Adoption Information Pack

Will you brighten up a child’s world?
Our Vision

To inspire ordinary people to make an extraordinary difference
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What is adoption?

Adoption is the legal process by which a child or a family group of children who cannot be brought up within their birth family become full, permanent and legal members of their new family.

Adopters become the child’s legal parents with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was born to them.

This involves preparation and assessment by social workers trained in adoption work, a recommendation by an Adoption Panel and the final decision made by the Agency Decision Maker. The Adoption Panel is also responsible for recommending the matching and placement of a particular child or children with prospective adopters.

Preparation to become an adoptive parent involves learning that adoption is about ‘parenting in a different way’. Applicants will have the opportunity to look at the effects of early trauma, loss and neglect on children and how this can manifest itself in adoptive family life.

Adoption is a lifelong commitment, which requires very serious thought and preparation. It is important for applicants to consider the impact adoption will have on them as individuals, as a couple, as well as on their immediate and extended family.
Children who need adoptive families

Children of all ages, cultures, religious and ethnic backgrounds may need a family for life through adoption. Today there are very few babies who need to be adopted. Children in need of a permanent family are usually aged between two and ten years. There are many ‘sibling groups’ ie. brothers and sisters who need to be given an opportunity to grow up together in their family unit.

Most children who need an adoptive family are in foster care. The most common reasons for this are neglect or abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional), their parents may have addiction problems, poor physical / mental health or simply a lack of skills and knowledge required to parent their child.

Understandably, children who have lived through such experiences are confused and hurt and can find it hard to build relationships and trust adults. Many children express their feelings through behaviours that can be challenging; they need parents who can understand and help them. The important thing to remember is that these children deserve to be loved, feel secure and grow up in a family where they will be nurtured and encouraged to develop in all areas of their life.

In spite of their difficult past, many of these children will have memories of their birth family which are important to them, and may continue to have contact with them. All adopted children need parents who can understand the importance of early life experiences and who can acknowledge the significance of their birth families.
Who can apply to adopt?

People can apply to adopt whether they are an individual, married, in a civil partnership or living with a partner. You can adopt jointly without being married.

>If you are applying to adopt as a couple, the term couple extends to unmarried couples (including same sex couples) and those in a civil partnership. However the term couple does not extend to two people, one of whom is the other’s parent, grandparent, sister, brother, aunt or uncle.

An individual means any person who is not married or in a civil partnership.

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/adoption_faqs

We need a wide range of people to provide loving and permanent homes for children in need of adoption. The assessment will focus on whether you are able to adequately care for a child and meet their emotional and physical needs. Obviously your health and wellbeing are a significant consideration too but your parenting skills, understanding of children’s needs and strong support system are also important.

Other factors to take into consideration

○ An adoption assessment will not be undertaken while fertility treatment or investigations are ongoing
○ You must be 21 years of age or over. There is no upper age restriction to people applying to become adoptive parents
○ Experience of child rearing is not necessary but experience of caring for a child in some capacity is helpful
○ Applicants are welcomed from all social, economic, religious and cultural background
○ Applicants should be emotionally stable
○ Applicants do not need to be home owners but tenure needs to be secure
○ Applicants on low income may in certain circumstances and depending on the needs of the child receive financial support which is means tested. You will also be advised on other benefits you may be entitled to
○ Applicants can be in full or part time employment. As a minimum requirement all applicants will be required to avail of statutory adoption leave
○ Applicants will be required to attend a preparation course. The process is designed to help participants decide whether adoption is right for them
○ Applicants must consent to having a police record check, social services record check, a full medical completed by their GP, and provide the name of two referees.
What qualities and skills do adopters need?

Some adopters may have parented their own children or foster children, others may have little experience of parenting. There are many different kinds of families needed to meet the various needs of the children who require permanent homes.

Adopters are needed who can:

- Commit to providing a child with a secure, stable, loving family
- Take legal responsibility for the child once adopted, but be able to ask for help if needed
- Be open with their child about their background and birth family
- Help their child develop social skills and provide them with experiences they may have missed
- Have fun and maintain a sense of humour.
How to become an adoptive parent

The process is normally as follows:

**Initial enquiry**
- First you need to contact an adoption agency. This will either be the adoption team in your own Trust area or an approved voluntary agency.

**Meeting with adoption social worker**
- The meeting is a two-way process; an opportunity for you to find out more about adoption and for the social worker to find out more about you.

**Preliminary checks**
- If any of the checks are not satisfactory you will be informed and given the opportunity to discuss the situation with the appropriate manager for adoption.

**Preparation course**
- All applicants will be expected to attend a preparation course. The course will be an educative experience and it will also give you an opportunity to reflect on your plan to adopt.

**Social work interviews**
- The social worker will meet with you on a number of occasions. The areas discussed with you will include:
  - your own upbringing and experience of being parented
  - your support network
  - your lifestyle
  - your parenting capacity
  - your current relationship and experience of previous relationships
  - if you do not have birth children how this has impacted on you.
- Your children from any previous relationship including those who have reached adulthood will be interviewed by the social worker in respect of their views on your application to adopt.
- You will have an opportunity to read your assessment and make any written comments prior to circulation to the Adoption Panel.
Adoption Panel

- The Adoption Panel is made up of a group of people who have experience in adoption
- The social worker and the senior social worker / senior practitioner will present your assessment to the Adoption Panel
- You will be invited to attend part of this meeting if you wish to do so
- When the Panel have considered your assessment you will be advised of the outcome
- The Adoption Panel make their recommendation to the Trust Agency Decision Maker who ultimately makes the decision whether you become an approved adoptive parent or not.

How do children become available for adoption?

Children who are available for adoption will be in foster care because they are unable to return to their birth family and their Care Plan will change to adoption. The Trust will make an application to a court, a legal process which may include a number of options to make this possible:

- Adoption with consent, ie. birth parent agreeing to their child/ren being adopted
- Freeing Order - when a birth parent does not agree to their child/ren being adopted, the Trust applies to the court for a Freeing Order.
Support available after adoption

Parenting an adopted child may require extra support and guidance. When you adopt your child, you will have the opportunity of having access to a post adoption social worker, who will provide emotional and practical support in relation to any plans or agreements in relation to the child.

Peer support

Support from other adopters is available from Adoption UK, a UK wide organisation independent from social services. More information is available from www.adoptionuk.org

Financial support

In some circumstances financial support, known as adoption allowance, may be available.

What should you do now

If you wish to pursue your interest in adoption you should contact the Adoption team in your local Trust area, or contact the Regional Adoption and Fostering Service on 0800 0720 137 or visit www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net to request a meeting with a social worker.

You also have the option of pursuing your interest in adoption with the two voluntary adoption agencies listed below:

www.familycaresociety.co.uk
www.adoptionroutes.co.uk
Call 0800 0720 137
www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net