



ADOPT
LONDON

YOUR
**adoption
journey**

BEGINS HERE...



Thank you for choosing Adopt London

Adopting a child is a life-changing experience. Adoption offers children the love, stability and security of family life they may not have experienced before. It's one of the most important decisions you could make, so we are here to help you find out if adoption is right for you.

Every year in England around 3,000 children are waiting for loving adoptive families. These children come from a range of backgrounds, but what they have in common is a difficult start in life and that they can no longer be brought up by their birth families. All these children need a loving, stable home.



By now you will already have given adoption a great deal of thought and this booklet is designed to give you information about who we are, the children we are wanting to find adoptive homes for and what is involved in the process of adoption. We hope to give you more to think about, and try and answer some questions that often arise. At the end of the booklet there are useful resources and links to help you find out more.

To proceed with your interest in adoption, your next step is to come to one of our Adoption Information sessions, the details of these can be found on our website at www.adoptlondon.org.uk



About us

Adopt London is a specialist adoption recruitment service made up of the four Regional Adoption Agencies known as Adopt London North, Adopt London East, Adopt London South and Adopt London West. Together, we provide a service for 23 London Local Authorities. We are working together to find adopters for children who need new families, and to offer the best possible support and preparation to adopters.

As Regional Adoption Agencies we are responsible for family finding for children in London. We know all the children waiting to be adopted and we aim to ensure that children are linked and matched with the families who can best meet their needs. All our children are special to us and we welcome your interest in offering a home to a child.

What is adoption?

“Adoption is a second chance... not a second choice.”

- ROBERT, DAD TO RONNA & KARLENE

Adoption is about making a real difference to a child's life. Children who cannot be brought up by their own parents become a permanent member of a new family. Adoption transfers all legal rights and responsibilities for the child from the birth parents to the adoptive parents, who then have all the rights and responsibility that go along with being a parent. Adoption is a serious, lifelong commitment to provide a child with a new family and a safe, secure future and like all parenting, it means sticking with it through good times and bad.



Why do children need to be adopted?

Most people would agree that the best place for a child to grow up is within a stable, secure and loving family environment. Unfortunately this is not available to all children, and as a result of family difficulties, personal circumstances or backgrounds, some cannot remain with their birth families. A new adoptive family gives the child an opportunity for a brighter and better future.

All our children need a family who can offer them a loving home. They come from a range of backgrounds with a range of ethnicities, religions and cultures; they may be newborn babies, toddlers or school age children. They all have different levels of ability, some may have additional health and developmental needs.

Some children have experienced loss, rejection and instability at an early age. Sadly some children have already experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse and neglect.

Many of our babies needing new families are affected at birth by their mother's drug use or by the effects of alcohol. Some children

have been born to parents with learning disabilities or mental health problems. Some children may have developmental difficulties, emotional and behavioural challenges and some simply need to live and grow up in a new family where they can be together with their brothers and sisters.

Like all children, they are lively, cheerful, lovable and at times demanding. Whatever their experiences, with caring and patient parenting they can thrive and enjoy a happy childhood. Watching them become healthy, happy individuals can be rewarding and worthwhile.

“We are all grateful and happy to have him with us, because this is where he belongs.”

- POLLY & CLIVE

Each will have their own unique way of expressing and dealing with often painful and difficult past experiences. Some will withdraw into themselves; others will act as if they haven't a care in the world. At times they can be aggressive and noisy, at other times over-polite and eager to please. More than anything else, they need to belong and to be accepted and to be given a chance of family life. They need someone to talk to, laugh with and play with. They want a family who will not let them down and who will stick with them.

They want to belong to a family, have a cuddle when they are feeling low and some space when they need to think – but above all, they need you. Whatever their behaviour, with caring and patient parenting, they can be helped to deal with their past and with encouragement, they can develop and grow.



What is early permanence?

Some adopters chose to care for vulnerable babies and young children who are likely to need adoption but still have a chance of being reunited with their birth families. There are many benefits to this approach but there are some important considerations to take into account.

The 'Early Permanence' (EP) scheme allows for children to be placed with EP carers who are approved as both foster carers and adopters whilst the court is considering the plans for the child. These carers have been specially trained to undertake this specific fostering role and understand that the local authority is working with the birth family to address the difficulties that led to the child coming into care. However, if the court decides that adoption is the right plan for the child these carers are ready to offer the child a permanent adoptive home preventing another unsettling and disruptive move.

This scheme minimizes the number of moves that your child may experience before a permanent plan is agreed by the court. The court is very aware of the need to make timely decisions for children so that they are able to experience a settled family life. Ideally this should be with their parents or wider family, but if that is not possible with carers that are able to offer the security of adoption if that becomes the plan.

The EP carers facilitate regular contact (if agreed in court), with the birth parents, who will have the opportunity to build a relationship with the carers. This can give peace of mind if adoption does become the plan for the child as you will know the birth parents more than you would in a traditional adoption. Most birth parents feedback that they appreciate this opportunity and that the EP carers are sensitive to their circumstances during the care proceedings.

For the adopters EP provides the opportunity to form an attachment with a child from as young as possible which is sometimes harder to do in a traditional adoption. EP carers often feel that bonding is easier and quicker and they can see the benefits for the child, which to some degree can balance out other potential risk factors in terms of drugs, alcohol and domestic violence during pregnancy, or possible inherited learning difficulties or mental health issues.



"We started to foster Sam when he was 6 weeks old and have been there from his first smile to his first steps. This has really helped both Sam and us to bond. We were worried about meeting his mum in contact. She didn't always turn up which was difficult but when we did meet she was lovely, she had had a really difficult life and really couldn't look after herself let alone a child. She thanked us for caring for her child and said in court that if he had to be adopted she was pleased it was us. That meant a lot, we will be able to tell Sam that we knew his mum and she really did care about him but couldn't look after him. We did worry about whether the court would decide not to place for adoption but we were well supported and things worked out well."

- SALLY AND GRACE

Is adoption right for you?

Adoption is life-changing. It's a good idea to think about the questions below.

- **Do you have space in your home for a child to grow?**
- **If you have children at home, how will they feel about having another child in your home, and having to share you?**
- **How flexible can you be with your lifestyle and work commitments?**
- **How will it feel becoming a parent to a child you didn't give birth to?**
- **How you will help a child to settle into your family and develop over the years?**

Our experienced teams will help you answer these questions and are committed to working with you throughout the process.



Who can adopt?

Adopters must meet the following criteria:

- You must be over 21 years old and can be single, married, in a civil partnership or an unmarried couple (same sex or opposite sex).
- You or your partner must be domiciled in the British Islands and have been habitually resident in the British Islands for at least a year

before you can apply to the court for an adoption order. Please speak to us if you are unsure whether you meet this criteria.

- Neither you nor an adult member of your household has been convicted or cautioned in respect of a serious offence against children.

Other matters to consider



“I began my journey to being a mum and have not looked back! I cannot put a finger on what the trigger was, but could only say that it felt that it was the right time, for me.”

- LYDIA, MUM TO NAOMI

We believe it is important that adoptive parents can offer a safe, stable and loving home throughout childhood and beyond. To enable us to assess this we would need to discuss the following with you at an early stage:

- Are you ready to make space in your life and your home for a child?
- Are you fit and active enough to look after a child for the rest of their childhood and beyond?
- There is no upper age limit to adopt – mature people have successfully adopted with us.
- We are keen to hear from people who can give a permanent and loving home to children over the age of five because older children wait longer for a new family.
- We need to be sure that adopters can offer a safe home to a child, so we need to know about any previous criminal convictions so we can be sure that a child will be safe in your care.
- We ask for a report from your GP to make sure you are in good health. Any particular health issues can be discussed.

- We encourage people from all ethnic origins and religions to come forward to adopt. It is important that you are in a strong position to meet the child's emotional, identity, health and developmental needs.
- As a prospective adopter you can live in social housing, private rented accommodation or be a home owner. Ideally we would prefer that a spare bedroom is available for your adopted child – however, we understand that this is not always possible and we would need to be assured that you have thought about how your home could be reconfigured to ensure that your child would have sufficient space

- to play and sleep in an adequate space by the time they reach the age of two.
- Each child is different. If an adopted child needs to share a room with an existing child, we will need to discuss this in more detail with you.
- It is unusual for any adoptive agency to agree to place a child with an adoptive family where there would be less than an 18 month to two year age difference with an existing child. If this is likely in your family, we would want to discuss this with you to ensure there would be no serious detrimental impact on either child.

- Living in a household with someone who smokes presents a health risk for children, particularly for those under five. Given the known medical risks of passive smoking we would want to discuss smoking cessation programmes with you if you are a smoker.
- If you are undergoing any investigations and treatment concerning infertility issues, we may need to discuss this with you. You will need time to recover from the physical and emotional effects of this, before applying to adopt a child.
- If you have experienced any recent trauma, such as bereavement or miscarriages, we would want to discuss these with you to ensure you feel ready to proceed.
- We understand that some people struggle with difficulties in relation to their weight. We will want to discuss these with you in order to be assured there are no related significant health or emotional issues which could affect your ability to be a parent. Your adoption medical with your GP will consider this, and our medical advisor will advise you and us about any issues or support you may need.

FINANCES

You will have a right to paid adoption leave from your workplace if you are employed.

We will need to discuss your finances to help you to plan for being a parent.

Depending on the age and needs of the children you adopt, we usually expect that the main carer in your household will be able to take between at least six months to one year off work to enable your adoptive child to settle into your family, their new home and school.

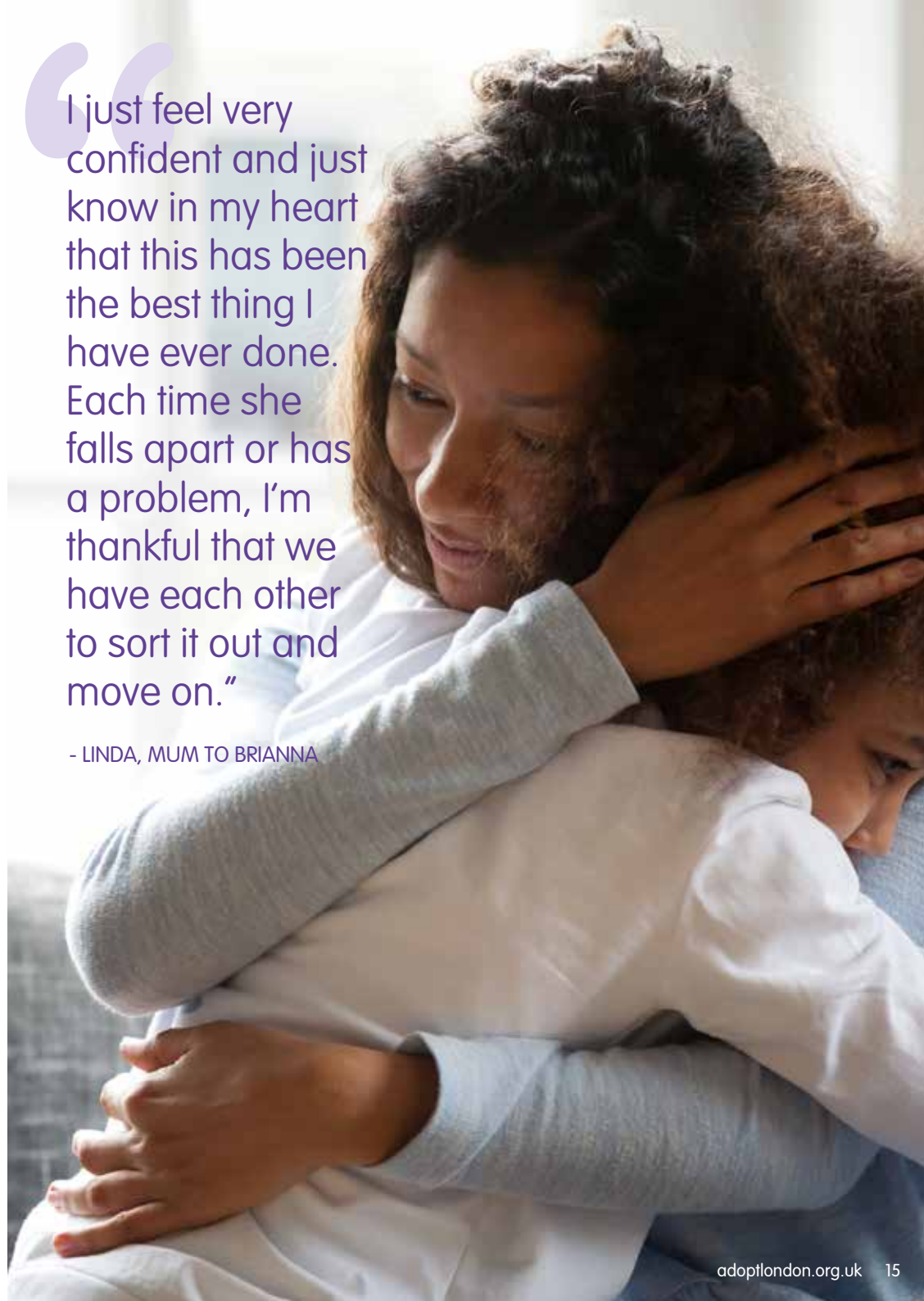
We may be able to help with finances if you need this, such as setting up allowances or further help to meet your child's needs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All personal information gathered about prospective adopters will remain confidential to those involved in the process. In the event of it being necessary to disclose information we will ask for your permission.

“I just feel very confident and just know in my heart that this has been the best thing I have ever done. Each time she falls apart or has a problem, I'm thankful that we have each other to sort it out and move on.”

- LINDA, MUM TO BRIANNA





Thinking more about adoption

If you decide to go ahead with your application to adopt we will help you to think about how your life experiences, present knowledge and skills will help you be a successful adopter.

“I remember how I was when I was about four or five, and I look at myself now. I am 17 and I’ve done things I would never have dreamt of.”

- JASMINE

You may not have lots of experience in bringing up children, but other experiences in your life have given you understanding which will be useful as an adopter.

For example:

- You may have cared for the children of friends or relatives.
- You may have experienced separation from people important to you, or even bereavement: this could help you understand how an adopted child might feel.
- You may have been responsible for health and safety at work.
- You may have been bullied at work or school and so be able to ‘stand up’ for a child in a similar situation.

At this initial stage it would be helpful if you could begin to think about your life experience and the relevant skills and knowledge it has given you. You need to think not only about paid employment you have had and qualifications you have gained, but also about experiences acquired through your own family life, voluntary work, hobbies and interests.

“Now, no two days are the same and this is life, she’s my child and she knows where she fits into the family. She knows that families are made up of different people and ours is just the two of us. I ask her every now and then how she feels about it and she says ‘I’m happy with that because I know that you love me and I love you, mummy.”

LYDIA, MUM TO NAOMI

The adoption process can take six months from the time you complete an application form to the time you are approved to adopt. It is important that we take this time. This will give you the time and space to learn about our children and think carefully about your adoption journey.

Firstly, we’ll need to spend time getting to know you and your family, thinking with you about your life, your past, present and future and what support you may need to care for a child. We will work with you through the stages of this process so you are matched with a child who will fit into your family.

Your adoption journey

The first part of your journey is to find out more about adoption you can do this by:

- **contacting the adoption teams for information and advice. Our details can be found on the back cover**
- **attending an adoption information session to find out more about the process, these are listed on our website at www.adoptlondon.org.uk**



THE PROCESS AND YOUR ADOPTION APPLICATION

Our recruitment teams will take you through the two stage process. The following summary outlines what will happen at each stage, from when you apply through to the process of approval.

Learn with us – up to two months. Stage One:

Once we have accepted your Registration of Interest we will arrange for a dedicated social worker to meet with you and agree a prospective adopter stage one agreement plan. You will be expected to do extra learning to prepare yourself, including attending adoption preparation training. This stage is normally expected to be completed within two months.

We have an Adopter's Workbook for you to complete in this period. It will assist your learning and development, and help you to understand more about becoming an adopter and how you will begin to parent a child. We will provide a list of recommended reading that we ask you to choose from.


Throughout stage one of the process you will have the support of an adoption social worker to enable you to make an informed decision as to whether adoption is right for you.

You will be able to take a break at the end of this two month period, for up to six months, without having to restart the process. Please discuss with your social worker if you wish to do this.

If we decide not to proceed with you to stage two we will provide a clear explanation of the reasons why.

Assess with us – up to four months. Stage Two:

This stage of the process involves an assessment of your suitability to adopt. Your social worker will be gathering information about you as well as building your understanding of the needs of the children who may be placed with you. This is an opportunity to learn a great deal more about adoption. Your social worker will recommend reading material and will inform you about any further training and workshops available.



We aim to complete the assessment within four months. You will be able to read the finished Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) before we present it at the adoption panel.

What if you don't get approved to adopt?

If a decision has been made not to approve you, you can make representation to your Regional Adoption Agency asking them to review their decision. In England, as an alternative, applicants can request that an independent body (Independent Review Mechanism) undertake this review and make a recommendation to the adoption agency.

After approval

Once you have been approved as an adoptive family your adoption social worker will share details of the children we think will suit you and provide you with advice to help you identify a child who is a good match for you family.

“We have heard all about him. He seems the one, we cannot wait to meet him.**”**

- ROBERTO AND JANE

Useful resources and links

New Family Social

0843 289 9457

www.newfamilysocial.org.uk

New Family Social is the UK network for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) adoptive and foster families. They provide support and information for prospective and existing adopters through social networks, promoting LGBT families and providing direct help.

We Are Family

www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk

hq@wearefamilyadoption.org.uk

We Are Family is an adoption support community in and around London, open to all adopters – including prospective and approved ones. They provide organic buddying and active support through regular meet ups, information sharing and other initiatives, that are open to all families: gay, lesbian, straight, single or couples.

Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC)

0208 447 4753

www.icacentre.org.uk

The Intercountry Adoption Centre is an adoption agency that can assess families for intercountry adoptions. If you are considering adopting a child from another country, they will be able to assist you.

Adoption UK

01295 752 240

www.adoptionuk.org

Adoption UK provides local and national support for adopters before, during and after adoption.

PAC-UK

020 7284 0555

www.pac-uk.org

PAC-UK was founded to provide specialist therapy, advice, support, counselling and training for all affected by adoption and permanency. They have developed a range of support services which reflect the complexities of adoption, as well as long term fostering and special guardianship.

First4Adoption

0300 222 0022

www.first4adoption.org.uk

On this website you'll find all sorts of helpful information on the adoption process and what it is like to be an adoptive parent. Call their phone line and you will find trained advisers who are happy to answer your questions and help you understand the journey ahead.

CoramBAAF

020 7520 0300

www.corambaaf.org.uk

CoramBAAF is the leading membership organisation dedicated to improving outcomes for children and young people in care by supporting the agencies and professionals who work with them.



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