

Consensual Adoption

Information for Birth Parents

You have been given this leaflet as you have shared that you may feel unable to care for your child or that it may be in their interests to be adopted, known as 'relinquishing' care of your child or 'consensual adoption'.

What is Adoption?

Adoption is when children are placed with new legal parents and will live with this family until adulthood. Adoption ends the legal relationship between the child and their birth parents and establishes a new one with their adoptive parents when an 'Adoption Order' is granted. This is final and cannot be overturned and a child's adoptive parents will be responsible for making all decisions in relation to their care.

Adoption *usually* occurs when a child is removed from the care of their family because they will be at risk of significant harm in their care so social workers ask the Court for permission to place them in to a safe placement with adults who can care for them. But sometimes adoptions happen as parents have decided that they are unable, for many different reasons, to care for their child.

What is a relinquished child?

The term 'relinquished child' is used to describe a child, usually pre-birth or a baby, whose parents are choosing adoption for their child's future. Occasionally, a parent will make this decision before birth, and this time should be used to provide counselling and explore the available options and support for the parents and child. A parent *cannot legally give consent to relinquish a child under the age of 6 weeks* for adoption, even if the child is already in foster care.

How is an Adoption arranged?

This has to be through social workers. If you decide that adoption may be right for your child or just want some help with considering this decision, an adoption social worker and a children's social worker will spend some time with you to help you with your decision. They will also encourage you to share some personal information about yourself, your family and your family's health. It is important to gather as much information as possible about your circumstances and the reasons behind you wanting your child to be adopted as this will help the Court process to run smoothly and will also allow adopters to provide 'life story' information to your child as they grow up so they can understand who they are and how they came to be adopted. This is really important for your child for the future.

Preparations for the adoption can begin before your child is born, however, nothing will be definitely arranged until after the birth. You are able to change your mind up until the time when you sign consent to the placement of your child for adoption.

What will the social workers want to know?

The social workers will help you to consider the possible options for your child's future care, including:

- staying with you with close support where possible,
- short term foster care, with the aim of returning to your care with support,
- a permanent placement within the child's wider family,
- adoption.



They will want to know as much information as possible about you, your circumstances, your family, your hobbies, personality and interests, your health including whether you have smoked or used drugs or alcohol during your pregnancy, and your education and employment history. They will also want to know information about your child's birth father and your relationship with them if you have one.

Must the father of the baby give his permission?

It is very important for children to grow up having information about their birth family as this will help them later in life, therefore you will be asked questions about the child's father. Social workers will need to contact him, and it is important to pass on information about the father's health, family, and medical history to the adopters and in turn to the child. If you choose not to disclose the father's identity, legal advice will be sought as the Court may have to be notified to ensure the Judge is happy that all reasonable efforts have been made by the social workers to identify him. The baby's father may not agree with the plan of adoption and may want the child to be raised by him or within his family. If this is the case the Court will need to know about this and if you do not agree, will decide what is likely to be best for the child's future.



Do I have to tell my family?

It is helpful to ascertain whether your child could be cared for within your family network. If you do not wish for your family to be notified that you wish for your child to be adopted, the local authority cannot make contact with them without your permission. However, the Judge may wish for family members to be contacted by social workers before making a final Order depending on your reasons for not wanting to tell them.

Who will adopt my child?

There are lots of people who want to adopt children and it should be possible to find a safe and loving home for your child. The social worker will discuss with you the kind of family you want your child to grow up in and you may be involved in choosing the adoptive parents and even meet them, if you want to. There is the option for ongoing contact such as exchanging letters and photographs.

What happens after my baby is born?

Before you leave the hospital, you will be asked to sign a form to show that you agree to your child being placed with foster carers (this is **not** a consent form for adoption, this comes later). In most cases the baby will be looked after by a temporary foster carer until you sign consent to placement for adoption when your child is 6 weeks old. Sometimes these temporary foster carers are also approved adopters so they can go on to adopt your child and s/he doesn't have to move homes. Social workers will regularly visit the child to check everything is going well and you will be kept up to date with your child's progress if you so wish.



When your baby is at least six weeks old

The social worker will arrange for you to be interviewed by a CAFCASS officer (a social worker who works for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service). They will make sure that you understand what adoption involves, they will ask you to sign a formal document consenting to your child's placement for adoption and you may also give advance consent to an Adoption Order being made when the adopters apply for it.

Once the child has been placed with their adopters and has lived with them for 10 weeks they can apply for an Adoption Order. If you wish to oppose the making of this Order you will need to ask the Court for permission to do so. You will have to show the Court that this is in your child's best interests and that there has been a change of circumstances since you gave your consent to your child being placed for adoption. The social workers will provide a report to the Court about the child's circumstances and their involvement with you, and if the Court is satisfied that an Adoption Order is in the best interests of the child then an Adoption Order will be granted. You will be notified about the Adoption Order application and when and where it will be heard (in which Court) unless you specifically request not to be.

What if I change my mind?

Once you have signed your consent to your child's placement for adoption your right to change your mind will be limited and may be lost altogether. You will be able to withdraw your consent at any time until the people who want to adopt your child start an Adoption Order application in the Court. If you do withdraw your consent and want your child to be returned to your care you will need to notify the adoption agency that you have changed your mind but your child may not automatically be returned to you immediately. This depends on whether they have already been placed with adopters and whether the social worker agrees that it would be best for your child to be returned to your care. A Judge may make the final decision.

When the people who want to adopt your child have made an application to the Courts for an Adoption Order you will not be able to ask for your child to be returned to you.



Will I see my child again?

Once you have given consent to the child being placed with prospective adopters it may be possible to have contact with your child through arrangement with the adoption agency, but you will not have an automatic right to see them. You will have a right to apply to Court for an Order stipulating that you should have contact with your child at any time until the Adoption Order is granted. Adoption can sometimes involve continuing contact between the birth parents and the adoptive family, either face to face or by letter.

The agency will usually try to find a family for your child who are happy with having the sort of contact that you would like, as long as this is also in your child's best interests.

The contact you have with your child may change over time depending on the child's needs and their wishes. In the future your child may try to find you, they may not.

Can I keep it a secret?

Adoptive parents are advised to tell children from an early age that they are adopted. As they grow up, most adopted young people are curious to know something about their background and how they came to be adopted. Having as much information as possible to help them understand their identity helps them to accept this.

Adopted people can obtain their original birth certificate when they are 18 years old and if you were registered as a parent, your name will be on the certificate. Using that information, they could try to trace you. There are adoption contact registers covering England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to facilitate contact between adult adopted people and their birth relatives.

There are specialist post-adoption counsellors in local authorities and voluntary organisations who can discuss your particular situation with you.

Making the decision

The decision you make about your child's future is so important that you should not be tempted to rush in to it. Get all the advice you can before you make up your mind. This may include legal advice.

You need to be sure that you are doing the best for your child so that you will feel comfortable that your decision was the right one.

Will I get support?

There is a birth parent support service available who provide support from workers who know a lot about adoption. You can ask the social worker for details about this and other support services available.



Can I contact my child again when they become an adult?

You can request an adoption support agency or a local authority or voluntary adoption agency to act as an intermediary for you once your child becomes an adult. They will have a responsibility to make an attempt to contact your child on your behalf if this is deemed safe and appropriate. Contact would only be re-established if it is what the adopted adult wants.