



**Adoption
Central
England**



ENQUIRY PACK

**FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN BECOMING
ADOPTIVE PARENTS**

WELCOME TO ACE

We are committed to ensuring that we find the best possible families for children who need adoptive parents, and to ensuring that our adoptive parents are well prepared and supported as they take on the responsibility and privilege of adopting a child/ren. Your enquiry to ACE shows that you are also interested in caring for a child who needs a permanent family and thank you for taking this important first step of asking for further information about adoption.

Understandably you will want to find out as much as you can about adoption before you make a final decision to go ahead. This Enquiry Pack will provide you with the essential information about the process involved in becoming an adoptive parent. You will find out more about the needs of the children who require adoption as you progress through the application, preparation, and assessment stages.

ACE's priority are the children, so the thorough assessment process is to ensure that adoptive parents fully understand what is involved in adoption so that the best possible families can be found for these children. We need adoptive parents who will be able to meet both the short and longer term needs of children which can be complex.

There are children who are waiting for adoptive parents and ACE's current priority is for adopters who can meet the needs of sibling groups of brothers and sisters, older children (3 years or above), black and dual heritage children and children with some degree of actual or possible disability or developmental delay. We are also recruiting adoptive parents for younger children where there may be some legal challenges to the plan for their adoption. This is called Early Permanence or Fostering for Adoption.

Children and young people have told us some of the things they are looking for in adoptive parents:

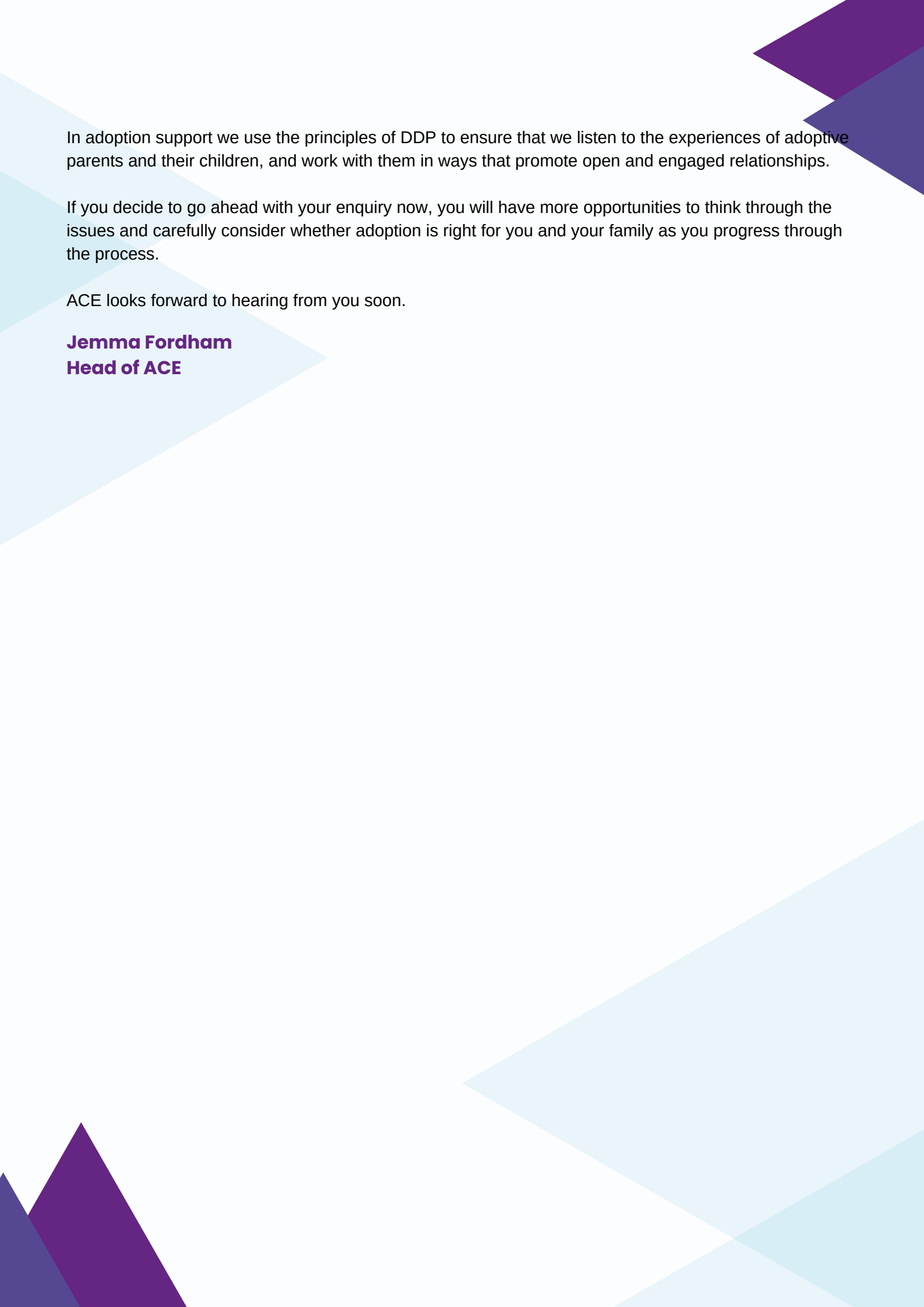
"They should be loving and understanding"

"They should talk to us and show they want to listen"

"They have to be friendly, outgoing, love to have a laugh but know when to stop".

If you express an interest in adoption with ACE, you will be treated with fairness and respect. The process of preparation and assessment will be open and honest; we will focus on the skills you have to care for children and will be clear with you about any areas where you may need further information, experience, or training. Gaining childcare experience, if you have not already got this, is encouraged prior to the application process. If we don't think adoption is for you, we will explain why we have come to this conclusion and will talk it through with you.

ACE is a regional adoption agency that has been certified as a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) organisation. DDP brings together our understanding of attachment theory, and developmental trauma that can have a profound effect on children's emotional and behavioural development and their capacity to build warm and trusting relationships with their care givers. ACE works with adoptive families at all stages through the process, to enable them to appreciate the impact of their child's early trauma and to be able to parent in ways that will enable their child to build trust, feel safe and reach their full potential.



In adoption support we use the principles of DDP to ensure that we listen to the experiences of adoptive parents and their children, and work with them in ways that promote open and engaged relationships.

If you decide to go ahead with your enquiry now, you will have more opportunities to think through the issues and carefully consider whether adoption is right for you and your family as you progress through the process.

ACE looks forward to hearing from you soon.

Jemma Fordham
Head of ACE

ADOPTING WITH ACE

Adoption is a lifelong commitment to providing a loving, permanent family for a child or children who cannot live with their birth family. When you adopt you take on all the legal rights and responsibilities for the child/ren you are adopting.

Parenting adopted children, whilst presenting unique challenges, can be hugely rewarding. You will need to have the qualities needed to see your child or children through the ups and downs that they will face throughout their lives. If you can offer commitment, time, love, patience, and a desire to understand how your child sees the world then the rewards will be limitless.

Lots of people can adopt and we are interested in knowing about your skills and capacity to parent, not your status. We are looking for a wide range of people to become adoptive parents: single, married, same sex couples, with or without children, working or not. If you can offer your unconditional commitment, support and love to a child or children who are in the care of the local authorities, we know you will have the potential to become an adoptive parent.



THE ADOPTION JOURNEY

From the moment you first consider adopting you are on a journey to discover if adoption is right for you, and what kind of parent you might be.

That journey is made together with the social worker from ACE, whose job it is to make sure that prospective adopters can fully understand and meet the needs of children who need adoptive families. Like all journeys, the adoption process has its hills to climb and bumps in the road, but most prospective adopters find that the journey helps them gain a better understanding of themselves as well. This is through exploring your own lived experiences and how this will impact upon your own parenting as you become adoptive parents.

The approval process for prospective adopters comes in two stages and the whole process can take approximately 6 - 9 months, although there is opportunity to extend this timescale if needed. This may be due to changes in your personal circumstances or that you need more time to look into the implications of adoption, or perhaps have the opportunity to speak to others who have this experience.

Adoptive parents have told us that it's less daunting than you might think and could be one of the most rewarding decisions you'll ever make.

The different stages of the adoption journey are summarised below.



Online information meetings are held every three weeks. They will give you an insight into who we are, what we do, and will explain what you can expect from your adoption journey with ACE.

INFORMATION MEETING

INITIAL ENQUIRY

Following this you will receive an email with a form to fill in if you would like a call back from our team to progress your adoption journey. Once received by ACE a social worker will then complete an enquiry call with you to gather some basic details and information.

An online visit will be set up (via Microsoft Teams). These last around 2 hours. A social worker will collect further information from you about your current circumstances, background information, and what has brought you to adoption, and answer any questions or queries you have.

ONLINE INFORMATION VISIT

REGISTRATION OF INTEREST

Providing everyone is happy to proceed you will be sent a Registration of Interest (ROI) Form to complete. Guidance will be sent out with this to assist you. This is your application to become adoptive parents.

Once your ROI form has been accepted you will enter Stage 1 of the process, which can take approximately 2 months or longer. This involves various checks and references being completed. * Alongside reference checks being completed you will need to attend training and complete Stage 1 homework. **

STAGE 1 REFERENCES, PREPARATION TRAINING AND WORKBOOK

STAGE 2 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Once your Stage 1 checks and references have been completed and your information submitted this is reviewed by a manager. If your Stage 1 review is positive, you are allocated a social worker to complete Stage 2 of your assessment. This typically takes around 6 months.

This will involve various home visits (typically between 6 - 8 visits) which will take place mostly within working hours Monday - Friday. The social worker will get to know you and your family and spend time with you thinking about your strengths you could bring to parenting an adopted child and what type of child or children might suit your family.

STAGE 2 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

STAGE 2 TRAINING

The social worker will explore areas such as your family background, present circumstances, lifestyle, support networks, previous relationships, education and employment history, and experiences with children. There are additional training modules to attend in Stage 2 to include training for your family and friends. ***

The information collected during the assessment is written up into an Adopter Assessment Report (AAR), which you will have a chance to comment upon before attending adoption panel with your social worker. Panel members will have read your assessment and will have some questions to ask you, and you can ask them questions too.

ADOPTION PANEL

ADM DECISION

The panel will make a recommendation regarding your suitability to adopt to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who decides whether or not to accept this recommendation. You are notified once the ADM makes their decision.

Your social worker will keep you informed about potential children needing families and how they are progressing. You can also view profiles of children through an online platform called Link Maker. The time taken to find the right child/ren can vary depending on your individual circumstances and preferences.

FAMILY FINDING

MATCHING

Once you and your social worker agree on a child or children to join your family you will be provided with further information to decide whether you should proceed. You will meet the child's social worker during this stage.

Once an agreement is reached to progress, you will again be invited to the adoption panel where a recommendation will be made about the proposed match. The ADM in the child's local authority will consider the adoption panel's recommendation.

MATCHING

TRANSITION

Once the approval is given to the child/ren moving in with you arrangements are made for you to meet the child/ren and their current carers. This can happen before the adoption panel meeting.

You will continue to receive support from your social worker. Where the child is subject to a placement order (the local authority has the legal authority to place a child with adoptive parents), and has settled with you, after a minimum of 10 weeks you can apply to the court for an adoption order, depending on the legal situation. Your social worker will help you with this.

EARLY DAYS

AFTER ADOPTION

Once an adoption order is made, all the rights and responsibilities as the legal parents transfer to you. You will continue to have access to a wide range of adoption support services through ACE including having the same social worker for one year who will continue to support you and ensure you can access training.

*STAGE 1 CHECKS AND REFERENCES INLCUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

- DBS check.
- Adoption medical completed by your GP (you will be charged by your GP for this).
- 6 written personal references, (2 from family members and 4 from non-family members). Solo applicants will require 3 personal references (1 from family member and 2 from non-family member).
- Previous partner reference (if you have co-parented or co-habited).
- Current employer reference.
- Local Authority checks where you have resided.
- Previous employer references (if worked with children or vulnerable adults).
- Overseas checks (if you have lived and/or worked abroad).
- School references (if you have children).
- Health Visitor reference (if you have children under 5).
- SSAFA reference (if you have been in the armed forces).

**STAGE 1 TRAINING AND WORK TO COMPLETE

- Attend Preparation Training. This is a 4 day course led by social workers where you will attend alongside other adopters. It involves some homework reading and preparation then various group learning and discussions about adoption. This training takes place in Warwick or Worcester.
- Complete a Home Study Workbook, plus information around your family tree and support network.
- Complete a financial statement, home health and safety questionnaire, and a pet questionnaire where applicable.

***STAGE 2 TRAINING

- 2 further days of preparation training focussing on Theraplay techniques, Life Story Books and Adoption Support.
- Adopting with birth children training (2 hour workshop for people with birth children already).
- Adopting again (2 hour workshop for people who have adopted before).
- Family and friends training (2 hour workshop for your family and friends to attend to learn about adoption and how to support you with your journey).



WHO ARE THE CHILDREN

The children needing adoption across the ACE region are typically between the ages of birth and 8 years and come from a variety of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Many will be part of a sibling group and some will have additional needs, disabilities or developmental uncertainties.

There are many reasons why children need adoptive families. They may have experienced abuse or neglect and lived in homes where there was violence or substance misuse. Due to this they will need parents who will stick with them through the good and not so good times, to enable and support them to grow up to feel safe and secure and be confident. The adoption process is designed to ensure that you develop key skills in the therapeutic parenting style of DDP and PACE, which will help you to provide the love and reliable care these children need in order to rebuild their trust in adults and lead fulfilled lives.

Younger Children

Many of the children ACE place for adoption are younger, aged birth - 2 years. They may have been placed in foster care at birth or from a young age due to longstanding worries about the care received in their birth families or they may have been exposed to drugs, alcohol misuse or violence in utero.

Early Permanence through Fostering for Adoption (FfA)

Commonly referred to in ACE as Fostering for Adoption, you are temporarily approved as a foster carer for a child or children who may go on to have a plan for adoption. You will be required to fulfil all the duties and responsibilities of a foster carer and will receive a fostering allowance.

ACE has placed over 100 children via FfA! Most children placed are very young but sometimes older children are placed FfA to avoid them having to move between foster families. FfA has many benefits for the children, as it means that often they can build attachments with their adoptive families sooner.

Adopters can often experience their children's firsts, such as first steps, words etc. However, this does carry some risks as the court may decide that the child should not be adopted, as their family circumstances may change.

Children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, and Mixed Ethnicity backgrounds

Children needing adoption come from many different family backgrounds, cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Black and mixed heritage children frequently wait longer for an adoptive family. Prospective adopter/s can be considered for children with whom they do not share the same ethnicity, however, they will need to consider how they can positively promote their child's identity. ACE will provide flexible and creative support.

Brothers and Sisters

ACE always needs more adoptive families who can offer caring and stable homes for brothers and sisters of varying sizes and ages. Adopting siblings can have many benefits, for example you can become a complete family unit instantly! Also, siblings have each other for support when going through a transition to a new home and they can stay together throughout their childhoods. Your adopted children will have a shared history, which can support their identity development and emotional stability as they grow up.



Example profile – Lilly (age 4) and Tommy (age 1)

Lilly and Tommy are full siblings who need to live together. Lilly loves anything to do with princesses and pink! Lilly experienced neglect in the care of her birth family and was often left to look after herself and her little brother. Lilly responds well to firm boundaries, as these make her feel safe now. Lilly witnessed violence between her birth parents and doesn't like loud noises. Lilly has some speech and language delays so can't always express how she is feeling. Tommy is a happy little boy who loves cuddles and kisses. Tommy has built a good attachment to his foster carer and will usually only cry when he needs his nappy changing or he is hungry.

Children with disabilities or unknown health and developmental needs

All children need secure and loving homes. We are looking for adoptive parents willing to help meet the needs of children with additional health and developmental needs or disabilities. Sometimes we do not know what the likely health or developmental outcomes may be for a child, for example if they have a chromosome disorder or where the parent used drugs or alcohol excessively through pregnancy. The needs of young children are often unknown, and children may later go on to receive diagnoses, such as ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders or learning difficulties. However, all children have strengths, positive qualities and skills despite these diagnoses and can grow up to live independently. ACE needs adoptive families who are willing to accept and understand these uncertainties and be willing and committed to help their child develop and succeed at their own pace. ACE will advise and support you, so that every child reaches their full potential.

Example profile – Demi (age 3)

Demi is described as a cheerful little soul who is always smiling. Demi loves to be the centre of attention and having the adults around her interacting with her. Demi likes animals and although cannot say the names of animals she will make the correct noises and laugh while doing so. Demi has significant developmental delay and is reviewed by the paediatrician. She is functioning at approximately half of her chronological age in all areas. However, she is making some slow progress and her foster carers celebrate each of her achievements. Genetic testing has identified that Demi has a chromosome deletion, which is associated with developmental delays.

Older children

ACE are looking for adoptive families for children of all ages. Children over the age of 5 are often less likely to be adopted or have to wait longer for a family. However, there are several benefits to adopting older children as there is usually much more information known about their health, development, personality, likes and dislikes. They may also have a greater understanding of their life story and the decisions made around adoption.

Example profile – Dylan (age 6)

Dylan is a bubbly, energetic little boy who has an infectious smile and a laugh that has everyone falling around laughing after him. He likes to have your attention and will play all day long, be it at the park, with playdoh or with building blocks. Dylan also enjoys doing puzzles and is getting really good at them now. Dylan has experienced a number of different carers in his life and due to her mental health difficulties Dylan's mum was very unpredictable. Due to this Dylan struggles to trust adults, however he loves cuddles and is very affectionate and enjoys time on the sofa cuddled into his carers. At times he struggles to express his feelings and Dylan likes to feel in control. Dylan asks his social worker every time she visits if she has found him a new family yet!

SUPPORTING YOU AFTER ADOPTION

Adoption is a lifelong commitment, which can throw up different issues at various stages throughout a child's life. ACE is committed to being there to help and to offer you support at any point in the future when you need it.

There are a variety of services available to you and we can help to assess your needs when you feel help is required. Please look on our website for more details.

We offer:

- 12 months of support from your assessing social worker after the adoption order has been made, to ensure easy and quick access to support that may be needed in those early months after the adoption is formalised.
- An advice and information service regarding adoption related issues which you can access directly by contacting ACE at any point that support may be needed.
- A training programme for adoptive parents in areas such as Therapeutic and Sensory Based Parenting, Non Violence Resistance (NVR), Life Story Work and 'talking and telling' about adoption, Theraplay, Parenting Teenagers and Eat, Sleep and Play.
- Advice and support in using DDP and PACE to understand a child's changing needs and support their healthy emotional development.
- Access to 4 free counselling sessions.
- Indirect contact exchange service to assist in exchanging information between birth families, young people and adoptive parents.
- Advice and information on maintaining relationships for your child.
- Opportunities to meet other adoptive families which may include wellie walks, picnics and other activities.
- Adopted Young People's Groups.
- ACE Clinical Psychology Service.
- Support in making applications to the Adoption Support Fund for specific therapeutic support for you, your child or children.



ADOPTION AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT FUND

What is the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)?

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) was established to help pay for essential therapy services for adoptive families as and when they need it. It was set up by the government because many families need some kind of support during and following adoption. The ASGSF enables adoptive families to access the services they need more easily. Following an “assessment of need” it may be identified that you or your child may need to access therapeutic support which could be funded through the ASGSF.

The therapies funded are those identified to help achieve the following positive outcomes for you and your child:

- Improved relationships with friends, family members, teachers and school staff
- Improved engagement with learning
- Improved emotional regulation and behaviour management
- Improved confidence and ability to enjoy a positive family life and social relationships.

This [First4Adoption webpage](#) provides helpful information on the support that the ASGSF can provide and eligibility.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I'm 50 – am I too old to adopt?

The youngest age at which you can adopt is 21; there is no upper age limit. Consideration will be given to whether your age is compatible to the age of the child you are seeking to adopt. You will need energy and stamina to keep up with the child you adopt. People of all ages can, and do, successfully adopt.

I'm not married – can I adopt?

Yes - you can adopt whether you are single, living with a partner or divorced.

I'm out of work – can I adopt?

Yes - we welcome people from all backgrounds, regardless of their employment or financial status. Your financial circumstances and employment status will always be considered as part of an assessment but being unemployed or on a low income does not automatically rule you out.

Can I continue to work following adoption?

Yes - just if you can provide time and space as these are important to a child. We would expect a minimum of 6 months adoption leave to be taken when a child is placed with you, to help ensure that your child has the best chance to settle into your family. Where a child is under 2 years of age, we would ideally expect adoptive parents to take 12 months adoption leave.

Can I adopt if I'm in a same sex relationship?

Yes - ACE encourages and welcomes all sections of the community to become adoptive parents and is committed to equality of opportunity.

Can I adopt if I live in rented accommodation?

You can adopt whether you are renting or own your own home if you have or will have the bedroom space available for the child. A secure and stable environment is of utmost importance for adopted children.

What if I have a health issue?

Anyone who applies to adopt will need to have a medical assessment. Any medical issues that arise will be taken into consideration and the agency's medical adviser will make recommendations on your suitability.

Can I adopt if I have a criminal conviction?

People with minor convictions can adopt a child or children but much depends on the seriousness of the offence, how long ago the crime was committed and how you have lived your life since. People with convictions for violent or sexual offences against children will not be considered as suitable to adopt.

I have pets, can I adopt?

ACE recognises the important role pets, especially dogs, can have in families' lives and we will gather information on any pets within the household as part of the assessment process. However, ACE will not be in a position to accept a Registration of Interest from an applicant who has a dog living within the household where the breed of the dog falls under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasileiro and XL Bully).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Would I be able to adopt as a smoker?

ACE's policy states that children should not be placed in a smoking household when they are under 5 years old, have a particular need for a non-smoking household, disabled or suffering from heart disease, glue ear or respiratory problems such as asthma. If you wish to be considered for a child under 5 years we ask that you have given up smoking for a minimum of 12 months at the time of beginning Stage 1 of the adoption process. Whilst smoking status is not an indicator of parenting skills, there are long-term health and social implications for a child who has been exposed to second-hand/passive smoking.

If I have a child of my own, can I still adopt?

Yes - we actively encourage people with parenting experience. Your children will be included in the assessment process, as it is important to ensure adoption is right for the whole family. However there needs to be an appropriate age gap between the children thus we are unable to process applications from potential adopters who have children under 2 years old.

I have a disability – will this prevent me from adopting?

Having a disability should not automatically exclude anyone from becoming an adoptive parent, and it is widely recognised that people with disabilities are still able to provide a very loving home for a child. Disability is only one of the many factors that will be considered, so do not rule yourself out before you have spoken to us. Even if you believe that you might need some additional assistance when it comes to parenting an adopted child there are services that may be able to provide you with this support.

Can I approach other adoption agencies or local authorities?

When you begin gathering adoption information you may wish to approach other agencies in addition to ACE. First4adoption.org.uk is a useful website providing information on the options available to you. However, you are only able to submit a Registration of Interest with one adoption agency at any one time.

My partner and I have been trying to have a baby through IVF. We've got our last attempt next month and have decided not to try again. Where do we stand in relation to adoption?

Although you might not realise or accept it now, the experience of unsuccessful IVF can bring deep emotional reactions. Given that the adoption process is in itself very stressful, emotional and requires people to be able to think wholeheartedly about the needs of children, we advise prospective applicants to allow themselves time to come to terms with their loss and their decision to stop all treatments. Applicants who have taken time out have recognised with hindsight the great benefit of having allowed themselves time to grieve and really think through their decision to adopt. For some, adopting a child will never replace the birth child they hoped to have. We usually recommend that applicants give themselves on average 6 months before beginning Stage 1 of the adoption process as we would want to be sure that you have come to terms with your situation. However, we know that everybody's experience is unique so please contact us to discuss your individual situation.

FIND OUT MORE

ACE website and resources

www.aceadoption.com Phone: 0300 369 0556

Email: enquiries@acedoption.com

Department for Education

Provides useful information on the legal aspects of adoption.

www.gov.uk

PAC-UK

Therapy, advice, support, counselling, and training for those affected by adoption.

www.pac.org.uk Phone: 020 7284 5879

Family Lives

A national family support charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life.

www.familylives.org.uk Phone: 0808 800 2222

First4Adoption

A dedicated information service for people interested in adopting a child in England.

www.first4adoption.org.uk

Email: helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk

Adoption UK

Offer support and information before, during and after adoption.

www.adoptionuk.org.uk Phone: 0300 666 0006

Email: admin@adoptionuk.org.uk



THANK YOU



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