



TACT
Adoption

My guide to adoption

Brighter futures for children in care

My guide to adoption

This leaflet will help you understand what adoption is and what it will mean for you.



What adoption means

Adoption means belonging to a new family and growing up with them as if you were born to them, when you cannot live with your birth family. If the court agrees that you should be adopted, a lot of things will change in your life. These include your surname as you will be known by the name of your new family. You will already be living with your new family by the time the judge grants an adoption order, possibly in a different area to the place that you lived with your foster family. You may have to attend a new school and make new friends.



This doesn't mean that you will lose touch with the people you knew before you joined your new family and I will tell you more about how you can keep in contact with them later in this guide.

Sometimes, all these changes can be hard to cope with and to understand. Your social worker and your new family will always be there to answer your questions and will help you to get used to all the changes in your life.

Every year, hundreds of children are adopted. Some are babies, some are older, some are adopted with their sisters and brothers, some are adopted from other countries, and some are adopted by relatives or friends of the family.



The court makes something called an adoption order, and you are then, legally part of your new family. The adopters become your new parents and you become a part of their family as if you were born to them. They are responsible for taking care of you throughout your life and making decisions about anything that will have an affect on you.

There are many reasons why some children cannot stay with the family they were born into. Usually, it's because your birth parents have not been able to look after you so that you grow up like other children or they may have hurt you. Sometimes, it's because they think that you will have a better life with another family than the life they can offer you. If your birth family cannot look after you, a social worker will arrange for you to be safe and well looked after. Most of the time, this means living with a foster family while they look for a new forever family who can look after you until you become an adult. They are called adoptive families.



A social worker is someone who tries to help children and their families when they have serious problems. They also find new parents for children who need them.

Adoption is different from fostering



Foster families usually look after children until they can go home or move to a new adoptive family. Sometimes, a foster family looks after a child until he or she is grown up and sometimes a foster family will arrange to adopt their foster child. Foster families do not usually look after children until they have grown up, although sometimes they keep in touch after their foster children have moved on to new families.



Deciding about adoption

Being adopted is a very important event in your life.

Your social worker will talk to you about what it means to be adopted and answer any questions you have. She/he will talk to your birth parents and perhaps other relatives to let them know the plans we are making for your future and to ask them what they think. Plans about your adoption will be discussed at meetings, whenever your future is thought about.

It is really important that you say what you think and how you feel. You can ask any questions that you want to, and tell the social worker what you want to happen.

 If you are not happy with any of the plans, tell your social worker before final decisions are made.

Maybe there is already someone – a relative or someone else – who you could live with. Tell your social worker so that they can look into it.



A court will be involved in deciding what will happen to you and will make a care order giving the social worker's permission to plan for your future and to find an adoptive family for you.



The adoption panel

A group of adults called an adoption panel tells the social workers what they think about the plan for adoption and whether it would be best for you. It also helps to match you with the right family.

On the panel, there is often an adult who has been adopted and someone who has adopted children. There will be a medical advisor who will talk about you and your health and a legal advisor who will tell the panel about the law and how it affects you. There will be other people who work with or who know a lot about caring for children.

The panel reads a report by your social worker. Your social worker will put your views and wishes in the report, so it's important for you to tell the social worker what you think, how you feel and what you want to happen. You can ask your social worker to put this in the report so that the panel knows how you feel and what you think. You could also write a letter for the panel or make a DVD or an audio tape. If you want to meet the panel yourself, you should ask your social worker about this; it might be possible, depending on how old you are.

If it is decided that adoption is best for you, your social worker will talk to you about it. He or she will find out what kind of family you would like and what kind of family can best look after you. Then, the social worker will begin to look for a family for you.



Finding out about you

To choose the right family, your social worker needs to find out a lot about you. It's important to tell them the things about yourself that you want the new family to know. For example, what you like and don't like, things that make you happy and things that make you sad, things you are good at and not good at.

Your social worker, foster carer or key worker may start helping you understand the things that have happened to you in your past and will help you make a life story book – this book is about you. What you tell your social worker will only be told to the people helping to find the right family for you. Your new family will need to know all about you, just like you will need to find out things about them.



Your feelings and wishes are very important

Decisions about you should always include what you think and what you want.

You can ask your social worker how they are making sure that what you think is being properly listened to before decisions are made.





This may be a difficult time. All the changes around you might make it hard to understand what's really going on. You may feel scared and upset or even angry. Don't hide these feelings. Talk to your social worker who will help you with these feelings. You can put questions about what's happening to your social worker or your foster family, or someone you trust.

Finding the right family

Some families are waiting to adopt a child. Some of them may have adopted before or have their own birth children. Adoption agencies sometimes have families that live in your area. Your social worker can find out about other families that live in your area or other parts of the country. It may be a family with a mum and a dad, or two mums, or two dads, or just one mum, or just one dad. ... It may be a family with other children or a family where you would be the only child.



Your social worker will look for a family that is of a similar ethnic background to you. This means that at least one person in your new family may be the same as you: speak the same language/s, have the same religious celebrations and share other parts of your culture. If this is not possible, your social worker will talk with you.





The adoption agency

An adoption agency arranges adoptions for children and knows about families waiting to adopt.

Your social worker may have contacted TACT Adoption as we are an adoption agency and we will give them information about families waiting to adopt.

Your social worker will meet different families to find out about them and will choose one that they think will be the right one for you. Sometimes, it can take a long time to find a family, but your social worker will tell you what is happening.

The reasons for choosing a family are written down and sent to the people on the adoption panel. They will remember you from the last time they talked about you, when they agreed that adoption was the right plan for you. They will look at all the information, decide whether or not they think the social worker has found the right family for you and tell the agency decision maker what they think.

The final decision is made by the agency decision maker – the social worker responsible for all the decisions affecting children who are looked after by local authorities. If the decision is “yes”, this is the right family, then you and the family will meet.



Sometimes, the panel wants some more information about the family before they decide; then it can take a little longer.

You will be able to ask any questions about the family and what they are like.

They may send you photographs of their house and family or even write their own life story for you, so that you know a bit about them before you meet.

Meeting the new family

Your social worker will arrange for you and the family to meet. This could be at your foster carer's house or somewhere else. You may be a bit scared, but also excited as you start to get to know who's in the family and what they're like. You will visit them too, perhaps with your foster carer or social worker and maybe stay over a few times. When you and everyone else feel that you are ready, and depending on school holidays, you will go and live with them. This will usually take between two to eight weeks from when you first meet them. Your social worker will visit to see how you're getting on.



If you are not happy about the family

If, after meeting the new family a few times, you feel that you would not be happy to live with them, you should tell your social worker or the people you are living with, or someone else you trust. This is a time when you can feel quite mixed up about all



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the new things that have happened and are going to happen, so it would be normal for you to feel this way. Talk about it with your social worker who will be there to help you sort out your feelings.

Your social worker should make sure that your wishes and worries are always properly listened to in the decisions being made about you.

Your birth parents

Your birth parents are the family you were born into. Before everything is finally agreed, the social workers, the adoption panel and the court will need to know what they think and how they feel about you being adopted. Your birth parents will still love you, even if it is not safe for you to live with them or if they are not able to look after you and you will probably still have feelings for them too. It's normal to feel this way and you can talk to your social worker or someone you trust about how you feel.

Some birth parents say "yes" to adoption, because they know that it will be best for their child. Some are not sure, and their social worker will talk to them to help them sort it out and some say no, because, although they cannot look after their children properly, they still love them and find it hard to say that they can't look after them safely themselves. When this happens, the court will ask another social worker to help the judge decide what will be best. This social worker is called a Children's Guardian.



The Children's Guardian

A Children's Guardian is someone who finds out what you think and feel and makes sure that your feelings and views are told to the court.

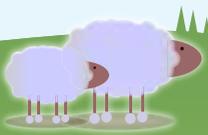
Will I see my birth family again?

You may be wondering whether you will see some or all of your birth family again. Belonging to a new family does not mean that you forget about your birth family. If there are people from your birth family who you want to see or send letters to from time to time, talk to your social worker to let them know your views. He/she will arrange for you to keep in touch, although, in the end, adults will decide what will help you most. The word that social workers use for keeping in touch is "contact".

For some children, it may be good to keep in touch with some of their birth family. For others, it may not be possible or it may be upsetting and may not even be what the child wants. Your social worker will help you to sort out your feelings about contact with your birth family.

They will help you work out whether it's good for you or not, which family members you should keep in touch with and the best way to do this. The social worker will tell your new family about it and help arrange for you to telephone them from time to time, write letters or see your birth family if everyone agrees.

Even if you don't see your birth parents, it might be arranged for them and your new adoptive parents to write to each other sometimes, perhaps once a year.



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Your birth parents will receive news about you and you may receive news about them. This is usually done through the social workers, because birth parents aren't usually told a child's new surname or new address.

You may also want to keep in touch with foster carers, friends and teachers from your past and you can talk to your social worker to see if this can be arranged.

In court

The court is the place where a judge can make a decision about where you live and whether or not you should be adopted, and who should adopt you.

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In the court, an adoption order will be made. The adoption order will mean that you now legally belong to your new family. Your adoptive parents will be your legal parents and will have full responsibility for you just as if you were born to them. You'll remember that we talked about some of the changes earlier and you can look again at what this means and how it will affect you.

But first, the court will make a date so that you, your new family and social worker can go and meet the judge. The judge will listen to you and the adults about the plans for



your adoption. If all is going well, the judge will decide that being adopted by the new family is best for you. Usually, this happens when you have already been living with your new parents for at least six months or even longer.

You may feel scared but there's no need to be. It will be a big day for you and your new family. You will probably have a celebration!

Help with problems or difficulties

If you have problems or difficulties, you should talk to your own social worker, to your family's adoption support worker or someone you can trust to help you work things out. If you are still not happy, you can make a complaint and share your worries with the social services of TACT who have made the arrangements for you.

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Independent advocate

At any time, you can talk to an independent person called an advocate to help you. An independent advocate is someone who does not work for the agency that your social worker works for, and who can help you with problems.

The following organisations can find an independent advocate for you:

Voice

Freephone: 0808 800 5792

Email: info@voiceyp.org

Website: www.voiceyp.org



National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

Freephone: 0800 61 61 01

Email: help@nyas.net

Website: www.nyas.net

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Freephone: 0808 802 0008

Website: www.childrenslegalcentre.com

If you are not happy with how the social worker and the adoption agency have been handling your adoption, you can make a complaint to the Children's Rights Director if you are in England or the Children's Commissioner for Wales if you are in Wales (the contact details are on page 16). You can get information on how to do this from your social worker or from the independent advocate that we talked about.



After you've been adopted

Once you've been adopted you may want to know how you can get the support or help you may need in the future. Keep this leaflet safe so that you can use it if you need to.

You might need help with:

- Anything that you are worried about to do with your adoption.
- If you are in contact with your birth relatives. Or your brothers and sisters or anyone else who is important to you.
- If you write or receive letters from
 - Your birth relatives.
 - Your brothers and sisters.
- Wanting to have more information about your birth family.
- Finding someone to talk to outside your family.
- A birth relative may have tried to contact you on Facebook or MySpace. This might be upsetting or confusing and you may not be sure what to do?



So what should you do?

Talk with your parent(s) about what you want:

You and they can come to see us.

Who are we?

We are the Post Adoption Service and we can often suggest lots of ways to help you with your questions.



Where are we?

Our office is at: The Courtyard, 303 Hither Green Lane, Hither Green, London, SE13 6TJ.

Our team is called the Post Adoption Service. Our telephone number is 020 8695 8111. You or your parents can give us a ring any day of the week 9am to 5pm when our office is open. You can leave a message on our answerphone at other times and we will ring you back.

You can email us as well if you have a laptop or computer at home. Our email address is: adoption@tactcare.org.uk

If you decide not to come to us - then there are other people who are also good at giving you support and help:



Post Adoption Centre

They have an advice line you can contact on: 020 7284 5879.

Talkadoption

This is a helpline for young adopted people on 0808 808 1234. They can help with any worries or questions you have.

Rights4Me

The office of the Children's Rights Director



This is an organisation that will tell you more about your rights. They will also listen to and answer any queries that you may have. You can contact them on 0800 528 0731 or visit their website at: www.rights4me.org.uk

If you live in Wales, you can write to the Children's Commissioner for Wales at Oystermouth House, Phoenix Way, Llansamlet, Swansea, SA7 9FS. Or call their Freephone on 0808 801 1000. You can also visit their website at www.childcom.org.uk





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www.tactcare.org.uk/adoption



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