to show an interest in his or her own or other children's origins. Then your child will never remember a time when he or she did not know about the adoption.

Older children also need to be aware of their adoption and the reasons for it. If you are adopting an older child, the Court will want to know whether the child understands what adoption is about, and they will need to consider the child's own wishes and feelings.

Explaining should be a continuing process, so that your child will gradually come to understand as he or she grows older. Before the date of placement, we will give you written background information about your child and the birth family, so that you will have this written reminder whenever you or your child want to talk about how and why you have come together as a family.

Your child will have a life story book which he or she needs ready access to and which you can read together.

We also give you a "later life letter" to keep to give to your child at what you judge to be the right time. This letter will explain to your child how he/she came to be adopted.





Your child will want to ask you questions about the adoption and his or her birth family. Most children go through stages of being very curious about their origins and have other times when they do not need to discuss it. It is very important to give honest and sympathetic answers, and to make your child feel free to discuss these things with you.

If your child does not ask, this does not mean he or she does not want to know. Your child might feel that questions about the adoption and the reasons for it would upset you. Because of this possibility, it is a good idea if you from time to time bring up the subject yourself.

The more open and straightforward you are, the easier it will be for your child to talk about things which puzzle him or her, and the more secure your relationship is likely to be.

Don't feel, however, that you have to stress adoption all the time. It should be just one among the many things your child is gradually taking in during childhood.

If you would like to talk to us again at any time about talking with your child about adoption, please do get in touch with the Adoption and Permanence Support Team. You can access advice, or request an assessment of support needs, by contacting the Adoption Duty Social Worker in the first instance.





## Contact with the Child's Birth Family

There is usually some contact between a child's birth family and the adoptive family.

This contact may take the form of a single meeting prior to placement and/or the regular exchange of news and photographs via the adoption agency. In Bedfordshire this service is managed by our Contact Coordinator.

In other cases, visits may continue between your adopted child and an important member of his or her birth family – usually siblings, parents or grandparents.

Where a child has a happy and positive relationship with those members of his or her birth family it is important to preserve those relationships.

It is very important that you recognise the value of continued contact between your adopted child and members of the birth family. This will enable him or her to grow up with a stronger sense of identity and with an understanding of why adoption was thought to be the best way of providing a permanent family.

It will offer a sense of continuity and the chance to have the best of what is available from the birth family and from yours.

You can access support regarding your child's contact arrangements. If your child is from Bedfordshire, this will be provided by the Contact Coordinator.

## Adult Adopted People

When your child reaches eighteen, he or she is legally entitled to get a copy of the original birth certificate. Your child can get one at an earlier age, of course, when he or she has his or her own birth name.

Your adopted son or daughter may simply want the birth certificate or they may want access to their records or they may wish to make contact with birth relatives with whom they have lost touch.

At this stage we suggest you or your son/daughter contact Bedfordshire's Adoption and Permanence Support Team or they can contact their local adoption team.

Here in Bedfordshire we have information booklets for adopted adults and their adoptive parents available on request. Sometimes members of the birth family ask to renew contact with an adopted member of their family with whom they have lost touch.

At present we contact adopted people to tell them of their birth relative's approach to us. (If they are under 21 and still living at home we are likely to contact the adoptive parents first) We do not pass any identifying information to the birth relatives.



## Adoption is a Life Long Process

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 has recognised that adoption has life long implications for all concerned. You, your adopted child or any of your other children may at any stage approach the Local Authority where you live (or in the first 3 years after Adoption order the Local Authority who placed your child) for an assessment for adoption support services.

The Local Authority who placed your child will retain responsibility for your child's contact arrangements and any ongoing adoption financial support agreed at the time of placement.

We certainly expect to hear from you – it may be a simple query, which can be resolved on the phone, or it may be a more complex situation, with which you need help from a Social Worker or other professionals.

Adoption and Permanence Support Team

Duty Social Worker and

Contact Coordinator Tel No: 01234 276876

Adoption UK Helpline: 0870 7700450

Tel No: 01295 752240

Website: [www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)





## Suggestions for Further Reading

Archer C (1999) 2nd Edition, First Steps in Parenting the Child who Hurts, Tiddlers and Toddlers, London: BAAF – Practical and sensitive guidance on the impact of a child's losses and how to respond.

Archer C (1999) Next Steps in Parenting the Child who Hurts, Tykes and Teens, London: BAAF. Sequel to the book above

Argent H (2004) Related by Adoption, London: BAAF – A useful handbook for adoptive grandparents-to-be and other relatives.

Argent H (ed) (2002) Staying Connected, London: BAAF – An anthology of papers which look at ways of managing contact arrangements in adoption.

Argent H (1998) Whatever Happened to Adam?, London: BAAF – A collection of stories of disabled young people and the families who choose to care for them.

Cairns K (2002) Attachment, Trauma and Resilience, London: BAAF – A beautifully written account of a personal and professional experience of living with children who have been hurt.

Howe D (1996) Adopters on Adoption, London: BAAF – A collection of personal stories from adopters whose children are now young adults.

Lord J (2006) Adopting a Child, London: BAAF – A popular guide to adoption and how to go about it.

Morrison M (February 2004 – 3rd edition) Talking About Adoption to Your Adopted Child, London BAAF – The why's, when's and how's of talking about adoption.

Salter A (2006) The Adopter's Handbook, London: BAAF – Information, resources and services for adoptive families.

Mulholland J (2007) Special & Odd, London: BAAF – A fascinating and humorous story of an adopted adult's experience.

Thomas C and Beckford V (1999) Adopted Children Speaking, London: BAAF – A poignant and moving record of children's wishes and feelings about adoption and their experiences of it.

Van Gulden H and Bartels – Rabb L M (1995) Real Parents, Real Children, London: BAAF – Takes the reader through the stages of child development and how adopted children commonly think at each age.

Wilson J (1992) The Story of Tracy Beaker, London: Corgi Yearling – A fictional children's story of a 10 year old in a children's home who wants a real family.

Wise J (2007) Flying Solo, London: BAAF – A single parent's adoption story.

# Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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برای اطلاع

Per Informazione

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Informacja

Za Informacije

তথ্যের জন্য



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Bedfordshire County Council

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