



## Welcome to Adoption Central England (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 your 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 our children.

There are a number of 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. 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 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 Adoption Central England 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 actively 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.

If you decide to go ahead with your enquiry now, please do not think this commits you to anything at this stage. You would have more opportunities to think through the issues and carefully consider whether adoption is right for you and your family.

ACE looks forward to hearing from you soon

Yours faithfully

**Brenda Vincent**

ACE Lead Manager



## Adopting for ACE

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

Parenting adopted children, whilst presenting unique challenges, can be hugely rewarding. You will need to have qualities to see your child/ren through the ups and downs that they will face throughout their lives. If you are able to 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 are able to 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 currently in care, we know you will have the potential to become an adoptive parent.

The adoption process focuses on finding the best possible family for the child/ren, and approval as an adopter takes about six months. It's less daunting than you might think and could be one of the most rewarding decisions you'll ever make.

# 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 workers from Adoption Central England, whose job it is to make sure that prospective adopters are the best possible parents for the child/ren in need of a home. 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 to become better adoptive parents.

The approval process for prospective adopters comes in two stages and the whole process should take six months in total, although there is opportunity to extend this timescale if needed. This allows you the time to consider carefully whether embarking on the adoption is right for you.

We know that it can take years to make the decision to adopt, but just a few seconds to take the first step. We hope that this pack helps you make that decision to change a child's life.

## 8 Steps to your Adoption Journey

### 1. Pre Stage One – Information Sharing

After you have read your Enquiry Pack, should you want to progress further, you will be invited to an Information Meeting which are held every two weeks throughout the year at different locations across our region. Their purpose is to give you an insight into what adoption means for the children and yourself as a prospective adoptive parent and you will be given information to help you decide if adoption is right for you.

### 2. Pre Stage One – Home Visit

If you wish to continue, we will arrange for an adoption social worker to visit you in your own home. This will provide the opportunity to address questions relating to your personal circumstances in privacy. After meeting with the social worker and providing everyone is happy to proceed to the next stage, you will be sent a Registration of Interest Form to complete. Please do ask for help to complete this form if you need it.

When you have returned the form we will make a decision as to whether you will be able to proceed to the next stage of the process, and you will be given the decision within five working days.

### **3. Stage One – Registration and Reference Checks**

Following your formal Registration of Interest to become an adoptive parent, Stage One begins. This stage should take approximately two months. Stage One is a prospective adopter led process as there are a number of actions for you to complete. The Stage One Agreement will set out the responsibilities of the adoption service and of you as the prospective adopter. We will ask you to complete a workbook and undertake the training that will be provided for you.

#### **Preparation Training**

Within both stages of the process you are invited to attend a three day group Preparation Course. During stage one and a further preparation day during stage two, this is to help identify the skills that you have and to learn about what is involved in adoption. They are facilitated by experienced adoption social workers and existing adoptive parents.

### **4. Stage One - continued**

At this point we will also take up a number of statutory checks and references, including:

- Disclosure and Barring Service which is a criminal background check
- Six written personal references, two from family members and four non-family members, who will need to have known you for at least 3 years.
- Employers' references

We will request your agreement to undertake an adoption medical, which is completed by your GP. This is simply to ensure that you are physically fit and emotionally well enough from a medical point of view to parent a child/ren throughout their minority years. There is a cost involved in obtaining the medical report that will need to be met by you as the prospective adopter/s.

We recognise that deciding to adopt is one of the most important decisions you will ever have to make and you need to make sure that it is right for you. Thus we will be on hand to help you through this and to allow you extra time to complete this stage of the process. Please note, once you have completed stage one, you may also take a break of up to six months to before moving onto Stage Two.

### **5. Stage Two - Assessment**

This is approximately a four month long process during which time you are assessed and a decision is made as to whether you are suitable to become an adopter. Your social worker will meet with you throughout this period to carry out a full assessment. During this time the social worker gets to know you and your family and spends time helping you think about what strengths you could bring to parenting an adoptive child/ren. We will talk to you about your family background and your present circumstances. You will be asked to provide information about your education, employment history, leisure interests, past relationships and experience of caring for children.

Remember the whole process is focused on finding the right homes for the children in care, so developing an understanding of the kinds of child/ren you could support is very important. The process of preparation and assessment of prospective adopters is thorough, this is to determine whether applicants are suitable to adopt. During this stage we will have to ask some very detailed and personal questions, so we ask that you are relaxed, open and honest with us as far as possible.

## **6. Adoption Panel**

On completion of the assessment, it is written up into a report called the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR), which is taken to Adoption Central England's Adoption Panel. You will have the opportunity to read and comment upon the report. You will be invited to attend the Adoption Panel meeting with your social worker. All Panel members will have read your assessment and will have some questions to ask you. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have. The panel will make a recommendation regarding your approval which will be passed to a senior manager in ACE, called the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who decides whether or not to accept the recommendation, based on all of the reports and minutes of the Adoption Panel meeting. Once the ADM has made their decision you will be notified of the decision.

## **7. Following Approval**

Being approved to adopt does not mean that a child or children will be placed with you straight away. The time taken to find the best match can vary and your social worker will keep you informed of progress. Sometimes this part of the process can feel the longest, but for others a match is made very quickly.

## **8. Matching and placement**

There are many factors that are taken into consideration in order to ensure that the adoption placement will have the best chances of being a success. Our priority is to ensure that the child or children will be placed within a family that are best able to meet their needs through childhood and beyond.

Sometimes your worker will have a child in mind for you even from the early stages of the assessment process. If this is the case your journey through this phase of the process can be quite short, but in other situations it can take some time. If you are not being considered for a child within Adoption Central England then we can look further afield after three months of approval. Your social worker will discuss this with you in more detail at the right time.

Once a suitable child (or children) is identified you will be told all about them, including their future support and contact needs, so you can decide if this is the right placement for you. If everyone agrees that they want to move forward you will again be invited to the Adoption Panel where a recommendation will be made about the prospective placement match.

The placement will be carefully planned and, after a period of introductions, the child will come to live with you. Remember you are not on your own - your social worker will visit you and provide advice and support. The child's social worker will also visit regularly.

Where the child/ren is the subject of a placement order (which gives the local authority the legal authority to place a child with adoptive parents) and has settled into the family (minimum of 10 weeks depending on the legal situation), you can apply to the court for an Adoption Order. When the order is made, all the rights and responsibilities as the legal parents transfer to you. We will continue to keep in contact with you and offer you a range of adoption support services following the making of the Adoption Order.



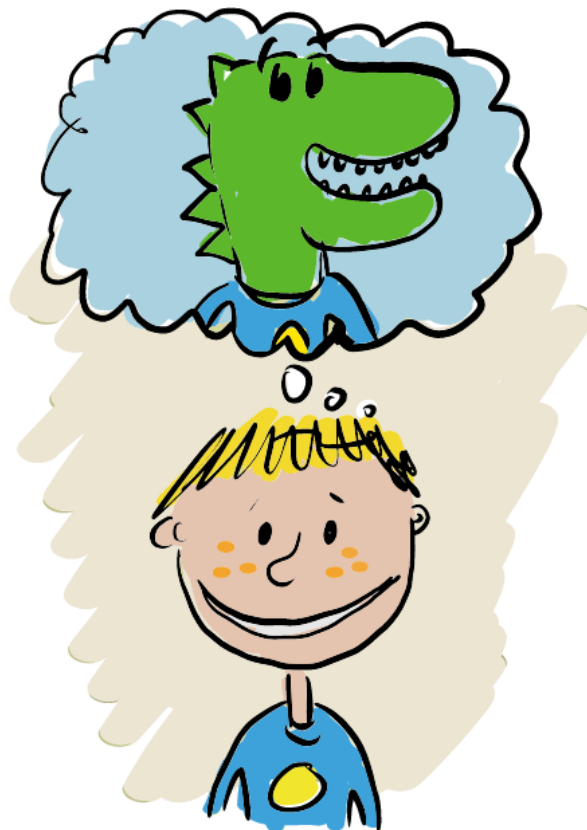


## Who are the children?

One thing all of the children have in common is that they have experienced the loss of their birth parents – because, for whatever reason, their birth parents are not able to provide them with the care they need.

There are many reasons why children need adoptive homes. It's true that some will have experienced neglect or abuse, and others will have disabilities or special needs. There are often sibling groups whose greatest wish is to join an adoptive family who are committed to keeping brothers and sisters together. All these factors have implications and children who need adoptive homes can have complex needs. At this stage in their lives they 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 can provide the love and reliable care to help these children to rebuild their trust in adults and lead a fulfilled life.

*Quote "Having completed the training, I now know how important it is to embrace the idea that I am going to have to parent differently and that the challenges will be different to ones I have faced with my birth daughter"*



# Supporting you after adoption

Adoption is a lifelong commitment, which can throw up different issues at various stages throughout a child's life. Adoption Central England is committed to being there to help and support you 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.

## We offer:

- An advice and information service which you can access directly
- A training programme for adopters in areas such as loss, attachment, life story work and communicating with children
- A Letterbox Exchange Service to assist in exchanging information between birth families and adoptive families
- Advice and information on direct contact issues where applicable
- Regular support group meetings
- Advice and information to adopted adults; including counselling to over 18 year olds, who wish to have access to their birth records
- Advice, information and an intermediary service to birth relatives after adoption





# Adoption Support Fund

## What is the Adoption Support Fund (ASF)?

On 24th January 2013, the Department for Education (DfE) published their report 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding more loving homes', setting out their proposals to attract adopters and improve the support available to adoptive families. This led to the implementation of the Adoption Support Fund in December 2013 which worked initially with 13 local authorities but which has since been extended across the country.

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was established to help pay for essential therapy services for adoptive families as and when they need it. It has been set up because many families need some kind of support during and following adoption and too many have struggled to get the help they need in the past. The ASF will enable adoptive families to access the services they need more easily in future.

## What support will I receive through the ASF?

The ASF is available for children up to and including the age of 21 (or 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan) who have been adopted from local authority care in England or adopted from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland but living in England.

The fund will provide money to Adoption Central England to fund a range of therapeutic services. An assessment of need is undertaken to determine what support could be provided prior to an application being made to the ASF.

The amount per child per year is capped alongside a separate amount where a specialist assessment of the child is needed.

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.

To achieve these outcomes the fund will pay for therapeutic support services including a range of different therapeutic interventions.



## 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 placed with you. 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 as long as 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 adopters to take 12 months adoption leave.

### **Can I adopt if I'm in same sex relationship?**

Yes - Adoption Central England 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, as long as you have a spare bedroom 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 Adoption Panel'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 adopters.

### **Would I be able to adopt as a smoker?**

Adoption Central England'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 one 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 secondhand/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 adopter, 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 don't 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 Adoption Central England. [First4adoption.org.uk](http://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 at the moment, 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 the time to come to terms with their loss and their decision to stop all treatments. Applicants who have taken the 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 one 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.

**If you want to discuss your personal circumstances please call us on:  
0300 369 0556**

## Find out more

### Department for Education

Provides useful information on the legal aspects of adoption.

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

### Post Adoption Centre

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

[www.pac.org.uk](http://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](http://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](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk)

**Phone:** 0300 222 0022

**Email:** [helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk)

### Adoption UK

Offer support and information before, during and after adoption.

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

**Phone:** 01295 752240

**Email:** [admin@adoptionuk.org.uk](mailto:admin@adoptionuk.org.uk)