adoption now

INFORMATION PACK

Together we make a difference

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Adoption Now is the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) combining the Local Authority adoption service for five areas in the Northwest of England:

Bolton Council

Bury Council

Oldham Council

Rochdale Borough Council

Tameside Metropolitan Borough

We are proud of the reputation our collective local authorities have established in Adoption practice over many years. We also work in partnership with two voluntary Adoption agencies:

CaritasCare
Making lives better

adoption matters
A proud history of children's futures

Our motto is **'Together we make a difference'** and we believe that children do benefit enormously when adoption services and adopters work with each other effectively.

We keep our children's needs at the heart of all our practice and are keen to make adoption a successful experience for all our children and adopters.

adoption now

Adopter stories



Adopt With Us!

Here at Adoption Now we welcome enquiries from anyone thinking about becoming an Adoptive parent. We hope that this Information Pack will help answer some of the questions you may have about Adoption and encourage you to take the next step towards one of the most enriching experiences in life, for you as a parent, and for the child(ren) you adopt.

Adopting a child(ren) is a major decision and a life-long commitment. It requires a lot of hard work, patience, love, understanding, and resilience.

We are committed to being open and honest with you every step of the way. Making sure you are as well prepared and supported as you can be, to be able to decide if Adoption is right for you.

If you do decide to take the next steps and apply to adopt with Adoption Now, our support will continue throughout the process and we will always be there for you and your adopted child(ren) every step of the way.

At Adoption Now, our aim is to increase the number of children from our Local Authority areas who can be placed with adopters within the Northwest. This means we can provide a more responsive and effective Adoption Support service to children and their adoptive families.

If you are just starting to consider adoption, or maybe you already know this is the route you are going to take, we hope that this information pack will answer a lot of the questions you have. We hope that it will also answer some of the questions you didn't know you had as well.

Our aim is to give you an overview of the information surrounding Adoption Now and what our regional adoption agency can offer you throughout the adoption process and beyond. We are proud of the service we provide to children, prospective adopters and adoptive families, and would love to go on that journey with you.



– Katrina Williams (Head of Service)

"Thank you for taking the time to enquire about adoption through Adoption Now. Children are truly at the centre of everything we do, and we believe we can best meet their needs by offering you the very best service possible. There is a lot of information to consider, and we hope that this pack will help to build your knowledge and understanding, answer some of your questions and assist you in your decision to start or extend your forever family. Please do also reach out with any further questions or concerns you have – our Welcome Team are ready and waiting to assist you. Adoption is a journey, and here at Adoption Now we are with you every step of the way, with skilled and experienced professionals as well as adopters to walk you through each stage from starting the process to helping you navigate life with an adopted child and beyond."

CHILDREN AWAITING PLACEMENT

Adoption experts have warned of a 'concerning' decline in adoption rates. For the first time in recent years, there are now more children in need of a permanent home than those coming forward to adopt. We currently have around **102** children with adoption plans.

Around **54%** of children awaiting adoption are under 3 years, and around **43%** are sibling groups

ADOPTION – WHAT IS IT?

Adoption is a chance for children who cannot be brought up by their birth parents, or other members of their family network, to have a permanent new family.

Adoptive parents have all the same parental rights and responsibility for children as birth parents do, and the children become a full member of the family.

Children needing adoptive families are some of the most vulnerable children in our society. They come from a range of diverse backgrounds making them all unique. However, for many, they will all have had a difficult start in life.

These children need a loving, safe environment so they can thrive.

Adoption enables them to have a stable, secure, and loving upbringing. Some children might need to be adopted alone, whilst others will need a family where they can be adopted with their brothers and sisters.

WHO CAN ADOPT?

We welcome enquiries from people who are single, married, in a same sex relationship or living as partners, from any religion or ethnicity.

There are however basic legal criteria which a prospective Adopter would need to meet:

- You must be at least **21 years old**; there is no upper age limit.
- A prospective adopter must have **resided in a part of the British Isles**, this means one or both within a couple or the single prospective adopter must have been habitually resident in a part of the British Isles for a period of no less than one year, ending with the date of the application for an Adoption Order.
- There are certain offences – known as **specified offences** – which mean that if you have a conviction or a caution for these you would be **unable to adopt**. However, if you have any other convictions, please talk to us as these would not necessarily prevent you from becoming an adopter.

If you're thinking about Adoption, talk to us if you are unsure of the criteria.

"There are close to 2,000 children waiting to be adopted in England and chances are, if you can provide a safe, stable, loving home, you can adopt."

-You Can Adopt

HOW LONG DOES THE ADOPTION PROCESS TAKE?

The adoption process is divided into two stages and our aim is to complete these stages within ***six months*** from return and acceptance of the **Registration of Interest Form** to **Approval Panel**. Applicants can take up to a 6-month break between stages or slow down the process if needed.

Sometimes we may recommend you pause the process should you have a bereavement or other situation related to your personal circumstances which requires time to process.

If you've previously adopted, or are an approved foster carer in England, you may be eligible for the fast-track approval process, which will speed the assessment process up.

More detail about the process is provided later in this pack ***(Page 14)***.

Everybody's adoption journey differs in time and length of process. It's important we work with you to ensure your journey is smooth and at your pace. Our aim is to make you feel as supported and informed as possible throughout your adoption journey process and beyond!

FFA

Fostering for Adoption (FfA) is a form of 'early permanence' - meaning a child(ren) is placed with approved Adopters (who act as Foster Carers) whilst decisions are made by the courts about their future.

The overall aim of FfA is to reduce the amount of instability surrounding child(ren) during their time in Local Authority care. It aims to prevent child(ren) having multiple moves and adjusting to different people, ensuring stability as early as possible.

This means a baby could be placed with adopters either directly from hospital after birth, or a baby or child placed directly from birth family into a possible permanent home with adopters. This process of early placement is to avoid unnecessary distress to child(ren).

At the point of receiving an FfA placement, the Local Authority responsible for the child(ren) will have reason to believe that adoption is the most likely outcome for them. It is however important to note, the court hearing could decide to move the child(ren) back to birth parents, or other family members if they are assessed as able to care for them safely.

Whilst there are a few more uncertainties associated with Adopting in this way, for those seeking the placement of a very young child(ren), this option can be hugely beneficial.

FfA for children aged between (4 – 8years)

In some situations, there are school age children who can no longer remain living within their birth or foster families. This can be a traumatic and difficult transition into a new home. The use of FfA, in some situations, can help prevent children experiencing several moves during this time. FfA gives older children the opportunity to move from birth family directly into a family who can provide lifelong permanency and security if this becomes their plan.

We encourage anyone starting their Adoption journey to research and consider FfA further. Our FfA training course is also a mandatory part of stage one of the adoption process. In addition to the training, information and support is provided to those considering FfA placements throughout their Adoption journey.

Fostering for Adoption Podcast Fostering for Adoption (FfA) | AdoptionNow



Our Children

There are a growing number of young children from different cultures and backgrounds who, for a variety of reasons, cannot live with their birth parents.

These children all come from different, often difficult circumstances, hence being placed in the care of the local authority:

- Some have learning or physical disabilities.
- Some will have been affected by drugs and/or alcohol in the womb.
- Others will have suffered or seen neglect or abuse.

All our children will have experienced loss of some sort in their young lives and need the love, care, and support of a permanent family.

Adoption Now is looking for parents to adopt children aged 0 to 8 years old, who need a permanent family outside of their birth family network. Wherever possible, we try to keep brothers and sisters together, if that is the right plan for them.

We need a wide range of adoptive families for all ages of children. We are especially looking for families for those children who fall in the below categories, as these children often remain in care longer, waiting for the right family to be found:

- Children aged four to eight years old.
- Sibling groups of 2, 3 or more.
- Children with disabilities, special needs, or developmental uncertainty.
- Black children and children of dual ethnic background.



We'll be there for you every step of the way!

We understand that making the first step and contacting an Adoption Agency can be daunting, scary, and even emotional for some people. We want to assure you however that our Welcome Team are here to help, guide, and support you.

The role of our Welcome Team is to put you at ease, so you can ask questions about adoption, no matter how trivial you may feel they are. We fully understand everyone enquiring about adoption has their own personal journey, and our aim is to offer advice so you can make an informed decision as to whether adoption is right for you.

Need more questions answering? want to listen to our Podcasts? or want to start your journey? Just let us know and we will make sure your journey begins when you are ready!

Our Welcome Team will happily start the first step of the application process with you by taking an **Initial Enquiry**. This is a no commitment route, just a process of logging your details and interest in adoption. The information you provide will be logged onto our secure database, and your enquiry will be reviewed by one of our managers.

Once agreed by a manager, we will move you onto the Initial Visit where we can discuss your enquiry further. You can find out more information about an **Initial Enquiry** and **Initial Visit** by speaking with our **Welcome Team on 01204 336 096** or by attending one of our **Information Events**.

We recommend anyone considering Adoption attends our **Information Events** which cover the adoption process, why children need adopting, and the support on offer.

You can book onto the events through our website link:
www.adoptionnow.org.uk/events

Information Events are generally held online, twice a month. They are free to attend and have a Social Worker present to answer questions, a Welcome Team member, and a Guest Adoptive Parent speaker who will give you an overview of their adoption journey.

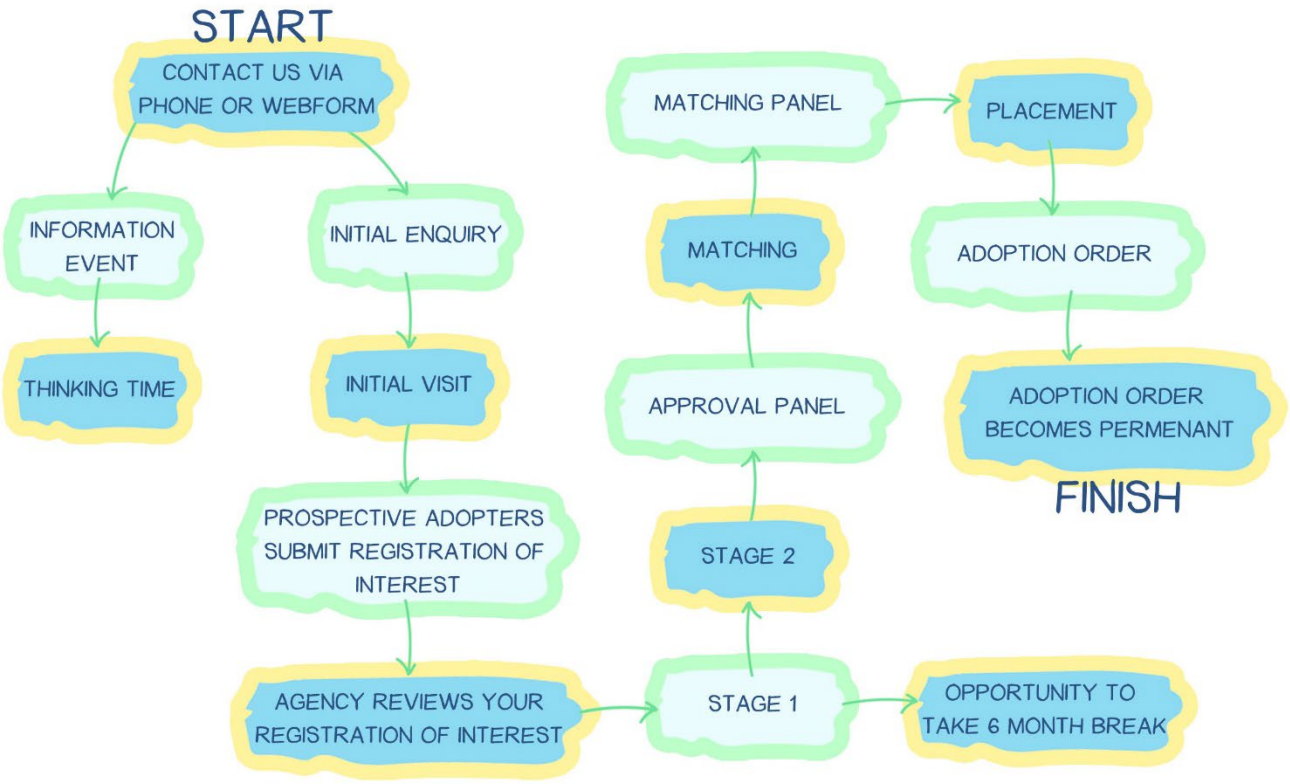
Welcome Team Podcast We're with you EVERY step of the way! | AdoptionNow

Another way to find out more is through our **Adopter Stories** by Adoption Now podcast series which focuses on bringing you real life stories from real life adopters. We also talk about a wide range of topics within adoption so you will also get to hear from industry professionals. You can stream every episode direct from our website, Podcasts | AdoptionNow or if you search 'adopter stories by adoption now' on your favourite podcast platform you will be able to find us there.





Adoption Now - Process Chart



INITIAL ENQUIRY (IE)

You will be asked if you would like us to take some general information about you (and your partner, if applicable). This is called an **Initial Enquiry**. This can take up to 30 minutes to complete. The information you provide will be recorded confidentially on our secure internal system following GDPR regulations and reviewed by a manager. We will then discuss the next steps with you providing our best possible advice and guidance based on the information you have given us. If you have not attended one of our information events, we would advise you book onto one via Online Information Events | AdoptionNow.

INITIAL VISIT (IV)

The next stage will be an Initial Visit. A member of our Welcome team will meet you either online or at your home. This will enable you to explore adoption further and what it will mean for you. It will also help you consider whether it's the right time for you to proceed. It is a chance to ask more questions about adoption and for us to ask further information about you, your household and circumstances.

REGISTRATION OF INTEREST (RoI)

Information from the **Initial Visit** is recorded and reviewed by a manager, and we will then provide advice, making recommendations on the next steps and if this is to proceed, we will invite you to complete a **Registration of Interest Form**. This is your formal application form which takes further personal information and consent. At the point your RoI is accepted your formal adoption journey begins.

STAGE 1

Our aim is to complete **Stage 1** in around ***two months***, and you will complete your Stage 1 workbook and attend several training courses, including preparation training, FfA training, and first aid training, to name a few. Our statutory checks team, along with your allocated social worker, will work with you to carry out your checks and references.

There is also a **"Get ready for Group"** workbook for you to complete, providing you with the basis of the preparation course you will attend.

In the preparation training you'll learn more about Adoption, the children waiting, their backgrounds and needs. The course runs every month and is a 3 day, in person, training course attended with other Adopters. It is led by our experienced social workers with contributions from adoptive parents, foster carers, and other professionals.

Stage 1 Summary:

- Allocated Social Worker
- Adoption Medicals: Private appointment with your GP **(£)** - Adopters are responsible for paying for their own medical assessments during the stage one assessment process. Reviews will also be required at different stages and some GP surgeries may charge adopters for these as well. Costs vary from one GP to another. If at any point this causes undue financial strain, then please discuss this further with your social worker.
  - Please also ask your GP if they have access to medical records covering your adult life and going back to your childhood if possible. If they do not have access to records going back a sufficient number of years, then you may need to make a Subject Access Request (SAR) to your previous surgery. This will enable your GP to have sight of the required medical history. Please speak to your social worker if you need further advice.
- Statutory checks and references are completed including:
- Local authority check
- Employer references
- For applicants who have worked and lived abroad we may undertake foreign county checks - if needed, paid by Adopters
- Personal referees x 3
- Previous partner references
- Stage one workbook including:
- Your history
- Finances and Adoption Leave
- Health and Safety checks
- Dog assessment **(£)** – if needed, paid by Adopters
- Enhanced DBS and Local Authority checks – paid for by the agency.
- Training

Stage 1 Compulsory Training (more detail about the training is provided later in the pack):

• Preparing for Prep Group Workbook	1 day	independently
• Preparation Group Attendance	3 days	in person
• FfA training	1 day	in person
• First Aid training	1 day	in person

STAGE 2

Stage 2 normally takes around ***four months*** and our aim during this stage is to work with you to assess and evidence your suitability to adopt. Your allocated social worker will complete a plan for this stage with you, including what you can expect from us and what we will expect from you to complete your assessment. We will also arrange your approval panel date.

Your social worker will meet with you several times to work towards preparing a **P**rospective **A**dopters **R**eport referred to as a **PAR**.

In order to complete the PAR, we will assess your:

- Personal History
- Education
- Employment
- Relationships
- Support Network
- Personality & Interests
- Parenting/caring experience
- Motivation and attitude to Adoption

During stage 2 you will also have the opportunity access our Virtual Reality Training, helping Adopters to develop their understanding of the experiences of a child(ren).

On completion of your PAR, we will share this with you to review. It is then sent to the Adoption Approval Panel for consideration. You have the opportunity to attend panel with your allocated social worker. Once a recommendation surrounding your approval has been made at panel this will then go through to the agency decision maker (ADM) for ratification/final decision. Your allocated social worker will support you throughout this time.

APPROVAL PANEL

All the members of the panel have knowledge of adoption through personal and professional experience, or both. A medical advisor will also be present. There are usually between six and eight panel members.

Your social worker will present and discuss your **PAR** with the panel, and if you choose to attend, you will have the opportunity to answer questions with the support of your social worker.

MATCHING

Once adopters are **Approved**, and sometimes during **Stage 2**, we will begin looking for potential child(ren) that might be an appropriate **Match**. This is a process which involves discussions between our teams to find the right family for each child(ren).

Whilst we aim to match adopters with children within our agency, there is also a possibility you may be matched with children from other areas in England.

Adoption Now search for around 100 adoptive families for children with new plans of adoption each year!

We work very hard to ensure that children and families are matched quickly, and we will be pro-active on your behalf to ensure that your information is available to our family finding and care planning team, when appropriate, so that you can be considered for a wide range of children.

At present we use **Link Maker** to help identify potential matches and you will be asked to register on this platform as part of your stage 2 assessment. Whilst we initially use Link Maker as a tool to identify potential matches within our own local authority areas Link Maker also joins-up children's social care across the UK.

We also encourage adopters to attend **Adoption Activity Days** and **Exchange Days**. These events, where you will be supported by your Social Worker, enable Adopters to speak to social workers about the children in more detail, or even meet children in person who are waiting for an adoptive family.

Waiting for a child(ren) to be **Matched** can be a difficult waiting period with no set timeframe. Our social workers will continue to support you and stay in touch to discuss your progress regularly, however currently many adopters have a child identified within a few weeks at most of being approved.

Once a potential **Match** has been identified, we'll provide you with all the information the local authority has about the child(ren). If you want to go ahead, then a meeting with a social worker who knows the child's personality, history, and needs will be arranged to decide the next steps, and make sure everyone agrees that the match is right. If the decision is agreed by all parties, then a linking meeting will take place with the child's social worker and their manager will formally agree the potential match.

MATCHING PANEL

Once a link has been agreed plans will start being drawn up for matching panel. Adopters will also be able to meet the child's foster carer, medical advisor, and other people who know the child(ren) well. When appropriate, adopters are invited to observe the child(ren) in person. In collaboration with you and your social worker, the child's social worker will write an **A**doption **P**lacement **R**eport **(APR)** which will outline the child(ren)'s needs, how you are able to meet these needs and any areas where additional support might be needed.

In addition, the child's social worker will compile the Adoption Support Plan which will evidence how support will be provided as needed. Adopters and the social workers are then invited to attend matching panel to discuss the match and why it is right for everyone involved. This will involve talking about why you feel you are the right match for the child(ren).

If the panel recommends the match, this decision will then be ratified by the agency decision maker of the local authority area for child who will make the final decision about whether the match should go ahead.

PLACEMENT

Once the match has been formally agreed, it will be important that the child(ren) and adopter(s) have the opportunity to get to know each other. The child's social worker will have put together a full introduction plan as part of a **Placement Plan** to assist this process. This plan enables adopter(s) to meet up with the child(ren) and Foster Carers to get to know them and gradually learn their routines, building up to the adopter(s) fully taking responsibility for all the child(ren)'s needs. This is adopter(s) initial opportunity to bond with the child(ren) before they move into the adopter's home.

The Placement Plan will include arrangements for reviews and delegated authority for the child(ren) as they formally remain in the care of the local authority until the point of Adoption Order.

Throughout the introduction period, and placement move, adopters and children will be supported by our social workers as you start living together and become a family.

This will include regular visits which will provide an opportunity to reflect on how everything is going as this is a time which will be very different for every adopter.

ADOPTION ORDER

Following the placement of a child with adopters there is a period of 10 weeks before adopters can apply to court for the final Adoption Order. This is to allow time for you as a family to settle and to make sure you have everything you need to be able to proceed.

Adopters are then supported by their social worker and the child's social worker to complete the necessary paperwork. Both social workers will be asked to write a report evidencing why they support the making of an adoption order. The child's social worker will also attend court hearings related to this.

It is extremely rare for adopters to attend hearings. Birth parents are invited to attend. At this stage birth parents may ask the court for permission to contest the making of the order and the court will consider the merit of this and again the child's social worker will provide evidence regarding this.

Once an Adoption Order has been granted:

the adoption becomes permanent.

When the court makes an **Adoption Order**, adopters can apply for an **Adoption Certificate** from the general register at the office of national statistics. This will show the child's new names and the Adopters. This will replace the child's original birth certificate for all legal purposes.

Adopted children will keep their first name they were given at birth; it is very rare for this to be changed as it is a key part of the child's identity therefore the local authority responsible for the child will be asked whether or not they support a change in name if one is proposed. Adopters can however add middle names and their own surname when applying for an Adoption Order.

Celebration Days

Following the court granting an **Adoption Order**, adoptive families are invited to celebrate this special occasion if they wish at the court with the judge who presided over the case.

Adoptive families along with their wider family and friends can visit the court and meet the judge. Celebration days have no legal standing, and are not part of the adoption process, but as an agency we find it is a magical moment in Adopters lives to celebrate their new family.

Training during the ADOPTION PROCESS



Preparation Training

Preparation training provides prospective adopters with the foundation principles surrounding adoption. This training is a 3 day, in person course that you will complete alongside other adopters in stage one. The aim of preparation training is to provide you with an overview of adoption, the process, the child's journey, and their needs. The training will also discuss therapeutic parenting and techniques to support you with your adopted child's life story as you progress through life as a family. You will be sent a Preparing for Groups workbook to complete prior to the training starting to get you thinking about the themes you will be learning more about.

First Aid Training

First aid training gives prospective adopters the basic knowledge they need in an emergency, ensuring our adopters feel confident in keeping their family safe. Adoption now works with Mini First Aid to deliver a 2-hour Baby & Child first aid class.

This is a multi-award-winning class taught in a relaxed and informal way. They will cover planning for emergencies, CPR, burns, bleeding, choking, Febrile Seizures, Sepsis & Meningitis awareness, head bumps, and breaks.

The classes are run within the community throughout the month and booking details are shared as you progress through your adoption assessment.

Fostering for Adoption (FfA) Training

Adoption Now offers bespoke training on FfA. The purpose of the course is to provide you with additional information to decide whether FfA is a possible option for your family. Our FfA training is a mandatory part of prospective adopters' stage one assessment, and We strongly encourage all prospective adopters to attend this so that you can make a fully informed decision.

The FfA training covers key themes such as: the challenges and benefits of choosing early permanency, the timeframes surrounding FfA, the legalities, along with the foster carer role and expectations.

The course is held in person, bimonthly 10am – 4pm

Virtual Reality Training

Within Stage two of your assessment, your social worker will use our virtual reality headsets to help develop your understanding of the impact of adverse childhood experiences. These scenarios will place you at the centre of the child's experience, helping prospective adopters to understand the impact these events can have and the importance of therapeutic parenting.

These sessions are usually some of the most thought provoking and impactful within your assessment and help applicants further understand the needs of children.

Previous adopters have said:

"V.R was the highlight of our stage 2 assessment sessions. The training was a great way to experience firsthand how a baby felt in the womb, after birth, and in later life. For a visual learner, you could really get immersed, and it illustrated the importance of therapeutic parenting perfectly. The headsets were good quality and worked well. It was a great training aid and one that every new parent such participate in." *(M & J, 2023)*

Adoption Now MENTORING SCHEME



How does mentoring work?

- We offer both 1:1 mentoring and group mentoring.
- If having your own mentor suits your situation, your mentor will ring you on average once a month and calls last about half an hour.
- Mentoring lasts for up to a year and finishes when you apply for your Adoption Order.

'A unique support service provided by Adoption Now'

(An Adopter's thought's on mentoring)

How can having a mentor help you?

All our Mentors are adoptive parents themselves. They have firsthand, practical experience of adoption and are likely to understand some of the feelings you have and what you are going through. The Mentors are there to listen and offer friendly support and encouragement. Mentors are normally referred to at the beginning of stage 2 of your assessment.

Knowing that you can call on your Mentor when you need them is a great source of comfort and a great way of helping to build your confidence throughout your adoption journey.

Our Mentors are not involved in the adoption assessment process, so you can be sure that you can talk openly and honestly with them at any stage. Mentors are not social workers; they play a very different and separate role, and you will still have your social worker to support and advise you.

Mentors would only talk to your social worker about their involvement with you if it was felt there was a safeguarding issue raised.

'Having someone who has been through the adoption process to talk to, has really helped. They know the challenges and difficulties we are going through, so can empathise and provide suggestions.'

(An Adopters experience of the Mentoring program)

Mentor Podcast No one 'gets' Adoption like another adopter | AdoptionNow



Life Story Book

Adopted children and adults have taught us about the importance of them growing up with a good understanding of who they are and where they have come from. As such adopters are expected to develop an open relationship with their child in sharing information about how they came to be family together. Each child's identity will be considered and presented in a Life Story Book aimed at helping the child(ren) understand why they came into care and how subsequent decisions were made about their future.

A Life Story Book is a statutory requirement for all adopted children to have and will be provided by the child's social worker. We also offer additional training surrounding life story as part of our ongoing adoption support service, to help you share your child's story with them.

Later Life Letters are also key documents written by the child's social worker which provide more detail for a child when they become a young person.

Life Story Podcast Could you be part of a Life Story? | AdoptionNow

Birth Family Contact

Most children will benefit from **continuing relationships** with people who are important in their lives. This could be a foster carer who has looked after them for a long time and/or a relative such as a birth parent, grandparent, brother, or sister.

Relationships can be maintained in a variety of ways and full consideration will be given at every stage by the child's social worker, and others, including adopters once identified, to look at what would be in the best interests of the child. Consideration is given to how this might affect the child and their adoptive family in the short and long term.

In most cases **'letterbox'** contact is offered, where letters and possibly photographs, are exchanged between adopters and birth parents at set times each year. This is done via our in-house letter box service, supported by our contact coordinators which help to ensure confidentiality, monitoring, and security.

Other creative ways of using technology to support ongoing relationships such as use of email, WhatsApp, and pre-recorded videos or voice notes can be considered alongside or instead of letter exchanges.

In some circumstances regular face to face get togethers can be a positive experience for everyone, whether that is between adopters and birth parents or including the child(ren). If your child(ren) has brothers and sisters who live separately, it is likely to be important for them to continue to see each other. Geography as well as the circumstances of every person involved are taken into consideration when formulating plans, and these may develop and evolve throughout an adopter child(ren's) life.

We understand this could be confusing and each situation is completely unique to the child you adopt. We will discuss children's circumstances with you at length during your assessment, in your training, and when considering specific children, so everyone has a greater understanding of the expectations surrounding ongoing relationships.

Every plan will differ, but we are there to **support** you in understanding more about positive ways of doing this, according to your child's age and development, from the start of your journey and for the duration of your child's development.

For further information about contact within adoption we advise you research the modernising contact agenda further as part of your adoption journey.

Will I be expected to meet the Birth Parents?

Wherever possible adopters are encouraged to meet face to face on at least one occasion with the child's birth parents and occasionally other significant relatives such as siblings or a relative who has cared for them. You will be fully supported during this meeting by your social worker, and the person you are meeting with will also have professional support. We appreciate that this may sound daunting, however many adopters find this a worthwhile experience for them, recognising it as an opportunity to get a clearer picture of the child's identity and history as well as asking any questions (e.g. where their name comes from). Most adopters who are able to meet birth parents find that it really helps them when sharing their child's life story with them later on.

There will be a lot of support and guidance to help you with all aspects of contact, whatever this may look like for your child. We also run additional training on all of these areas within our adoption support services.

Ongoing Support

If you have read this far, hopefully you have seen that we're here to support you every step of the way. Our skilled and professional adoption support team will be here for you long after you have become a family, as often as you need them.

Adoption support from the moment you start your journey!

Our Adoption Support Team is a part of our service which we are extremely proud of. In our adopter's survey 2023, almost 95% of people who responded stated they would recommend Adoption Now for adoption support or training.

Here at Adoption Now, our services range from a core offer of support groups, workshops, training, and social events, to assessed packages of therapeutic intervention. You will be invited to join a mailing list so that you can keep up to date with what is on offer and opt into as much or as little as you like.

We understand the ups and downs of family life and it is perfectly normal to need some kind of support at some point on the journey, whether to ask a quick question or something more. We will support you throughout the adoption process and beyond the Adoption Order. It can feel like a bit of a rollercoaster ride, but adopting can bring joy, laughter, and make your house a home. Adoption is demanding, rewarding, and offers many of the same challenges all parents face. But there are some important differences.

Children who are adopted may have had some difficult experiences and will usually have lived with foster carers before joining your family. As an adoptive parent, you'll help your child(ren) to understand their origins and identity and we will be able to help you to do this.

By holding events and forming relationships with our adopters we always try to ensure that families get to know us at the earliest opportunity in their journey. Whilst many of you will not need high levels of support, our program of workshops and social events are intended to provide opportunities for adoptive parents and adopted children to connect with one another as well as with professionals. They offer opportunities to talk about adoption issues in an informal setting, to learn how to support your child(ren) in the best way that you can and to form valuable

relationships, extending your own networks. For adopted children our social events can offer them the opportunity to meet with other children who have joined their families in the same or similar ways, helping them to have pride in their identity.

Sometimes more support and input are needed. We are skilled at assessing the needs of children and you as a family, and when needed we have workers trained to deliver a variety of therapeutic interventions such as Theraplay, Dyadic Development Psychotherapy (DDP), therapeutic life story work, and therapeutic parenting programs. In addition, our staff have been trained to inform around (NVR) Non-Violent Resistance strategies. If we decide, along with you, that you require a service we cannot deliver from within our own resources then together we can decide who is best to deliver the required work and apply to the Adoption Support Fund so that the service can be provided.

We encourage adopters to contact us for anything no matter how small it may seem, whether it's advice and some advocacy around school difficulties, supporting with maintaining relationships with birth family members, or a listening ear when you're wondering whether something is 'normal'. Our support team is always happy to assist and is available on our duty line (Monday–Friday, 9am-5pm).

For support questions and queries call **01204 336 097** or email Adoptionsupport@Adoptionnow.org.uk.

Adoption Support Podcast We are with you every step of the way...and beyond! | AdoptionNow



What if I'm not good enough?

We're looking for loving supportive environments for children and if you're worried about anything you can talk it through with our Welcome team. There is no such thing as a perfect parent, and we offer high levels of support throughout the adoption journey.

I'm single can I still Adopt?

Yes, you can. Children need a loving stable environment, and this is possible whether you are single, married, divorced, widowed, or living with a partner. For some children single parents are preferable.

What if I'm LGBTQIA+?

We welcome your enquiry no matter what your sexuality. We work closely alongside New Family Social as well as being proud sponsors of Proud2beparents, an organisation that supports members of our LGBTQIA+ community throughout the adoption process and beyond. 1 in 6 of our adopters comes from the LGBTQIA+ community.

Will my health problems affect my application?

Lots of people with health problems and disabilities have gone on to adopt. You will need to be fit and well enough to care for a child into adulthood. The process includes a medical assessment, and this will be considered by one of our agency medical advisors once a medical assessment has been completed by your own GP. We would encourage you to call and speak to us about your particular situation.

Will my age be a problem?

We welcome applications from anyone over 21 years old and there's no upper age limit. We will take into account your health and personal circumstances when we look at the age and needs of children you might be matched with.

What if I have a criminal record?

The most important thing is that you tell us about any known offences at the beginning of the process. In most situations these do not affect your application to adopt however there are some serious offences, including those against children and other specified offences that would automatically rule out an application to adopt. Talk to us if you are worried about this.

Does it matter if I don't live within the Adoption Now area?

No - applications are welcome from people living within an hour's journey from Adoption Now's geographical boundary, but there is some flexibility about this. An application may be considered from anyone who lives at a greater distance if we feel we have the capacity to assess and support you and that you would be a good match for the children we have waiting for families. We do ask that you are able and willing to travel for group meetings, introductions etc. and be available for assessment and home visits.

Will it matter that English is not my first language?

No, there is no requirement for English to be your first language however, we advise adoptive parents to be reasonably fluent in English so that they can advocate for a child and concepts of adopting can be fully understood. Also, so that you are able to engage with the assessment and training fully.

What about my religion and ethnicity?

We welcome applications from people of any religious faith or none. We also welcome adopters of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. People from some ethnicities and faiths do wait much longer for a match depending on how broad their offer is and the children waiting at the time. We will be honest with you when you call if this is likely to affect you. At the stage where a match with a child(ren) is being considered the priority will be to ensure that the prospective adopter has the ability, experience, understanding, and support to meet that child's needs, including their religious, ethnic, or cultural needs.

A prospective adopter can be matched with a child(ren) of a different ethnicity to them, if they can respect, reflect, and actively develop a child's racial identity from the point they are matched and throughout their childhood. Prospective adopters need to fully understand that having a child(ren) from a different ethnic group will

present some challenges, not least that there may be visible differences that can affect a child's self-esteem and increase their possible feelings of difference.

For example, the child(ren) may have to deal with questions from their peers about why they are 'different' to their family.

What if I rent my home?

We would welcome your application whether you rent or own your home. We would ask you to look at the stability of your lease on your home and what this might mean.

I already have a child(ren) – will that matter?

Having children of your own is often a very good start as it means you have experience of parenting! We usually plan for an adopted child to be the youngest in the family and for there to be a reasonable gap in age between them and your birth child (2 years). If your children are grown up and living at home, or indeed if they have left home, we will be interested to hear their thoughts about your adoption plans.

Can I apply while I'm having fertility treatment?

You're welcome to talk to us about adopting whilst you're waiting for, or receiving fertility treatment, but you wouldn't be able to start the process until treatment had finished. There are no set rules about how long you have to wait to apply after stopping fertility treatment, but we know it can be an emotional time and we'd want to make sure the timing is right for you. We will be happy to discuss this with you when you contact us.

Will smoking stop me from Adopting? What about e-cigarettes?

We'd really encourage you to give up because of the risks to your long-term health and the effects of secondary smoke on children. If you currently smoke and are thinking about adoption, get in touch and we can talk through how this would affect your application, signpost you to smoking cessation services, and think about how we proceed.

Latest guidance on smoking suggests that no Looked-After Child, and particularly a child under 5 years, should be placed within a smoking household unless exceptional circumstances apply. This also applies to the use of e-cigarettes.

What about my pets?

Children often love animals and if the pet poses no risk to children there would be no problem at all. We may ask you to obtain a self-funded dog assessment in certain circumstances. Some children may have or develop allergies to certain animals (dogs and cats in particular) but this can be considered when we look at the right match for you.

What is Letterbox and will children maintain contact with birth parents?

The letterbox agreement sets out the indirect contact arrangements which have been agreed when a child has been adopted. Adoptive parents, children, birth relatives and significant others could be included in the agreement to maintain relationships in this way.

The adoption letterbox service is managed by Adoption Now's adoption support service for children placed for adoption by Bolton, Bury, Blackburn with Darwen, Oldham, Tameside and Rochdale and is a way of exchanging information securely on behalf of adopted children. It enables children and adoptive families to have indirect contact with birth relatives, and other significant people from their past, by an agreed exchange of information updates. For more information view Guide to Letterbox

Can I adopt with a disability?

Just because you have a disability doesn't mean you can't adopt. Talk to us about what your disability means for you and how you could support our children.

Why do children need adoption?

There are lots of reasons children can't be brought up by their birth family. In most cases their birth family have been unable to provide safe, secure homes for them and the courts have decided that being adopted would be in the child's best interest.

We need to find homes for all the children we have with a plan of adoption but siblings and children with developmental delay or uncertainty often wait longer than we'd like for families.

What happens after the adoption order?

You become a legal parent with all the same rights and responsibilities as any other parent, however when you need us, we are here to support you every step of the way. Our skilled and professional adoption support team will be here for you long after you have had a child placed with you.

Can I claim benefits?

As an adoptive parent you will have to meet the costs of providing for a child until adulthood and you will have the same entitlement as any other parent to claim from a range of benefits to help you meet their needs. In some circumstances financial support can be provided for a time limited period to help you, e.g. During adoption leave or if you are adopting a child who has more significant needs.

If you have more questions about finances, please speak to our Welcome team.

Can I talk to someone?

Yes, you can. Our Welcome Team are here to support you every step of the way. As part of the preparation process, you'll also meet adoptive parents and be able to ask about their experiences.

Start your adoption story! | AdoptionNow



There is so much more we would like to tell you about Adoption. It is impossible to convey it all in an information pack, so please do get in touch with our welcome team and speak with us; ask as many questions as you like.

ONLINE INFORMATION EVENTS

Another good place to find out more would be at one of our online information events. There you can hear from one of our social workers about the process and the children we have waiting. It also gives you the opportunity to hear from one of our adopter guest speakers about their experiences.

Our online information events are held twice a month via Microsoft teams. The dates available can be viewed on Eventbrite and you can book a date that.

suits you by following this link:

www.adoptionnow.org.uk/events

RESOURCES FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Independent review mechanism – Apply for a review panel

https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:03963817-9007-46e1-867d-feb9f6496081

Fostering For Adoption

https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:b5e3aca9-f26c-4405-b6b6-b2b1715216ce

Contact in adoption

https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:466fec6a-3bd2-434d-bd4c-fd7161865af8

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adoption now

Together we make a difference

INFORMATION PACK

Thank You and Good Luck in your Adoption Journey!

YOU CAN CONTACT US IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

EMAIL: RECRUITMENT@ADOPTIONNOW.ORG.UK
OR BY **PHONE:**
ADOPTION WELCOME TEAM 01204 336 096
ADOPTION SUPPORT TEAM 01204 336 097
LETTERBOX CONTACT TEAM 01204 336 166

Collating and storing your personal data UK GDPR Information for Prospective Adopters

About Adoption Now:
Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency, which brings together five Local Authority Adoption Agencies. The five Local Authorities are Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside. Our Agency approves adopters and provides them with ongoing support and guidance throughout the process and after Adoption. We ensure children are matched with the most appropriate adoptive parents to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people that have been in care. We also support adopters and provide assessments of need and therapeutic support required.

Our Information Governance team and Data Protection Officer for Adoption Now is based in Bolton

Adoption Now Data: Our core data protection obligations and commitments are set out in the council's primary privacy notice at *www.bolton.gov.uk*
This notice provides additional privacy information for:

- People accessing the Adoption Now Service
- Partners working with Bolton Council

It describes how we collect, use, and share personal information about you.
In relation to the Adoption Now Service the types of personal information we need to process, including information the law describes as 'special' because of its sensitivity.

It is important that you read this notice, together with any other privacy information we may provide on specific occasions when we are collecting or processing personal information about you, so that you are aware of how and why we are using such information. The information collected and held will vary dependent on the sector of the Agency used.

Reasons we can collect and use your personal information:
Adoption Now collects, uses and is responsible for certain personal information to comply with our legal obligations under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, and to carry out tasks in the public interest. When we do so we are regulated under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR) we are responsible as 'controller' of that personal information. If we need to collect special category, sensitive personal information, we rely on reasons of substantial public interest equality of opportunity or treatment, for the provision of social care, for social security or social protection law, and for the establishment, exercise or defense of legal claims whenever courts are acting in their judicial capacity.

Categories of personal data we collect and use:
While approving, matching, and supporting adoptive parents we collect the following personal information when you provide it to us:

- Personal information such as name, address, contact details, date of birth, gender, and language.
- Special category characteristics such as ethnicity, disability, religion, and medical information.
- Family network and relationship information.
- Employment information.
- Financial information.
- Information relating to assessments and approvals for suitability to adopt children.

Legal basis for processing:
The legal basis for processing your personal information is:

- Based upon the obligations we have under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005

The UK General Data Protection Regulation also stipulates that we can process "Special" categories of data where it is in the public interest.
If you fail to provide certain information when requested, we may not be able to perform our services or we may be prevented from complying with our legal obligations.

Information sharing and recipients:
We may share (and receive) personal information about you with the following people / services / agencies

- The judiciary and legal representatives.
- Ofsted (in the event of a local authority inspection of children's services).
- Other local authorities.
- Adoption agencies.
- The adoption support fund when applying for funding for specific services.
- Link Maker and Adoption Match (national agencies for matching).
- Law enforcement agencies as and when required.
- Other adoption agencies previously involved.
- Past and/or present employer.
- References (personal and employment).
- Previous partners.
- Health partners, e.g., GP's, Hospital Trusts.
- Schools.

Social Media
We do not ask for any information from you via our social media channels. Some of our organic and paid social media posts have links to website pages, both our own website and sometimes external websites. We have no control over external websites however, if you complete the information requested on our own website, you will have the option to opt out of communication at any stage.

We use your personal information to:

- Process adoptive parent applications.
- Assess suitability to become an adoptive parent.
- Match approved adoptive parents with children for adoption, to ensure the most successful outcomes for children who have been in care.
- Provide ongoing support and advice to adoptive parents.
- Access the adoption support fund.
- Prevent or detect crime or fraud.
- Assess and evaluate our services.
- Inform future service planning and the commissioning of services.

We will not normally share your information with organisations other than our partner organisations; however, there may be certain circumstances where we would share such as where we are required to do so by law, to safeguard public safety, and in risk of harm or emergency situations.
Only the minimum information for the purpose will be shared.

Automated Decisions
For this service all the decisions we make about you involve human intervention.

How long your personal data will be kept:
We will only keep your personal information for as long as the law specifies or where the law does not specify this, for the length of time determined by our business requirements unless we are required for legal reasons to retain records for longer than the recommended retention period.
Should you require the data retention schedule, please contact us by either e mailing recruitment@adoptionnow.org.uk or call 01204 336096 and we will provide this based on the most recent information provided by Bolton Council Guidelines.

Your individual rights:
You have certain rights in relation to the council's use of your personal information.

To find out more about how these rights apply in particular circumstances, please refer to our Guide to exercising your rights on the Bolton Council Website or alternatively visit the Information Commissioner's web site at www.ico.org.uk

Under UK GDPR you have rights which you can exercise free of charge which allow you to:

- Know what we are doing with your information and why we are doing it.
- Ask to see what information we hold about you.
- Ask us to correct any mistakes in the information we hold about you.
- Make a complaint to the Information Commissioners Office.
- Withdraw consent at any time.

Depending on our reason for using your information you may also be entitled to:

- Ask us to delete information we hold about you.
- Have your information transferred electronically to another organisation.
- Object to decisions being made that significantly affect you.
- Object to how we are using your information.
- Stop us using your information in certain ways.

We will always look to comply with your request however we may be required to hold or use your information to comply with legal duties.
Please note: your request may delay or prevent us delivering a service to you.
For further information about your rights, including the circumstances in which they apply, see the guidance from the UK Information Commissioners Office (ICO) on individuals' rights under UK GDPR.

If you wish to exercise your rights or to raise a concern about the handling of your personal information by the council, please contact our Information Governance Team at information.security@bolton.gov.uk
If you are still unsatisfied you should contact The Information Commissioner's Office by post at: ICO, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or by telephone:
0303 123 1113

Keeping your personal information secure:
We have appropriate security measures in place to prevent personal information from being accidentally lost or used or accessed in an unauthorised way. We limit access to your personal information to those who have a genuine business need to know it. Those processing your information will do so only in an authorised manner and are subject to a duty of confidentiality.

We also have procedures in place to deal with any suspected data security breach. We will let you know and any applicable regulator of a suspected data security breach where we are legally required to do. All staff complete compulsory GDPR and security training with regular re-freshers.

Contacts:
Our Data Protection Officer is based at: The Information Governance Team, Chief Executive's Department, 1st Floor, Town Hall, Bolton, BL1 1RU email: information.security@bolton.gov.uk

UK GDPR also gives you right to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority. The supervisory authority in the UK is the Information Commissioner who may be contacted on 03031 231113

Updates to Privacy Notice

We may update or revise this Privacy Notice at any time so please refer to the version published on our website combined with our LA's, for the most up to date information.

Adoption Now
1st Floor, Howell Croft,
Howell Croft North,
Bolton BL1 1QY

Compliments and Complaints

Here at Adoption Now we want to offer the best service to our children and to our adopters. To help us work together to do this we want to let you know about the ways you can raise issues with us, and how you can give us valuable feedback to improve and shape our service.

Compliments

We welcome and value your feedback, which includes what has worked or been helpful for you. Please do get in touch with us via your Social Worker, our regular feedback forms or with us directly - Jules Clarke (jules.clarke@adoptionnow.org.uk) and Debbie Collings (debbie.collings@adoptionow.org.uk)

Complaints

If you are unhappy with our service, you can discuss this either informally with your Social Worker, or more formally in writing or by email.

Should you wish to raise this with a Manager you can do so by contacting our Recruitment Managers – Jules Clarke (jules.clarke@adoptionnow.org.uk)

Debbie Collings (debbie.collings@adoptionow.org.uk)

If you remain unhappy you may raise your complaint with our Head of Service, Katrina Williams; by email katrina.williams@adoptionnow.org.uk

Or you can contact us by telephone on 01204 336094

Adoption Now combines local authority adoption teams from Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside with VAA's Caritas Care & Adoption Matters to deliver adoption services across the region. Bolton Local Authority is the host for Adoption Now and they can also be contacted to resolve complaints.

Please refer to their website for more details:
http://www.bolton.gov.uk/website/pages/Procedureforsocialcarecomplaints.aspx

Adoption Now
1st Floor, Howell Croft,
Howell Croft North,
Bolton BL1 1QY

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

If your assessment has been to panel, with a brief or full report, and the agency has not recommended your approval you will receive a 'qualifying determination' letter explaining the reasons why.

If you wish to challenge the decision you can either make your case to the agency directly or apply for a review by the Independent Review Mechanism. You will find a leaflet about the IRM in your welcome pack and it will be included with your qualifying determination letter.

Read more at Independent Review Mechanism - GOV.UK

Many thanks,

Jules Clarke & Debbie Collings

Recruitment and Assessment Team Managers

Adoption Now

Updated: February 25