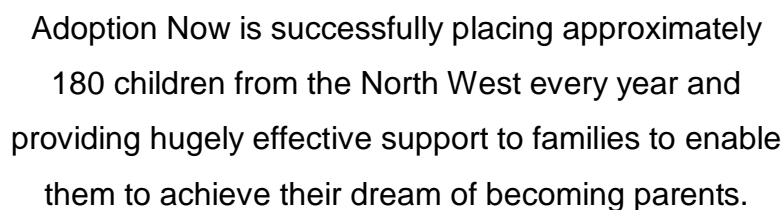


An orange brushstroke-style background behind the word "Welcome".

Welcome

We welcome enquiries from all those thinking about the possibility of becoming an adoptive parent. We hope that this information will 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 you adopt.

A pink brushstroke-style border surrounding the text.

Adoption Now is successfully placing approximately 180 children from the North West every year and providing hugely effective support to families to enable them to achieve their dream of becoming parents.

Adopting a child is a major decision and is a life-long commitment. It requires a lot of hard work, patience, love, understanding and stickability. We are committed to being open and honest with you every step of the way, to make sure that you are as well-equipped as possible to make an informed decision about whether adoption is right for you, and if, as we hope, you take the next step and apply to adopt with Adoption Now, our support will continue throughout the process and will be there for you and your adopted child, or children, in the future.

A blue sunburst graphic with the word "open" in the center.

open

Why Choose Adoption Now?

Who are we?

Adoption Now brings together the local authority adoption services for six areas in the North West of England – Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Tameside and Oldham working in partnership with two voluntary adoption agencies, Caritas Care and Adoption Matters.

We keep children and what they need right at the heart of all our processes and are keen to make adoption a successful experience for all our children and adopters.

Our strap line is 'Together we make a difference' and we believe that children really do benefit enormously when adoption services and adopters come together and work together effectively. We don't have set rules about who can and cannot adopt and understand that a friendly and supportive service will help us decide together which child/children would be best suited to your circumstances.

We successfully place more children than any other adoption agency in the North West of England and we are proud of the reputation our collective local authorities have established in adoption practice over many years.

**Together we
make a difference**

We aim to increase the number of children from our area who can be placed with adopters within the North West, knowing that this means we can provide a more responsive and effective adoption support service to children and to their adoptive families.

What is Adoption?

Adoption is a chance for children who cannot be brought up by their birth parents to have a permanent new family. Adoptive parents have all the same parental rights and responsibility for that child as birth parents do and the child becomes 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 and each child is different, but they will all have had a difficult start in life and all need a loving, safe environment so they can thrive. Adoption enables them to have a stable, secure, loving upbringing and a much better chance in life. Some children might need to be adopted alone, whilst others will need a family where they can be adopted with their brothers and sisters too.

How long does it take?

The process is divided into two stages and should take no longer than six months, but you can take time out or slow down the process if you want to.



Who Can Adopt?

Lots of people can adopt. There are many misconceptions about this, but we are interested in your skills, your life experiences and your capacity to parent, not in your status.

We welcome enquiries from people who are single, married, in a civil partnership or living as partners. There are certain 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;
- At least one of the couple or the single prospective adopter must be domiciled in a part of the British Islands or both of the couple or the single prospective adopter must have been habitually resident in a part of the British Islands for a period of not less than one year ending with the date of the application for an adoption order; and
- 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 come and talk to us. Having a conviction would not necessarily bar you from becoming an adopter – and some people who have had convictions in the past have gone on to be really good adoptive parents.

Fostering for Adoption (FfA)


In addition to traditional adoptions where children are placed with adopters from their foster homes we also recruit Fostering for Adoption Carers, so if you want to adopt a very young child, we'd like to talk to you about the possibility of fostering a child who is likely to need adopting. This means local authorities can place very young children directly from hospital or from a birth parent to prevent the child having unnecessary moves. There are a few more risks associated with adopting in this way but for the right family and child this can be hugely beneficial. We will encourage you to think about this possibility throughout the adoption process.

The "Fast-track" section is framed by a circular arrangement of orange, brush-stroke-like lines of varying lengths, creating a sunburst or starburst effect around the text.

Fast-track

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.

There is a growing number of young children from different cultures and backgrounds who, for a variety of reasons cannot live with their birth parents. They all come from different, and often difficult, circumstances: some have learning or physical disabilities, some will have been affected by drugs and/or alcohol in the womb, others will feel they have no one they can turn to, and some children would like to stay together with their brothers and sisters in their new family.

A large, solid orange circle with a soft drop shadow, containing the text "Who are the children" in white, bold, sans-serif font.

Who are the children

All these children will have experienced loss of some sort in their young lives and need the love, care and attention of a permanent family. Adoption Now is looking for parents to adopt children mainly 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 and especially need parents for:

- **Older children, aged four to eight years old**
- **Sibling groups**
- **Children with disabilities, special needs or developmental uncertainty**
- **Children with mixed ethnicity or from minority backgrounds**

Sadly, children who need to be placed with their brothers or sisters, as well as those who have additional needs, often wait longer than others for the right family to be found.



caring



Our Support



support

We'll 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 being placed. As an adoptive parent, you'll help your child to understand their origins and identity and we will be able to help you to do this.

A large, hand-drawn style pink oval with a slightly irregular border, framing the title text.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I'm not good enough?

We're looking for loving supportive families for children and if you're worried about anything you can talk it through with our 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 definitely can. Children need a loving, stable environment and this is possible whether you are single, married or in a civil partnership, divorced, widowed or living with a partner. For some children single parents are preferable.



What if I'm gay, lesbian or bisexual?

We welcome your enquiry no matter what your sexuality or gender.

Will my health problems affect my application?

Lots of people with health problems and disabilities have gone onto 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 our own agency medical advisor. We would encourage you to arrange to meet with one of our social workers and discuss your situation as early as possible.

just ask

Will my age be a problem?

The minimum age for adopters is 21 years, but there is no specific upper age limit. Older and more experienced people could take on the care of older children, provided they will have the health and vigour to meet the child's varied demands in their growing years and to be there for them into adulthood. Age is also not necessarily linked to general health, fitness and emotional wellbeing. We'll 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 many situations these do not affect your application to adopt however there are some serious offences, including those against children, 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 a much-needed resource is being offered (e.g. children in sibling groups or with additional needs). 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?

We particularly welcome applicants from Asian-speaking communities, as well as others whose first language is not English. Most preparation groups take place in

English, and support would be offered to those who would wish to increase their confidence in English in order to take part fully in these. It is also possible at times to offer a preparation group in an Asian language.



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. At the stage where a match with a child 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 of a different ethnicity to them, if they can respect, reflect or 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 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.

we listen

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

What if I rent my home?

We welcome your application whether you rent or own your home.

We need to know that you have a secure home environment in which to bring up a child and that your accommodation is appropriate for the number and ages of the children you are seeking to adopt.



I already have a child – will that matter?

We are pleased to accept applications from people who already have a child in the family as well as those who have no children. If there is another child, or children, in your family, there should usually be a two-year age gap.

Can I apply while I'm having fertility treatment?

We would be happy for you to talk to us about adopting whilst you're waiting for or receiving fertility treatment. We do know that ceasing fertility treatment can be a very difficult and emotional time, so if you have undergone treatment very recently the team would want to discuss this with you to make sure your decision to adopt was made at the right time for you and that you have had time to grieve. There are no hard and fast rules about how long it should be since the last fertility treatment however.

Will smoking stop me from adopting?

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.

What about e-cigarettes?

talk to us

The latest information on the NHS website (October 2017) states that: *"There is growing evidence that they can help people stop smoking for good. Using an e-cigarette isn't completely risk free, but it is much less harmful than smoking and can be especially effective when combined with extra additional quitting support to help you quit."* We would want to have a discussion with you about any additional support which may be useful in terms of quitting smoking entirely and also to ensure that all the equipment associated with smoking e-cigarettes is kept in a secure place, which cannot be accessed by children. Please note that e-cigarettes are relatively new, and this advice will be updated in line with health guidelines.

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 dog assessment in certain circumstances.



Will my Adopted Child Keep in Contact with their Birth Family?

Adoption is now a much more open process and the days are gone when adoption was clouded in secrecy. Adopters are expected to share information with their children about why they were adopted, and we will support you in understanding more about positive ways of doing this, according to your child's age and stage.

Contact will depend on the needs of the child. Children may benefit from continued contact with someone who is important in their life. They could be a foster carer who has looked after them for a long time or a relative such as a birth parent, grandparent, brother or sister. When deciding on contact, we consider what's in the child's best interests and whether it will affect the adoptive placement. In most cases 'letterbox' contact is offered, where letters, and possibly photographs, are exchanged between adopters and birth parents at set times. Face-to-face contact with birth parents rarely happens, although in some exceptional circumstances, this can be a positive experience for everyone. If your child has brothers and sisters placed separately, it may be important for them to continue to have either indirect 'letterbox' or some direct face-to-face contact.

We will talk to you much more about contact during the adoption process and you will have the opportunity to meet with adopters who can talk about their child's contact arrangements and how this works for them.

Will I meet my adoptive child's birth parents?

It is usual for adoptive parents to have a one off carefully planned meeting with birth parents, during which you would be supported by your adoption social worker. We appreciate that this may sound daunting, however almost all adopters find this a very valuable experience for them and their adoptive children, and adopters who have not had this opportunity have sometimes expressed regret, as they recognise it would have given them a clearer picture of their child's birth family.

There will be a lot of support to help you with all aspects of contact.

What happens afterwards?

We're here to support you every step of the way. Our skilled and professional post adoption support team will be here for you long after you have had a child placed with you.

The word 'committed' is written in a simple, black, sans-serif font. It is surrounded by several short, blue, radiating lines, similar to the sun icon in the logo, giving it a sense of focus or importance.



The Adoption Process



Step-by-Step



Before you start you'll have chance to speak to our staff about adoption and one of the adoption social workers will have met you in your home. This will enable you to explore further what adoption will mean for you and whether it's the right time for you to proceed.

Once you're ready you'll complete a Registration of Interest form and when we receive this **Stage 1** begins.



Approval Process

Stage 1 takes around two months and you will undertake training and preparation whilst we carry out checks and references.

During Stage 1 you'll be asked to attend an adopter preparation group where you'll learn more about adoption, the children waiting and their background and needs. The group runs every month over three days and is led by our experienced staff with contributions from adoptive parents, foster carers and other professionals.

We hope this preparation stage will help you make an informed decision about whether adoption is right for you and if you are ready to move on to Stage 2.

Stage 2 normally takes around four months and our aim at this stage is to work with you to assess whether you are suitable and ready to adopt. Your social worker will provide you with a plan for this stage including what you can expect from us and what we will expect from you to complete your assessment.

Your social worker will meet with you several times to work towards preparing a **Prospective Adopters Report**, or PAR, which will be shared with you and presented to the Adoption Panel.

Adoption Now **Adoption Panels** meet weekly and they each have an independent chair. All the members of the panel have knowledge of adoption through personal or professional experience. A legal and medical advisor may also be present. There are usually between five and eight panel members. Your social worker will be presenting your PAR to the meeting and you will be invited to attend too.

The role of the Panel is to recommend whether you should be approved as an adoptive parent and they will let you know their recommendations on the day. Their recommendations go to an agency decision maker who will make a formal decision within seven days of receipt of the panel minutes. You will then receive confirmation of your approval as prospective adopters in writing.

The outcome of that panel should not be a surprise to you. By that stage you would know if there were any reasons why the panel may not recommend your approval.



Once you're approved we can start talking to you about children that might be matched with you. There are no rules about how long this might take, and the priority is finding the right family for each child. You may be matched with children from other areas in England. In Adoption Now we work very hard to ensure that children and families are matched quickly, and we will be very pro-active on your behalf to ensure that your information is available across the country so that you can be considered for a wide range of children. We also encourage adopters to attend such things as Activity Days and Exchange Days (events where adopters can spend time talking to social workers about children in more detail or even meeting children who are waiting for an adoptive family at social events) but again we will support you in doing this.

Once approved, waiting for a child to be placed can be hard but our social workers will stay in touch and discuss progress with you regularly.

The word 'Placement' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. It is centered between two curved, pink arrows that point in opposite directions, one above and one below the text, suggesting a process or flow.

Once a potential match has been identified, we'll provide you with full background information about the child. If you want to go ahead, you'll then meet with a social worker who knows the child's personality, history and needs. You'll also be able to meet the child's foster carer and other people who know the child well.

If everyone agrees that you're a good match, the adoption panel will make their recommendations and the final say will be with a senior officer within children's services.

If you're approved, an introduction plan will be developed and if all goes well during these introductions and everyone agrees that this is the right match from both yours and the child's perspective, your adoptive child will come to live with you.



We'll support you every step of the way, keeping in touch and providing different services. You'll also have regular visits from the child's social worker up until the adoption order is made.



The Adoption Order

Once your child has settled in with you, you will be able to apply to the court for an adoption order. Once this order is made, all the rights and responsibilities originally held by the birth parents are legally transferred to you.



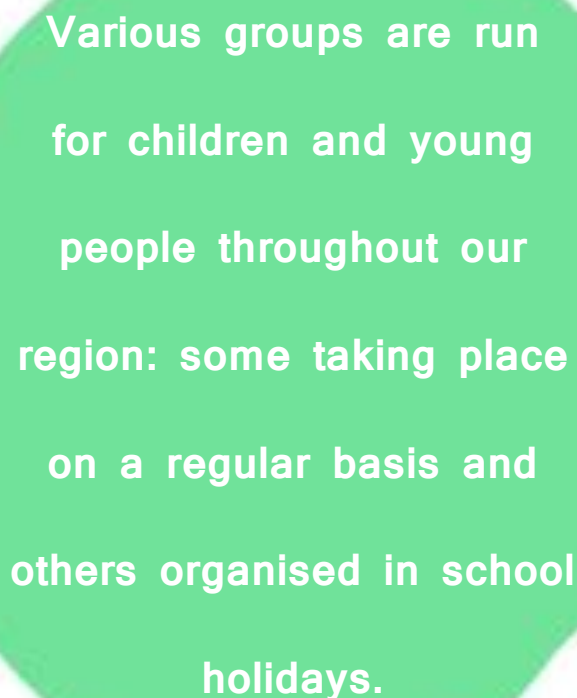
Together we make a difference



**Adoption
Support**

Our adoption support service can offer a wide range of services to support adoptive families, adopted children and birth family members and we very much hope that you will find these useful and supportive.

We provide a range of support groups and sessions on topics of interest to adoptive parents, which provide an opportunity to meet and discuss common issues that arise in parenting adopted children. We also have a range of social events for families so that we can stay in touch.



Various groups are run for children and young people throughout our region: some taking place on a regular basis and others organised in school holidays.

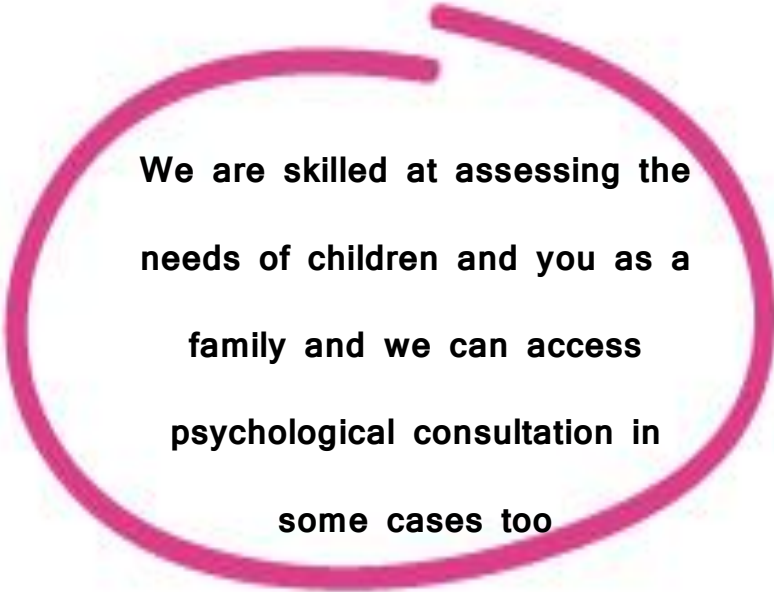
we listen

We can also run support groups that may run for a short period of time or meet the needs of a specific group of adopters. We will let you know about these through our regular newsletters. If you think there is a service you need that we don't mention here, we are always keen to hear from you and consider running new groups if needed.

The word "support" is centered in a dark grey font, surrounded by several blue, hand-drawn style lines radiating outwards, resembling a sunburst or a starburst.

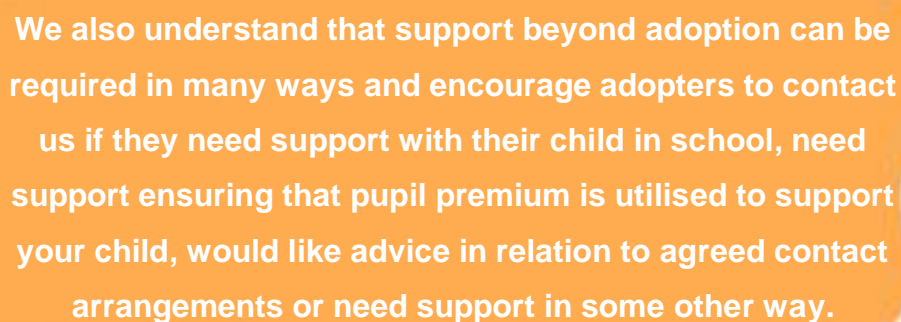
support

Sometimes more support and input are needed, so we have workers trained to deliver a variety of therapeutic interventions such as play therapy, DDP, therapeutic life story work and therapeutic parenting programmes.

A thick, hand-drawn pink circle surrounds the text.

We are skilled at assessing the needs of children and you as a family and we can access psychological consultation in some cases too

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.

A hand-drawn orange blob shape surrounds the text.

We also understand that support beyond adoption can be required in many ways and encourage adopters to contact us if they need support with their child in school, need support ensuring that pupil premium is utilised to support your child, would like advice in relation to agreed contact arrangements or need support in some other way.

talk to us



**And
finally...**

There is so much more we would like to tell you about adoption and it is impossible to convey it all in an information pack, so please do get in touch with us, ask as many questions as you like, and arrange for one of our team to visit you so that you can have a proper discussion.

You can contact us in any of the following ways:



Email:

Enquiries@AdoptionNow.org



Telephone:

01204 336 096



HOPE