



Information for Birth Parents

What exactly is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a child with new legal parents. It ends the legal relationship between the child and the birth parents and establishes a new one with the adoptive parents. Adoptions are arranged by adoption agencies but are made legally binding by the court making an adoption order. Once granted an adoption order is final and cannot be over turned.

How do I find out more about adoption?

In addition to the information provided by adoption agencies, advice can also be sought from: Social workers from the Social Services Department of your local authority. Hospital social workers who work with maternity clinics. Websites like <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>; <https://corambaaf.org.uk/>; www.adoptionuk.org

How is an adoption arranged?

If you decide that adoption is right for your child or just want some help with considering it further, a social worker or other adoption worker will spend some time with you to help you with your decision. You will be offered counselling and support from a social worker independent of the adoption agency.

Preparations for the adoption can begin before your child is born, however, nothing will be definitely arranged until after the birth. You will be free to change your mind up until the time when you sign consent to placement of your child for adoption, which usually takes place six weeks after the child's birth.

Should you decide to proceed with adoption you will, in due course, need to give some personal information about yourself, your family and your family's health, for the adopters to be able to share with the child as he/she grows up. You will be asked to sign to agree that any information you have provided can be shared with the child.

Must the father of the baby give his permission?

If the birth father of the child has parental responsibility (PR) then his permission is necessary for the child to be placed for adoption.

If a birth father of a child does not have PR, his permission for the child to be placed for adoption is not necessary. However, it is important to note that the father may wish to apply for PR, and should this be granted, will need to consent to the adoption. He could choose to withdraw his consent to the adoption, at any stage up until an application for an adoption order has been made. The social worker may need to contact the father, if considered appropriate, as the adoption agency will want some information about the father's health, family and medical history so they can pass it on to the adopters and the child.

The baby's father may not agree with the adoption plan of the birth mother and may want to bring up the child himself or within his own family. If this is the case, and the birth father has PR or is likely to apply for it, the adoption agency and the court will need to know about it. If he and the birth mother are unable to agree the court will have to decide whether it thinks adoption or a life with the father is likely to be best for the child in the long term.

If the birth mother is married but the husband isn't the father, the law will still consider the husband the legal father of the child unless he has signed a declaration otherwise. In this case the husband's consent to placement for adoption is necessary, but the adoption agency will also want, if possible, some information on the birth father so they can pass it on to the adopters and the child.

What sort of people will adopt my child?

The social worker will discuss with you the kind of family you want your child to grow up in. The greatest care will be taken to find a family who will give a safe and loving home to your child. You should talk to the social worker about the possibility of meeting the family, if you want to, or about other sorts of contact such as exchanging letters and if agreed, some photographs.

What happens after my baby is born?

Before you leave the hospital, you will be asked to sign a form to agree to your child going to foster carers (this is not a consent form for adoption). In most cases the baby will be looked after by a temporary foster carer until you sign consent to placement for adoption when your child is six weeks old; up until this time, you are able to change your mind and your child could be returned to you, provided the local authority does not choose to continue the adoption process by applying for a placement order.

Social care agreement is required if you wish your baby to be placed for adoption under six weeks of age. It will be discussed with you if a Foster to Adopt placement for your baby can be considered. This is a placement where they are approved as foster carers and adopters. You should discuss this with the social worker who has given you independent advice and the child's social worker. You will be asked to sign a written agreement.

The social worker will make regular visits to the child to check everything is going well and offer support. You will be kept up to date with your child's progress.

When your baby is at least six weeks old

The social worker will arrange for you to be interviewed by a Cafcass officer who will make sure that you understand what adoption involves. They will ask you to sign a formal document consenting to your child's placement for adoption, and you may also give advance consent to an adoption order being made when the adopters apply for it.

You can, if you wish, be involved in the process of helping to decide what kind of family your child should grow up with, and the adoption agency and your social worker will make every effort to find a family that both meets your wishes and the needs of your child. However, the adoption agency and your social worker will always need to place the needs of your child first when choosing a family.

Once the child has been placed with adopters and has lived with them for 10 weeks, they can then apply for an adoption order (in some cases the adopters apply for an adoption order many months after the child has gone to live with them). If you wish to oppose the making of the

adoption order once an application has begun, you will need to ask the court for permission to do so. The court may give its permission if it is satisfied that there has been a change of circumstances since you consented to your child being placed for adoption. The agency will provide a report to the court about the child's circumstances, and if the court is satisfied that an adoption order is in the best interests of the child, the adoption order will be granted. You will be notified about the adoption application and when and where it will be heard, unless you request specifically not to be told.

Can I arrange the adoption myself?

There are circumstances in which you can make a private arrangement for the placement of your child, but the Local Authority would still need to investigate. This would be a private adoption which is entirely different and beyond the scope of this leaflet. To protect the child, all other adoptions must be arranged by an adoption agency. The courts grant all adoptions orders.

What if I change my mind?

A birth mother can change her mind at any time in the first six weeks and ask that her baby be returned to her care.

Once you have signed your consent to your child being placed for adoption, your right to change your mind will be limited and may be lost altogether. You will be able to withdraw your consent at any time until the people who want to adopt your child start an adoption application in the court. If you do withdraw your consent and want your child to be returned, you will need to notify the adoption agency. However, it will not automatically be the case that your child will be returned to you.

If the adoption agency has not placed your child with prospective adopters and agrees that your child should be returned to you, they will return the child within seven days. If they have already placed the child with prospective adopters and they agree that your child should be returned to you, they will return the child within fourteen days. However, if the adoption agency considers that your child ought still to be adopted, they will have to apply for a placement order, asking the court for permission to place your child for adoption.

When the people who want to adopt your child have made an application to the court for an adoption order you will not be able to ask for your child to be returned. Unless you have said that you do not wish to be informed, you will be told when they make their application, but you will have to ask the court for permission to oppose it. You will have to show the court that there has been a change of circumstances since you gave your consent to your child being placed for adoption and that permission to oppose is in your child's best interests.

Will I see my child again?

Once you have given consent to the child being placed with prospective adopters it may be possible to have contact with your child through arrangement with the adoption agency or by getting a court order, but you will not have an automatic right to contact. You will have a right to apply to the court for an order for contact with your child at any time until the adoption order is granted. Adoption can sometimes involve continuing contact between the birth parents and the adoptive family, either face to face or by letter.

The agency will usually try to find a family for your child who are happy with having the sort of contact that you would like, as long as this is also in your child's best interests, although it would not be usual for a very young child to have face to face contact with his/her birth parents on an on-going basis. The contact you have with your child may change over time depending on the child's needs.

Can I keep it a secret?

Adoptive parents are advised to tell children from an early age that they are adopted. As they grow up, most adopted people are curious to know something about their background. Adopted people can obtain their original birth certificate when they are 18 years old (16 in Scotland), and if you were registered as a parent, your name will be on the certificate.

Using that information, the adopted person could try to trace you. There are adoption contact registers covering England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to facilitate contact between adult adopted people and their birth relatives. Where a birth parent and adopted adult have both registered, the adoption contact registers will inform the other party. The contact register will not share contact details it will be up to the parties to decide if they wish to pursue contact following counselling.

Adopted young people and adults or birth family members may make contact or obtain information from social media sites on the internet. This would be discouraged by adoption agencies because contact for both birth families and adopted adults without preparation and the support of an adoption agency can be distressing. Advice and support is available free from your local authority adoption support service.

Can I contact my child again when they become an adult?

You can request an adoption support agency, local authority adoption agency or certain voluntary adoption agencies to act as an intermediary for you once your child becomes an adult. There may be circumstances in which the agency does not accept an application to facilitate contact, and it is important to note that contact would only be re-established if it is what the adopted adult wants.

Making the decision

The decision you make about your baby's future is so important that you should not rush into it. Get all the advice you can before you make up your mind.

You need to be sure that you are doing the best for your child so that you will feel comfortable that your decision is the right one for your child.

Will I get support?

You will be encouraged to see a specialist adoption worker to assist you in making your decision but there are also services available for birth parents after their child has been adopted.

There are many agencies who provide support groups and workers who know a lot about adoption. You can ask the social worker for details about this and other support services available.

Local authorities also provide support to everyone involved in adoption throughout a child's childhood and beyond. They will be there to assist if any difficulties arise in relation to contact with your child or if you have any queries at all.