



Frequently Asked Questions

Contents

Adoption agencies and the adoption process

What is the difference between local authorities and adoption agencies?	3
What is the difference between adoption and fostering?	3
I am currently with another agency and would like to withdraw.	3
How long does the process take?	3
How many personal references will I need to provide?	4
Will you need to contact my ex-partner?	4
Why do I need to do training?	4
Why do I need to have childcare experience?	5
Where will adoption panel be held?	5
What is the “Adoption Register”?	5
Can I adopt a child from another country?	5
Do I have to have contact with my adopted child’s birth parents?	5
Who will undertake the assessment?	6

Who can’t adopt

Age	7
Residency	7
Criminal Record	7

Home, health & lifestyle

I don’t have a spare bedroom, can I adopt?	7
I’m planning some work on my house. Will this affect my assessment?	7
I have pets. Can I still adopt?	7
How much money do I need to have?	8
What if I am having fertility treatment?	8
Is it true that we need to use contraception if we want to adopt?	8
I’m a smoker. Can I still adopt?	9
I have had a physical illness and/or mental health difficulties. Can I still adopt?	9

Existing children

I have already adopted – what is the difference in the process?	10
I have children. Can I still adopt?	10

Is adoption right for me? 10

My question is not listed 11



Adoption agencies and the adoption process

What is the difference between local authorities and adoption agencies?

The main difference between a local authority and adoption agency is that local authorities have children who are waiting to be adopted, whereas adoption agencies do not. This means that local authorities will prioritise the types of families in their local area that they need for the children in their care and may approach their families first when identifying a family for a child.

Adoption agencies assess a diverse range of adopters from across the UK. They then work in partnership with local authorities to widen the choice of families available to their children. At Adopters for Adoption, we have excellent links with local authorities across the UK and have been successful in bringing children and families together.

It's crucial that you feel comfortable with your adoption agency and that you choose the agency which feels right for you.

What is the difference between adoption and fostering?

When you foster a child, you are caring for them on behalf of the local authority and the birth parents. You have no legal rights or responsibilities in respect of the child. It is usually a temporary arrangement, although some fostering placements can be long-term.

When you adopt a child you become their legal parent. This is permanent and the child has exactly the same legal status in your family as any other family member, which continues

throughout their lifetime.

If you are considering fostering, you may like to visit the fostering pages on the Core Assets website: <https://www.PolarisCommunity.co.uk>

I am currently with another agency and would like to withdraw.

Prospective adopters can only be registered with one agency at a time. Therefore, if you are in the adoption process with another agency, we would not be able to accept an application from you until you had formally withdrawn from them. We would advise you to speak to your current agency about why you might wish to leave them before doing so. There would be a requirement for us to contact your previous agency.

How long does the process take?

The adoption process is divided into two stages. In stage one, a range of references and checks are undertaken and we aim to complete these within two months. After this, prospective adopters can take a break or proceed to stage two, which involves an in depth assessment and should normally take four months. You must ensure that you have enough time and flexibility to attend meetings with your social worker and to undertake the preparation training. Stage two results in an assessment report being presented to the adoption panel, which you are invited to attend and ends with a decision made by the agency decision maker about your suitability to adopt.

Once approved as adopters, the matching process begins. We're unable to put a timescale on this part of the process as it will depend on the child's needs and your preferences. If you work, you will need to have some time available during the matching process and introductions, you also need to

take time off in order to settle a child into your family.

There are frequent visits and lots of support offered during a period of introductions and after a child has been placed in your family. Once a child has settled into your family, you can apply to the court to adopt them. When the court grants the Adoption Order, you receive an adoption certificate and are given full parental responsibility for your child.

How many personal references will I need to provide?

You will need to supply contact details for six personal referees. If you are applying as a couple, this should include one family member referee and two non-related referees each. If you are a single person, this should include two family referees and four non-related referees.

You should have known the non-related referees for at least two years and we recommend they are people who know you well on a personal level, preferably having spent time with you in the company of children. All of your referees will be asked to complete a written reference, and your social worker will select which three of your referees to visit.

Will you need to contact my ex-partner?

There is a requirement to make every effort to contact a previous partner when you have been involved in caring for a child together. At Adopters for Adoption, we also believe it is important to seek references from any significant previous partner, whether or not you cared for children together, unless there is a good reason not to do so.

We are aware that not all relationships will have ended well. Adoption assessors are

used to speaking with previous partners and working out what is and isn't relevant to the assessment.

Why do I need to do training?

Some children needing adoption have been abused, either physically or sexually, many will have been neglected and haven't been given love or care. All will have experienced changes and uncertainty. As a result, children may be confused, fearful or angry about what's happening to them. They will need a great deal of love and attention to help them adjust to a stable family life. Our training will help you to understand and meet their potential needs.



Why do I need to have childcare experience?

Childcare experience is very important: the more experience you can gain during the adoption process and before being matched with a child, the better prepared you are likely to be for adoptive parenting. Many people will have the opportunity to gain childcare experience through caring for the children of family and friends and this should include having sole care of a child or children, including overnight stays if possible. You can also gain experience beyond your immediate family or friends by volunteering, for example in nurseries, pre-schools or toddler groups.

Where will adoption panel be held?

Currently, Panel is being held virtually and you will be invited to attend. However, should things return to face-to-face, Panel will be held at our office in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire and you will be invited to attend.

What is the “Adoption Register”?

The adoption register is an online database that stores the details of children waiting to be adopted where their own local authority has not found the right adoptive family to match them. Similarly the database holds the details of approved adopters who are waiting to be matched with the right child for them. There is a team of experienced database operators who work alongside a family placement social worker. Together they look at the information on the database to see whether they can suggest possible matches between children and approved adopters who are waiting.

Can I adopt a child from another country?

Yes it's possible to do this. However we recommend that you contact First4Adoption

on <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk> who will recommend which agency you need to approach as we're not registered for international adoptions. You could also contact the overseas adoption helpline (see www.icacentre.org.uk).

Do I have to have contact with my adopted child's birth parents?

Adopted children need to know and understand their history and that the facts about their adoption are not kept secret from them. It's important to help children make sense of what happened in the past and to help them remember important people who were involved earlier in their lives. This can include birth parents, grandparents, siblings or foster carers. Being open with the child about their birth family is important to help them develop a strong sense of identity and may help them integrate into their new adoptive family. Contact can be arranged through a letterbox exchange scheme managed by the local authority and addresses are kept confidential. Ongoing face to face contact with birth parents is rare, face to face contact between siblings is more likely to happen.

There is a detailed section on contact on the First4Adoption website:

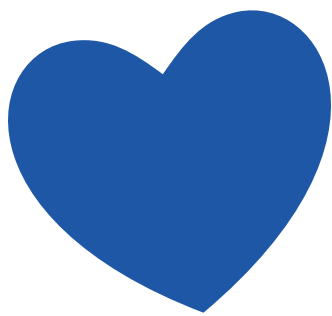
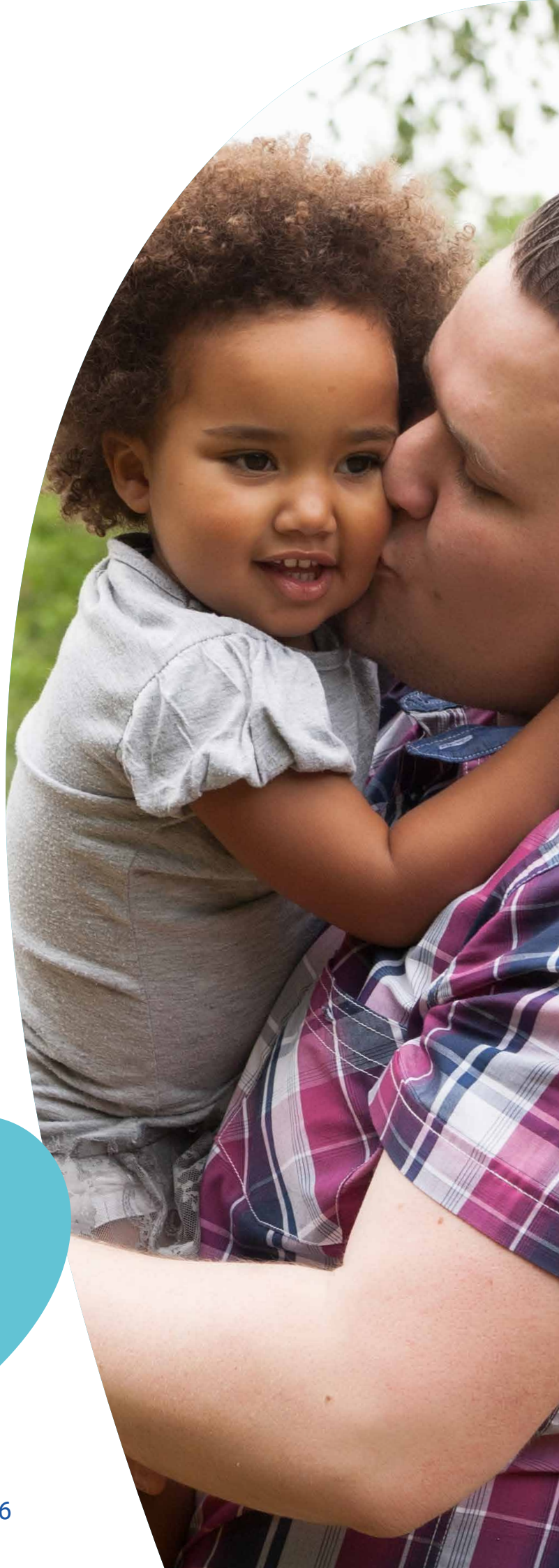
<https://www.first4adoption.org.uk>



Who will undertake the assessment?

Your assessment will be carried out by your allocated social worker. As a national agency we often engage Independent Social Workers (ISWs) from across the UK in order to provide you with a local contact, or your allocated social worker may be a Principal Social Worker who is employed directly by us.

If you are allocated an Independent Social Worker, their work is overseen by a Principal Social Worker or Team Manager at Adopters for Adoption and they will receive regular updates and guidance regarding our agency policies. All of our social workers receive regular supervision/consultations and assessments receive quality assurance and management oversight at every stage. You can also feel free to contact any of the team at our AfA Head Office if you have any questions.



Who can't adopt?

Age

You cannot legally adopt in the UK if you are aged under 21. If it is your dream to adopt, please don't give up; do consider coming back in a few years. There is no upper age limit.

Residency

You don't have to be a British citizen to adopt a child, but to adopt in the UK you must be legally resident in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, and have been so for at least 12 months. You are unlikely to be matched with a child if you do not have Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. If you do not have settled status, we would advise you to seek legal advice regarding your residency status, prior to making an adoption application.

Criminal Record

If you or a member of your household have a criminal conviction or caution for offences against children or for serious sexual offences you will not be able to adopt. Other criminal offences will not automatically exclude you but will be taken into consideration during the assessment process, so please be open with us from the start.

Home, Health & Lifestyle

I don't have a spare bedroom, can I adopt?

We believe that every child deserves to have a space of their own. It is not unusual for birth children to share a bedroom, but is not considered to be appropriate for children who have not lived with you from birth.

I'm planning some work on my house. Will this affect my assessment?

This will depend on the work you're intending to do. We aim to be as flexible as possible, however it we would require any significant work to be completed prior to an application being accepted, so that you will be in a position to have a child placed with you once you are approved.

I have pets. Can I still adopt?

Yes, you can still adopt if you have pets. We recognise the value for children in being raised in a family that has pets. During stage one, we would carry out a pet assessment in order to consider any safety and compatibility issues. We would need to be assured that you could make arrangements to rehome your pet in the unlikely event that your pet and any child placed were not compatible.



How much money do I need to have?

First and foremost, no one should be precluded from being considered as an adopter because of their income. However, we understand how stressful financial difficulties can be, therefore all prospective adopters have to be financially solvent, and possess sufficient money management (budgeting) skills to ensure that any child placed with them is going to have his or her material needs met without causing undue pressure on the family budget. As part of the stage one assessment, we ask prospective adopters to complete a finance statement, which is then evaluated by their social worker. The finance statement should include the anticipated additional cost of caring for a child, as well as any changes in your income during any period of adoption leave.

Some prospective adopters may have unexplained infertility and although it may be unlikely that they will fall pregnant, we would still advise them to use contraception to prevent a pregnancy. It would be really difficult for a child to be told that their social worker has found them new parents, only to then learn that they can't go and live with them because there is another baby – or for this to happen shortly after the child is placed. For this reason it is advisable that steps are taken to avoid a pregnancy.

If a pregnancy happens during the assessment process, the application could not continue, because the focus would inevitably be on the pregnancy. Therefore if you are coming into the adoption process we would expect that you are prepared to avoid a pregnancy.

What if I am having fertility treatment?

Whilst we have no hard and fast rules, as some agencies do, about how long you need to wait between the end of IVF treatment and pursuing adoption, we would need to be sure that you have emotionally come to terms with the end of that process. Everyone is different and people will process their feelings in a variety of ways. Some people will be ready and able to speak about adoption; others won't yet have got to the point of accepting that they won't be having a birth child. Fertility treatment would need to have stopped before being taken forward to the assessment.

Is it true that we need to use contraception if we want to adopt?

Children need adoptive parents who feel completely committed to them. Once prospective adopters are approved and considering possible placements, they need to be able to focus on the children who may join them.



I'm a smoker. Can I still adopt?

Smoking won't necessarily rule you out from adopting. Consideration will be given to this and to all health and lifestyle related issues. We'll want to know of any health risks to you or to the children who may be placed with you.

Following medical advice, our policy is that no children under the age of 5 or with a disability will be placed within a smoking household. Therefore, you would have to have given up smoking for at least six months before making an application to adopt. You could not be matched with a child under 5 years if you had not given up smoking for at least a year.

Adopters who smoke E-cigarettes are considered as ex-smokers and therefore can be approved for children aged 0 to 5. However, they should not use E-cigarettes in front of children.

I have had a physical illness and/or mental health difficulties. Can I still adopt?

As an adoptive parent, you will need to have energy and will be expected to give care and support for your adopted child throughout childhood and into young adulthood. During stage one, you will be required to have a medical to assess your physical and mental health as well as lifestyle issues such as weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. These issues may not be barriers to adoption but they could present health risks in the future. If you have resolved any problems with such issues in the past, we may consider that you have shown strength and motivation to deal with problems and this could enhance your application.

If you have had treatment for a serious illness, you may want to speak to your GP first about whether they feel this could impact on your ability to adopt a child. If you have experienced or are currently experiencing a mental health problem you would not automatically be ruled out as an adopter. We would need to carefully consider all the factors around the condition during stage one, before making a decision. For example, if you have suffered from depression in the past, our medical advisor will need to understand the circumstances that led to depression and be reassured that you will be sufficiently robust to cope with the inevitable stresses involved in adopting a child. Some applicants have used medication, counselling and other therapies during stressful times in their lives, and we would look at how you have used your support network and your resilience. This would provide an indication of how you might manage future stress.



Existing Children

I have already adopted – what is the difference in the process?

Depending on your particular circumstances, it may be possible to “fast-track” your assessment. This would involve undertaking stages one and two simultaneously.

I have children. Can I still adopt?

Already having an adopted, birth, step child or being a special guardian or a foster carer for a child (of any age) will certainly not exclude you from adopting, whether they are living at home with you or have grown up. Consideration will, however, be given to the age gap between your child and the age of the child you wish to adopt and the position of each child within the family.

Children over 18 will require a DBS check, as will any other adult member of your household.



Is adoption right for me?

You may be gay or heterosexual, single or a couple, married, divorced, or living with a partner, you may already have children and feel that you still have space for another child in your family. If you feel that you can offer love and security to a child who has not had a great start in life then adoption may be the perfect way to build your family.

If you're applying as a couple, it's important that you've been living together for at least two years. All relationships are deeply affected by becoming parents, and yours needs to withstand the changes adoption will bring.

You can apply to adopt if you are unemployed or disabled, and whatever your cultural and religious background.

Children need families from all sorts of different backgrounds and we positively welcome applications from all sectors of the population.

It's important to think about the timing of your application, as you will need to commit time and energy to the adoption process and you should be ready to begin the “matching” process by the time you attend adoption panel.

We would advise you to postpone your application if you are still trying other means of growing your family, if you have recently had a bereavement, or are planning on moving house or changing jobs. We'd also advise you make arrangements to gain childcare experience before, or very early in the application process.

We want to support you to be as ready as you can be for adoption and are happy to advise you on your particular circumstances.

My question isn't on this list

At Adopters for Adoption we believe that there is no such thing as a 'silly question' so please ask us anything you want to know about adoption. We will probably be able to answer your query, but if we can't we will do our best to find the answer for you. We would much rather that you ask us, rather than worry about something you're not sure about.

You can contact us on 01527 573678, or by email: AfAAdmin@adoptersforadoption.com



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