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Welcome

Thank you so much for taking the time to find out more about adoption. Even reading this is a big step and we truly appreciate your interest. Adoption is a huge decision and it will take you a lot of time to think about whether you want to take the next step, but we’re here to answer your questions and we’re here to help you at every step.

The process to adopt can take a long time. It’s not an easy or simple process, but that’s because we have to put the needs of the children first and be absolutely sure you’re the right person for the child and their needs.

Looking after a child takes a lot of work, it’s not easy and you’ll need to be ready for a long journey through the process and through parenthood. Some people would like the process to be quicker, but adoption is a service for children and it has to be meticulous. The process takes time and it takes patience. Adoption is a huge step and being a parent is a challenge, but it’s amazing.

People who do adopt tell us it’s the best thing they’ve ever done and that they wouldn’t change it for the world.

We really look forward to hearing from you.

Janet Denny
Birmingham Adoption & Fostering Service

“The son I have I feel is the child I was always meant to have in life.”
What is adoption?

Adopting means becoming the legal guardian of a child, and giving them a permanent home.

Adoption means that a child becomes a legal member of your family, as if he or she had been born to you. Once an Adoption Order is made it cannot be reversed and the child’s birth parents have no legal rights or parental responsibility from that point onwards.

In the UK, all children in need of adoption are in the care of local authorities – almost all of them living in temporary foster homes. They vary in age from very young babies to children of 12 or so, and are from a range of ethnic origins.

Many of these children have suffered neglect or abuse. This may be emotional, sexual, or physical abuse. Some children have medical conditions, disability or developmental delay. Some may have been rejected by their parents. Others are loved by their parents, but not given the full care they need. All will have suffered in some way.

All adopted children need to know their origins, and should come with a Life Story Book to help them understand what has happened, and retain a connection with their roots. In most cases there is some form of post-adoption contact – either direct or indirect – with their birth family, and possibly with former foster carers.

Before you can adopt, you must be approved by an Adoption Agency. This may be the local authority – such as us, with children waiting in our care – or an independent voluntary adoption agency. Voluntary agencies can approve you as suitable candidate(s), but they have no children to place. We work together to try to find the right child for you and offer support in matching and placing children in good homes that are right for them.

We also deal with adoption by relatives, and partners of parents. These processes are different, and are explained in separate guides. Inter country adoption also has a separate guide.

“Adoption was the best thing I ever did. It was also the hardest thing. It took a lot of time to adopt and then when we adopted Sam it took a lot of time to connect with him. He needed a lot of support, but I wouldn’t change it for the world. It’s a huge challenge and a huge commitment, but it’s worth it.”
More people than you might think are eligible to adopt.
Who can adopt?

Adoption is open to many people. Anyone over the age of 21 can apply to adopt. There is no set upper age limit for applicants, instead we aim to place children with responsible people who can meet their needs and care for them until they reach adulthood.

We welcome applicants from any ethnic origin or religion. You can be single, married, in a civil partnership, co-habiting, or with a long-term partner. You can be straight or gay. You can adopt if you have children or if you don’t. You can live in rented accommodation or own your own home. You can be employed or unemployed. The thing that matters is the ability and commitment to care for a child throughout their childhood and offer them a better future.

We welcome both single applicants and those applying as a couple. If you are in a relationship, you will generally be expected to apply together. If you are applying as a couple, you will need to demonstrate that your relationship is stable, and that you’ve been living together for at least two years.

If you have separated from a long-term partner, we would normally expect you to wait about 2 years before you apply to adopt. However, we know that all situations are individual to applicants and we always take this into account.

If there’s a lot of change going on in your life, we recommend waiting for things to settle down before applying.

“I didn’t think I was the ‘typical’ adopter they were looking for, but I got in touch and was told I was eligible.”
What about my age?

The minimum age to adopt is 21, but we want to be sure that you’re properly settled and mature enough to look after the kind of children who need adopting. This could include, for instance, finding the right partner, considering having your own children or resolving any issues around infertility before embarking on adoption.

All this takes time, and as a result most people are older before they make an application. Adoption is for life, both yours and the child’s, so your decision needs to be well thought through.

There is no legal upper age limit for adopters. Instead, we need to take into account certain common-sense factors, such as how well you’ll be able to cope with the demands of childcare in ten years’ time for example.

Ultimately we make decisions on an individual basis. If there’s a sizeable age difference between two partners, for instance, we’ll need to address your individual situation – including your health. The simple reason we consider everything is that we cannot risk our children suffering any further loss.

Adoption is not just about age. It’s about all the things you can offer a child – security, experience, lifestyle, understanding and patience in the face of adversity. We’re looking for people with the attitude and energy to see a child into adulthood and beyond – whatever your age.

“I thought I might be too old to adopt, I didn’t really know what was acceptable or not, but I got in touch, applied, and am approved to adopt.”
What about my health?

You need to be healthy enough to look after a child until they reach adulthood.

Raising a child is a hugely demanding job. You need to be active and energetic enough to rise to the challenge, and be able to cope with stress. The children we place need stability and support, so we need to be confident that your health (physical and mental) is unlikely to deteriorate in the next 15-18 years. Adopted children have experienced loss already; we need to ensure as far as possible that they do not experience any more.

As part of the process you’ll have a medical examination by your own GP, who will prepare a report on your past and present health to be considered by our medical advisor. You will have to pay for this report and you will be entitled to see it.

If you have concerns about any aspect of your health, please discuss them as soon as possible with a social worker.

If you are currently taking medication or having treatment for mental health or stress-related problems, we suggest waiting until you’ve recovered before applying. All previous illnesses will be taken into account to ensure that adoption won’t adversely affect you or the child.

We prefer applicants not to smoke, as a smoky atmosphere is not a healthy environment for children. The majority of our children require non-smoking adopters and although we wouldn’t reject your application for this reason alone, we need to be sure that you, members of your household, and your relatives and friends are not going to smoke in the presence of children of any age. If you smoke at all, even outside the home, you will not be matched with a child under the age of 2 or a child with any health needs.

People who have a physical disability are eligible to adopt, and may have particular skills to offer children. However, it is important that your disability does not compromise the practical care that children need. Again, it is essential that you discuss this at an early stage and we will work on a case-by-case basis.

“I wouldn’t say that I’m really healthy, I’m just pretty normal, but the doctor said I was fit and there was nothing to worry about so I was eligible to adopt.”
Other considerations

Adoption Leave
There is an expectation that you, or one of you, will take sufficient adoption leave from work, ideally a year, if you adopt a very young child. We can tell you more about this.

Financial Stability
Applicants need to be able to demonstrate financial security. You will need to consider the impact of taking adoption leave on your financial situation. You may be entitled to statutory adoption pay, which is similar to maternity pay.

Pets
All pets should be well cared for and well trained. Vet assessments may be required for most dogs and exotic pets.

“We had to make a lot of adjustments and think about everything beforehand, but that’s what being a parent means.”
Are there any people who cannot adopt?

If you are convicted of serious offences, or live with someone who has been convicted of serious offences, you will not be able to adopt.

By law, we cannot accept applications from anyone:

- Convicted of certain violent or sexual offences
- Convicted of offences against children
- Whose household members have been convicted of such offences.

No offences of any kind are ‘spent’ as far as the protection of children is concerned. All convictions and cautions, however minor, must be declared.

Some types of offence – such as Grievous Bodily Harm or Actual Bodily Harm – have a sliding scale of time that must have elapsed since they were committed. We would also need to discuss the particular circumstances with you before deciding whether to pursue your application.

Again, we’ll need to assess each situation individually, so please speak to us before proceeding. All speeding offences should be declared, whether ‘spent’ or not.

If you or any of your close family members have had children placed in care, or been the subject of child protection or police investigations in Birmingham or elsewhere, we need to know the details of this. Whilst in some cases this may help you relate to and care for abused or disadvantaged children, in other cases it may hinder your application. Please discuss any such issues with us as early as possible in your application.

A prospective adopter needs to have been a resident in the British Islands for at least a year before applying to a court for an adoption order.

It’s also our policy not to accept you as adopter(s) if you, your children or other household members have any kind of conviction within the last 2 years, excluding minor traffic offences but including drink-driving offences. If this is the case, you’ll need to re-apply after 2 years have passed (5 years for drink-driving).
There is no set experience you must have to adopt, but you need to spend a lot of time with children to be sure it’s right for you. You need to show that you can build relationships with children and that you’ve considered the extra challenges you may face as an adopter.
What experience do I need in order to adopt?

During the assessment stage you will show evidence of your ability to be a competent parent. This means you have to demonstrate that you’re safe, reliable, and can care for and build strong relationships with children.

We’ll consider any contact that you’ve already had with children, whether through friends, relatives or your job, and you’ll complete parts of your assessment yourself to show that you’re up to the challenge.

If you’ve been without a child for some time, it’s worth taking the time to do some research before making any decisions. Parenthood can be wonderful, but it isn’t for everyone. Remember that as well as gaining a family member you’ll lose some of your freedom – and a lot of sleep. Plenty of close contact with other people’s children beforehand can help you decide if there’s a place in your life for children permanently, as well as developing your practical childcare skills.

You’ll also need to show us how well you can work alongside professionals. Modern adoption involves more than ‘normal’ parenting and you and your children are likely to face challenges that ordinary life experience may not equip you to deal with. Adoption can turn your world upside down, and you need to be sure that it’s right for you. You can find out more from us about how it can change your life and how it has changed the lives of others.

“It turned my life upside down. The first minute the children came into the bedroom they opened all the drawers and took everything out and turned a tidy room into a tip in minutes. They were just excited to find out what was there, but it was a shock to the system when they first arrived.”

“Jack had some problems that hadn’t been picked up on. He needed extra support and I needed to get other people to recognise this. He’s fantastic but I had to persevere with him, and with others to get him extra support. It took effort, time and resilience, but he’s doing a lot better now.”
What are the challenges of adoption?

It’s crucial to accept children for who they are, and not try to mould them into someone you’d like them to be.

The child’s well-being is paramount in the process.

You should always consider what you can offer an adopted child – not vice versa. A safe, secure environment is much more important than a big house or lots of money, although you do need adequate bedroom space. However, don’t expect the child to fit in straight away: it’s crucial to accept them for who they are, and not try to mould them into someone you’d like them to be. Many adopted children have difficulty bonding with their new parents, and need adopters who are prepared to devote a lot of time to them without using nurseries or child-minders.

You need to give them time and space to adjust, including their own bedroom in most cases.

If you have children already, it is recommended to leave an age gap of at least 2 years between adopted children and your own, as research has shown that friction and resentment is more likely to occur between children of a similar age. This means if you have children, your youngest child will probably be at least 3 years old when you apply. The gap might be smaller if you are asked to consider adopting a younger brother or sister of your adopted child.

If you are able to conceive naturally and have children, we prefer you to have completed your family at the time of application – and be willing to take steps to prevent any further pregnancies, at least until the adopted child is thoroughly settled. Given that this could take some considerable time, your options to have further children may be limited.

Every applicant’s situation is different, but together we need to consider the wellbeing of the children as much as possible, so that if you are to adopt, they are put in the best position possible to be placed in a supportive and happy home.

“At first it was extremely hard for Naomi to settle in. It took a long time, and a lot of care; we hadn’t expected it to be this much work, but now she is a happy confident member of the family and makes her new brother and sister smile everyday”
How soon can I start the process?

Applying to adopt depends on your individual circumstances. There may be a number of issues that you need to deal with before starting out.

If you are unable to have children

If you have experienced difficulties conceiving a child, you'll know how difficult that can be, and how it puts a radically different perspective on your future plans.

Some people prefer to explore every medical option before they decide on adoption; others make the decision earlier. If and when you do come to us, it's important to make sure that it's the right thing for you, and the right time for you.

Anyone who has undergone an invasive fertility procedure like IVF will know how exhausting and harrowing it can be. The adoption process can be equally lengthy and emotional, and the children waiting to be adopted will have exceptional needs. So you need to be ready, emotionally as well as practically, for a big challenge.

Therefore, if you have been pursuing IVF or other infertility treatments, you will need to wait at least six months after your last treatment before starting the adoption process. Even if you are not pursuing treatment but have been told that you cannot – or are unlikely to – conceive naturally, you will still need to wait 6 months. Research and our experience shows us that infertility involves a kind of grieving process and needs time to come to terms with. You would also need to wait 6 months if you have suffered a miscarriage to give yourself necessary time to grieve and adjust.

People are often frustrated by this delay, and perceive it as lost time. Please believe that it is time well spent. You need time to heal, physically and emotionally. You may find it helpful to speak to someone who could help you talk this through, and can contact the Infertility Network UK. They provide support groups and can put you in touch with counsellors.

Infertility Network UK
www.infertilitynetworkuk.com
0800 008 7464
Availability of babies

If you’re unable to have a baby of your own, you may prefer to adopt a child as young as possible in order to establish a strong parental bond. This is completely understandable, but you need to take into account that many other potential adopters might want the same thing. Our priorities lie with the children waiting to be adopted – and the youngest are generally between 1 and 3 when they are ready to move to their families. Therefore you will have to be prepared to accept a child of up to three years old and unfortunately you cannot stipulate that you’d only like to adopt a baby.

Also, remember that many babies and toddlers in this age group have been exposed to drugs and alcohol during their mother’s pregnancy, so are hard to care for initially, and are likely to have considerable special needs in the future.

There are also babies with older siblings who need placing with them, so you may like to consider your ability to care for two children.

There are also many young children in need of adoption who are of mixed ethnic origin, and we need families who would like to care for them.

Older children

If you are used to working full-time, you may find that your lifestyle is better suited to older, more independent children. You’ll miss out on many of their formative years, but there are also clear advantages: work and leisure activities are easier to adapt around school-age children, and they may be closer in age to your friends’ children. In addition, many conditions that are hard to identify in very young children – e.g. learning difficulties, autism and some developmental problems – will become more evident as they get older, so you could have a clearer idea of what difficulties you may be facing with any individual child.

Are you ready for the change?

Take some time to think through what’s most important in your life, and how a child will fit into the bigger picture. If you’ve been without children for a long time it can be hard to imagine the impact that they’ll have on relationships with partners, family and friends.

Adoption requires many years of commitment and perseverance with children who may have major difficulties, and who may develop in ways that you find hard to cope with.

Remember, we’re talking about existing children with very real needs, waiting in foster homes across the city. Although you may be looking for a child that suits you, we need to find families who are suitable for the children we are already looking after.

These children may be in family groups of two, three or more, for whom being together is the only stability they have been able to have. In some cases children may have health needs, learning difficulties, emotional damage and abusive backgrounds.

Prospective adopters who are as flexible as possible about the age, background and health of the child they are applying to adopt, and those who also consider the possibility of adopting more than one child from the same family if they can, are often likely to wait for less time to be matched once they are approved.
If you already have a child

Sometimes people choose to adopt when they already have a child or children of their own, but cannot (or do not wish to) conceive another. In such cases a sufficient age gap between your birth children and the adopted child is needed.

Some friction and resentment is more likely to occur between children of a similar age, which can cause the breakdown of the placement. You need to leave at least two years between adopted children and your own. This is the minimum requirement, and we would prefer a larger gap if possible. Therefore your youngest child must be at least three years old when you apply.

The process of having an adopted sibling can be a really positive experience for an existing child, teaching them important skills. It is important to consider the impact that adoption will have on them as a whole.

Second – time adopters

Spacing between two adopted children may be closer, but unless you’re planning to take on their biological sibling, your existing child should still be a good bit older, and you should have allowed plenty of time for them to settle in before the arrival of another child with competing needs.

The process for second-time adopters will be considerably shorter, as preparation training is generally not required again, and we’ll still have your information on file. The minimum expectation is that you should have had your first adopted child living with you for at least a year, and the Adoption Order must have been granted – but in practice, the needs of your first child may mean we ask you to wait longer.

Don’t be tempted to ‘rush’ the process to provide a ‘brother or sister’ for your adopted first child. They may be coping well with other children they meet, but may not be able to compete with an adopted sibling who is likely to have his or her own attachment problems.

“It took a lot longer than I thought to adopt. At the time this was frustrating, but now I see why it has to be like this and I think it needs to take time and be right, because ultimately it is about the child’s needs.”
Adoption is for life so your decision needs to be well thought through. It’s very hard work, but it’s worth it.

Who would make a great adopter?

Qualities that make a great adopter:

- Accepting children as they are, not as you wish them to be.
- Considering children’s need for continuity with the past, including contact with birth relatives, siblings and maybe foster carers.
- Being patient, consistent and not expecting too much too soon.
- Understanding and accepting that children will have suffered losses and may have a limited ability to respond, or be slow or distorted in their responses or development.
- Seeing things through when the going gets tough, and your care and concern is rejected or put to the test.
- Being open to changing yourselves to meet the needs of the children.
- Being willing to ask for help and advice.

We are also looking for people who:

- Can take a sibling group of two, three or more children to avoid separating them.
- Are willing to consider both boys or girls.
- Can take over-threes and school-age children, especially when they are a sibling group.
- Can consider children with physical / mental disabilities and long-term emotional problems as a result of abuse and neglect.
- Can accept and understand the effects on children of parental alcoholism, drug abuse, learning difficulties and mental illness.
- Are black or of mixed ethnicity – for any age of children.

Adoption | Making Lives Better
What support is available for adopters?

You can get help and support from us and from those close to you.

A good support network of family and/or close friends is essential for all parents, and especially adoptive parents. If you are a single applicant, this will be particularly important as you will need to demonstrate how you will meet the demands of single parenthood.

However, there is support available. You’ll have your own support worker to advise and assist you up to the time an Adoption Order is granted. Before the child is placed with you, we’ll draw up a plan outlining any financial and practical support that you are entitled to.

Support available to adopters can include:

- Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) who will put you in touch with the relevant staff or services.
- Advice from the Adoption Service’s duty helpline.
- Further training groups on relevant subjects, e.g. discussing adoption with your child.
- Opportunities to meet socially with other adopters, e.g. our annual Adoption Day and monthly coffee mornings.
- On-going access to the Adoption Service after adoption for advice and consultation.
- Support with contact from our Contact and Letterbox workers.
- Support and first year membership with Adoption UK and New Family Social (where relevant).

If your circumstances change, you can be re-assessed for additional help and you could also approach an independent organisation such as Adoption UK – who run local support groups and offer further training. We may also refer you to After Adoption or to the Therapeutic and Emotional Support Service (TESS) where you would have a priority.

Adoption UK
Adoption UK provides support and gives a voice to adoptive families.
www.adoptionuk.org
0844 848 7900

New Family Social
New Family Social is a growing national charity that provides support and information for prospective and existing LGBT adopters and foster carers.
www.newfamilysocial.org.uk
0843 2899457

“When you adopt, the child becomes yours and in many ways you are left to be a parent and get on with the job, but there is help and support before and after adoption if and when you need it.”
What is the process to become an adopter?

The following list gives you an overview of the process of adoption. A detailed step-by-step process is on the following pages.

Enquiry, information and visit
- Make an enquiry online or on 0121 303 7575, and receive an initial call-back from a social worker
- Information Pack emailed or posted out
- Invitation to an Information Meeting (optional)
- Detailed discussion in a visit with a social worker

Stage 1: Registration and checks (up to 8 weeks)
- Registration of interest
- Complete Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checks
- Medical examination and references
- Attend pre-assessment training day (There is one day in this stage, and the rest is during the next stage)
- Confirm you wish to carry on
- You may choose to take a break of up to 6 months at this point

Stage 2: Assessment and approval (up to 4 months)
- You move on to a full assessment, and a social worker allocated
- Attend series of preparation days with other prospective adopters
- Completion of Prospective Adopters’ Report, through up to 10 visits (PAR)
- Adoption Panel considers your assessment report and makes a recommendation
- Adoption Agency Decision Maker confirms your approval
- Appeals process if necessary

After approval
- We work with you to find the right child or children
- After 3 months, you will be available for matching with children nationally, and we will help with this
- You receive ongoing support after adoption
I’m interested – what do I do next?

Approval by panel takes about 6 months, but the whole process will take a little bit longer.

The Process shows each step you’ll need to take and should take no longer than 6 months from signing the Stage One Pre-Assessment Contract to ‘Approval’ by Panel. However, the length of time between your first contact with us and your formal application can vary according to your own availability for meetings, interviews etc.

1 Initial Contact

To express an interest in adoption, please fill out our online enquiry form on www.adoptandfoster.co.uk or call Birmingham City Council on 0121 303 7575 and leave your details. We’ll pass your details on to our Adoption Recruitment Team. An experienced social worker will then give you a call at a time that suits you to discuss the adoption criteria, your eligibility, and to answer any questions you may have.

2 Information Meeting

You will then be invited to attend an optional Adoption Information Meeting where you can meet other prospective adopters and talk about the adoption process with like-minded people, as well as getting your questions answered by our Recruitment Team. Before attending the meeting you should read this information pack fully. The details and dates of the meetings are on our website, and you will need to contact the Recruitment Team to book onto a meeting. Please advise us before the meeting if you have any access requirements or if you will need an interpreter or signer. Please don’t bring children along, as the meeting can last up to two hours.

This meeting is optional, but previous adopters who have been approved have told us that they find it highly beneficial to attend the meeting, and we recommend attendance.
Detailed Discussion / Home visit

If, after attending the information meeting, you wish to continue the process, we will ask you to book an appointment with one of our experienced Social Workers to visit you in your home, or a place convenient to you, for a more in-depth conversation, which we call the Detailed Discussion. This will provide you with an opportunity to ask questions in a more personal setting and for us to facilitate your consideration and greater understanding of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the needs of the children waiting to be adopted in Birmingham. You will complete a Registration of Interest form, which includes your consent for us to start your Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and other checks.

Preparation Groups

Following on from the Information Meeting you will be asked to book in for a pre-assessment training day. At this meeting you can meet other prospective adopters and explore the issues connected with adoption – and what it could mean for your family – in greater detail.

Please note that we will prioritise adopters whose circumstances most closely match the needs of Birmingham children currently waiting for families. We expect adopters to make themselves available for these sessions. This may require you to take time off work if necessary.
Checks

You will need a medical examination by your own GP and at least three references from people who know you well – one relative and two non-relatives.

You will also need to apply for an Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). You can find full details about this on the DBS website: www.gov.uk/dbs

As part of the DBS disclosure we need to verify the identity of all applicants face-to-face including any household members over 18. You will need to provide us with at least three forms of identification. At least one form of photo ID is essential, as is a recent proof of address and your NI number. You will need between three and seven documents in total, depending on which groups your available documentation falls into. If in doubt, talk to one of our social workers about this at the Information Meeting.

You may have already applied for or obtained an Enhanced Disclosure elsewhere but unless the check has been carried out by our own Directorate (People’s Directorate) in the last six months, we cannot accept it.

If you have lived outside of the UK in the last ten years you will need to obtain a Certificate of Good Conduct (equivalent to a DBS check) from that country, normally at your own expense.

If you aware of any criminal convictions or cautions in your family, please let us know at the outset to avoid embarrassment or delay. Please note that you have to declare all offences, even those normally considered as ‘spent’. If you do not disclose any offence your application may be turned down. Please make sure all family members are aware of this.
6
Home Study / Assessment

After you have been accepted for full assessment you will be given a social worker to support you through this stage, and often through to the adoption of your child.

Your social worker will draw up a detailed report covering all aspects of your family life. You will have the opportunity to write parts of the report yourself, and you will always get the chance to read the whole report and comment upon its content.

If you have married or lived with a partner previously (and cared for children together) we will need to make contact with your ex-partner and / or adult children.

If during the assessment we do not feel that adoption is right for you, or that you would not be matched with the children we have waiting, we will advise you prior to Panel.

7
Adoption Panel

All the reports and evidence will then be put to a Birmingham Adoption Panel, which has an Independent Chair. The Panel will recommend whether or not you should be approved. You will be invited to (and are encouraged to attend) this meeting and the Panel will be very pleased to meet you, as this brings your report to life.

The Panel's recommendation must then be approved by an Agency Decision Maker before formal approval can be granted. If you are not approved, there is an independent appeals mechanism, details of which will be provided.
Once approved, you will continue to receive support from the Adoption Service. Your social worker will offer you further training and discuss any children who could be a possible match for you. Detailed information on the matching and placement process is available separately later on and is not included in this initial information pack.

Usually the same social worker will work with you before and after the child comes to you and accompany you to court when you apply for an Adoption Order. They will also be involved in drawing up the Adoption Plan for the child.

We hope you will build strong friendships with other adopters as you can all help and support each other in the years to come.

The day an Adoption Order is made, you will probably feel a sense of excitement and relief, as you prepare to begin your new life. As you’ll be aware, caring for a child into adulthood is not an easy task and it has its ups and downs. Many of us struggle at times to meet our children’s needs and it is now well recognised that there will be times when you will welcome some professional help and support. The Adoption Service is available to assist you at these times.

Our team may provide help directly or they might enable you to find help from a number of agencies who specialise in the sort of problems you may be facing. The team will also manage any on-going contact arrangements with birth families and the scheme for financial support. In the years ahead, they will be there for you – and you are encouraged to ask for their help.
Adoption Stories

Birmingham City Council
Adoption story one

“He was confused and frustrated.”

Sara and Jay have adopted two children. Their son Austin was only two and a half when he arrived with them, but his behaviour was very demanding.

“He’d been very badly abused by his parents, and his foster carer had tended to spoil him to make up for it – so when he came to us he was horrendous,” says Sara. “For about ten months he wouldn’t let us near him, he spat and kicked when we tried to be affectionate. He also had a hearing problem, which hadn’t been diagnosed, so he was very confused and frustrated.”

“We’d never been full-time parents before, so all this hit us hard. He was not at all the sort of child we had expected. He was very insecure, and his abuse had left him with a lot of phobias. He wouldn’t go near the bathroom or toilet. We just had to give him loads of love and learn to tackle things in a roundabout way – like when we had to tell him off (which was a lot) we made it a kind of game. When he went to school he had a lot of problems relating to other children, and was unbelievably aggressive.”

“The school has been excellent though, and now there’s been a big improvement. He’s also changed so much at home. Three years on he’s a lovely, affectionate child who is getting happier by the minute.”

“Caring for Austin has been demanding, but it’s also been very rewarding and we wouldn’t be without him – in fact we’ve now adopted a second child, Molly. She’s a very happy child; very independent. Austin was jealous of her at first, but now he absolutely loves her and she’s been tremendously good for him.”

“You have to be patient and very strong to cope with adoption – and if you are part of a couple, your relationship needs to be very strong too. You have to find a way to relax; still find time for each other as a couple.”

Sara and Jay are very honest about their challenges, but they think adoption is the best thing they have done.
Adoption story two

“They didn’t understand what love was about.”

Mr and Mrs Trimble adopted a family group of children ten years ago. “The children had a lot of different issues,” recalls Mrs. Trimble. “They had learning disabilities and behavioural problems – and they took up all of our time. At first we weren’t sure about taking a family group, but we didn’t want to split the children up – it was the only family they had really known – and so we took them together. I hadn’t been a mother before, but it was all I wanted to do, so I gave it 110% commitment.”

“We had the usual ‘honeymoon’ period, but it wasn’t long before we were into the long hard slog. It took two years to get over the major problems. All the children wet the bed, so we were changing sheets every morning, which was exhausting. One of the girls had the habit of wetting herself anywhere and everywhere to get attention, so we weren’t very popular in shops or on holidays!”

“In fact everything was a constant battle, and people kept telling us we should give up and send the children back. But I’m not a quitter, and that’s the key. My husband and I are both very determined. We knew the children needed us, and we weren’t going to give up on them.”

“The children had had very bad experiences, so they were suspicious and distrustful of all adults. They’d had little individual attention in the past, and it took them a long time to realise that they didn’t have to behave badly in order for us to pay attention to them.”

“They really didn’t know how to love, and they needed telling over and over again that we loved them before they could believe it. Even now, years later, I still reinforce the message.”

“Today all the children are doing well, and have jobs or are in college. Our daughter is now 18 and so beautiful with so much love to give – she lights up the room when she comes into it. Three months ago she gave a speech in public to say how glad she was that she had been adopted, and how appreciative she was of our love.”

“If you are thinking of adopting I would say you need to know yourselves – whether you’ve got it in you. Not everyone has, and it’s so damaging to children if adoptions break down. But if you persevere, it’s the most rewarding thing in the world.”
Our service

Here in the City of Birmingham we look after hundreds of children, and at any one time around 150 of them need adoptive families.

We look to you – the general public – to provide these families, and all the lifelong warmth and security that these children deserve.

Every child we care for should be placed in a comfortable, loving home that meets most of his or her many needs. We put the needs of the children at the forefront of our work, so we must ensure that you are in a position to meet those needs. Not all applicants will fulfil our criteria and we'll have to prioritise your enquiry according to the children actually waiting, which sadly may mean we have to say no to some people. However, if we do take you on, we'll try to offer you the best advice, training and support to help you in the task ahead.

Our Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Line is open Monday to Friday and someone will be on hand to take your details if you phone us during opening hours.

If you can only contact us outside our office hours, please leave your details on our online contact form www.adoptandfoster.co.uk/contactform or leave a message on our answer-phone, saying when you will be available, and giving your landline and mobile telephone number and we will ring you back.

You may also wish to email us, but if you do, please give us your full names, telephone number and address so that we can phone you or post you any written information.

Opening Hours

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Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team Contact Details

Team Address:
1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 7DJ

Postal Address:
PO Box 16262, Birmingham, B2 2WX

0121 303 7575
www.adoptandfoster.co.uk
a&frecruit@birmingham.gov.uk
Our service

We’re always keen to improve.

Improving our service
We strive to offer an efficient and effective service to all enquirers to the Adoption & Fostering Service, but are always keen to improve.

Access to our service
We endeavour to make our service accessible to all sections of the community. Should you require an interpreter, a signer or any other special arrangements, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate. It would help us if you do this as soon as possible to avoid delays.

Eligibility
In order to recruit people who will do the best possible job in ensuring the children in our care are in the safest and most stable position, we work from strict selection criteria - including government standards and specific adoption legislation. As a result, some applicants will unfortunately not be accepted as adopters.

You should put your complaint in writing to the appropriate Team Manager (see below), who will examine the complaint thoroughly and liaise with Senior Managers, if appropriate, to resolve any issues. You can also contact the Customer Relations Team if you wish:

Customer Relations Service Manager
Karen Holland
PO Box 16262
Birmingham B2 2WX

Even if you do not wish to make a complaint, in the interests of continual improvement we are grateful for any comments and feedback. The information you provide will help us to improve the way we attract and retain the prospective adopters we urgently need.

Delays
If you meet our criteria and are fully committed to adoption, we very much welcome your application.

Should any issues arise, we will always aim to process enquiries within an appropriate timescale. To help us achieve this, please ensure that you complete and return forms fully, accurately and as quickly as possible.

Given that we liaise with other agencies and departments however, delays are regrettably sometimes out of our control.

We are acting on behalf of Birmingham’s children, some of whom are extremely vulnerable. If you do not meet our criteria, we will not be able to reverse our decision.

Should your offer be turned down and you are not happy with our reasons - or you feel you have been treated unfairly at any stage - please let us know and we will investigate as fully as possible.

We are acting on behalf of Birmingham’s children, some of whom are extremely vulnerable. If you do not meet our criteria, we will not be able to reverse our decision.
Our service

Contact details for our Team Managers

**Head of Service**
Janet Denny
PO box 16262
1 Lancaster Circus
B2 2WX

**Adoption Improvement Manager**
Kate Adams

**Adoption Team Managers**
Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team Manager
Adoption Service Team One Team Manager
Adoption Service Team Two Team Manager
Adoption Service Team Three Team Manager
Adoption Service Team Four Team Manager
Adoption & Fostering Panel Team Team Manager

**Lancaster Circus**
0121 303 1010