



Adopt and be
the someone in a child's life

Love the difference you can make



Adopting with Adopt Thames Valley

Adopt Thames Valley is a regional adoption agency (RAA) formed between seven local authorities and the three voluntary adoption agencies:

- ♥ Bracknell Forest
- ♥ Oxfordshire
- ♥ Reading
- ♥ Swindon
- ♥ West Berkshire
- ♥ Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
- ♥ Wokingham
- ♥ Cornerstone
- ♥ Pact
- ♥ Barnardo's

The Agency is a dedicated Adoption Service responsible for recruiting and supporting a range of adoptive families, to provide adoptive homes for the children requiring placement both locally and nationally. The Agency also provides good quality and consistent support services for all adopters across the region.

Adopt Thames Valley aims to recruit adopters who can provide what all children need – love, consistency and security – and who also have the ability to meet the additional care

and parenting needs of children who have experienced neglect, loss and trauma in their early lives.

Hopefully, this brochure will provide you with the information that you need to take the next steps to becoming an adoptive parent. It is important that you take time to consider whether adoption will be right for you and talk it over with your relatives and friends. We are here to help answer your questions, so please do not hesitate to contact us.

Read on to find out more...

Alternative formats of this publication can be made available on request. These include other languages, LARGE PRINT, Braille, audio cassette, computer disk or email. To contact us please telephone: 0800 731 0171.



An introduction to adoption

Adoption is a legal way of providing permanent new families for children who cannot be brought up by their own birth families. Usually it is only considered when every other possible alternative has been explored. An adoption order means that the adopted child becomes a full member of the new family and once granted cannot be reversed. The making of an adoption order should not be seen as an 'end' or a 'beginning' but as part of a life cycle for some children that includes birth and adoptive families.

Being adopted should provide the child with a loving, stable, caring family throughout childhood and beyond. We recognise that if you make a decision to adopt it will be one of the most important in your life. Adoption may not always be easy but it can be extraordinarily rewarding.

Once you are approved to adopt you may then have to wait before a child is placed with you, because we take great care to make the right match between a child and his or her future

adoptive family. When any child who is placed with you has successfully settled in your family, the Court will make an Adoption Order. At the point of the Adoption Order being granted you will become the child's legal parent and your lifetime commitment to that child will then really begin.

Can anyone adopt?

For many reasons people often think that they may not be able to adopt. There are common misconceptions that you have to be married, have a religious belief, own your own home, have lots of money and be under 40 – but none of these statements are true. To adopt you have to be over 21, unmarried couples and single people, whether they are heterosexual, gay or lesbian can apply to adopt. Above all, to successfully adopt you need to be patient, dependable, flexible, energetic and committed to making a real difference to a child's life.



"We both wanted to be parents more than anything else, it wasn't about being biological parents, it was just about being a Mum and a Dad."





"Being adopted it's a bit like a puzzle but you don't have the picture and you're trying to put the pieces together as best you can. That's what I'm doing with the help of my adopted mum and dad, we're finding the missing pieces."

Factors to consider

We recommend a minimum age gap of at least two years between any children already in a family and the adopted child. If the child is a birth child then we may require a larger age gap between them and the adopted child. A smaller age gap with an already adopted child will often be considered if the child being placed is with his or her older birth sibling/s.

It is not advisable to begin the adoption preparation and assessment process if there is any significant change happening in your life; for example if you have recently experienced or anticipating a significant change to your family structure, or a bereavement, a house move, serious illness, or any other major stress in your family. The adoption preparation and assessment process is quite intense

and you will need to have time and emotional space to commit to it. In order to best prepare for the adoption task, we ask all potential adopters to gain as much experience of caring for children as possible such as volunteering at local schools, nurseries, children's activity groups or sports clubs.

Children who are placed for adoption will need a lot of patience and understanding when they first join their new family and many will need additional parental support for longer. For this reason, we expect one adoptive parent to be at home full time for at least the first six months, and ideally the first 12 months after the child has moved in with his or her new family. It is also essential to have some flexibility with regard to work beyond that time.



"We had wondered if we could love a child not born to us but when we met our son we had no doubts at all."



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The Children

Every child is an individual but all children who are placed for adoption have one thing in common: they need consistent time and attention, from families who will care for them and help them thrive throughout their childhoods and who will continue to support them in their adult lives.

Experience has shown that all adopted children, regardless of their ages, benefit from knowing age appropriate information about their birth families. This information can be given to them in all sorts of ways at different stages in their lives, and this is an important part of helping an adopted child to develop a strong sense of identity.

Most adopted children will have some form of contact with the most significant members of their birth

families as they are growing up. This is usually through our confidential Letterbox Service which is managed by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team. It usually involves a periodic exchange of letters and photos between the child's adoptive parent/s and the child's birth parent/s and/or grandparent/s. This takes place at pre-arranged times. Adopters need to support children to understand their past and you will need to be open to the possibility of contact.

Many adopted children have birth siblings who are growing up in other adoptive families; where this is the case their adoptive parents are often also asked to support a level of ongoing contact between the children.

"I met some fabulous people on my journey to become an adoptive parent and now have lots of new friends who have also adopted and who understand first-hand the extra parenting issues that adoption brings."





Who might I adopt?

All of the Adopt Thames Valley Authorities are looking for families to adopt children up to the age of ten years. The children include many whose future development may be uncertain and some with a known physical or learning disability. Some will be brothers and/or sisters who need to live together, while others will be being placed on their own.

Adopters are particularly needed for older children, children who are to be placed with their siblings, and children with disabilities. We also prioritise recruitment of adopters for children who are of African or Caribbean heritage.

The adoption process

The Enquiry Stage

If you would like to progress your interest in adoption please telephone 0800 731 0171 and speak to our Enquiry Officer.

If you would find it helpful you can also speak to a social worker. During your telephone conversation you will be asked a few questions which will help us establish if this is the right time for you to consider adoption. If this is the case, you will be invited to an Information Meeting, these are held every month in a number

of areas across the region. You'll have the opportunity to speak to an adoption social worker along with an experienced adopter and ask any questions that you may have.

If you cannot attend an information meeting, you will be offered a phone call or office appointment with an adoption social worker to discuss your position in more detail, however most adopters tell us that they found attending the information meeting really helpful.

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Stages of the adoption process:

Registering your interest & Stage One



Following attendance at an information meeting you will be invited to have an individual meeting with a social worker; this will help to determine if it is the right time for you to progress an adoption application. If we think that you are likely to be able to meet the needs of our children, you will then be invited to complete a Registration of Interest form, which is your application form.

If your application is accepted, Stage One of the adoption process then formally begins.

This involves:

- ♥ Undertaking e-learning about adoption
- ♥ Attending Preparation for Adoption Workshops, to learn more about adoption. (These take place over three full days.)
- ♥ A range of checks including a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (formally the CRB check).
- ♥ A full medical examination with your general practitioner.
- ♥ We will contact your current employer and your past employers if you have worked with children.
- ♥ We will require you to supply details of your financial circumstances, including an up- to-date Experian Check and, if you live in rented accommodation, we may require a reference from your landlord or letting agency.
- ♥ We will also obtain written references from at least three people who know you well, including at least two unrelated referees; at least two of your personal referees will be interviewed later on in the process.
- ♥ In most circumstances, ex-partners with whom you have lived and where children have been involved will be contacted. Also if you have any children with previous partners they may be contacted during the assessment process depending on their age and level of understanding.



anticipated timescale
two months





anticipated timescale
four months

Stage Two - The home study assessment

"During the process you think you are going to be judged, or I did. You think are you going to be good enough? But it's not like that at all, it's a learning experience for everyone."



An adoption social worker will conduct a full assessment with you. This will involve a series of interviews with you and any other children or adults who live in your household. This is a thorough assessment of the person/people you are and your current lifestyle.

If during your assessment concerns arise regarding your suitability to adopt we will share these with you and you will be given the opportunity to discuss them and explain your position.

Once approved, you are available to be matched with a child or children within the area covered by Adopt Thames Valley. We also work with other local authorities across the UK who are seeking families for children in their care. In addition you can have your name placed on the Adoption Register (run centrally by the government) and Link Maker which looks at children and adopters across the country with a view to identifying potential matches.

Being approved to adopt

When your preparation and assessment has been completed your application to adopt will be considered by the Adoption Panel. You will be invited to attend the Adoption Panel which will make a recommendation as to your suitability to adopt. The final decision is then made by the Agency Decision Maker - a Social Care Manager appointed by Adopt Thames Valley.

Post approval training

When you are newly approved to adopt, you will be invited to attend a parenting skills course, which will help you be more prepared for the adoption task and also give you the opportunity to spend time with others who are going through the same process.



Frequently asked adoption questions



Does age matter?

You legally have to be over 21 years of age to adopt, but there is no upper age limit. Our aim is to place children with families who will be able to fully support them throughout their childhoods and into adulthood. We hope to place children with adopters who are active and healthy and able to meet the child's needs not just in the short term but continue into early adulthood. We look at all situations individually with age being just one of the factors we consider when reaching a decision. Generally older applicants will be expected to consider the placement of an older child or children.



I'm on my own, would you consider me for adoption?

Yes, we welcome applications from single applicants who can demonstrate that they would be able to offer a child the level of parental time and attention that he or she will need and have family and friends who will offer support.



We're a same sex couple, does that make a difference?

We welcome application from couples who have a strong and supportive relationship and can provide the care and attention that a child will need, regardless of their sexuality. We ask that couples have been living together for at least two years when they apply.



more frequently asked questions overleaf...



Frequently asked questions continued



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What if I haven't got a clean criminal record?

We look at every applicant's individual circumstances. You are only automatically debarred from adoption if you have a record of offences against children, or significant offences of violence or of a sexual nature. It is important that from the start of your enquiry you are honest about any criminal record, offences or cautions that you have had, including those that happened some time ago. The circumstances that lead to you offending and the length of time that has since elapsed will both influence our decision.

5

Does it matter if I don't live in the areas that Adopt Thames Valley covers?

We normally work with families who live in the Adopt Thames Valley area. However we also consider potential applicants who live within an hour travelling distance of our geographical border, if they are able to adopt a child or children who are waiting for a family because of their particular needs. If approved to adopt through Adopt Thames Valley you will need to be able and willing to attend our support groups and in-house training.

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Do you need people to adopt babies and toddlers?

We do place children aged under two years, however they are likely to be babies/toddlers whose future development is uncertain. This may be because their mothers have misused alcohol and/or drugs during pregnancy or because one or both of their birth parents suffer from poor mental health or a personality disorder. For many of our children the identity of their birth fathers is not known.

"It changed our life overnight completely, they were both very young! For the first few weeks it felt like we were under siege, double buggies, bed routines, bath routines, stair gates and nappies! So it was a very steep learning curve from having no children one day to having 2 toddlers the next. It was crazy but we just felt so happy!"



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Who are the children that need adopting?

Most of the children who need adoptive parents are aged between 2-10 years. Some are of mixed heritage or from minority cultural backgrounds. Many of the children are part of a family group of two or three siblings who need to stay together. With all of the children there may be some uncertainty around their future development.



If I have a health problem or a disability or have suffered from depression in the past, will that exclude me from adopting?

Not necessarily. We ask all applicants to have a full medical assessment; this will determine whether you are both physically and mentally fit enough to potentially meet the needs of the children. If you have experienced a significant medical or mental health issue in the past ten years or take long-term medication just let us know. We may suggest that you have an early medical and can seek advice from our Agency Medical Adviser so we can discuss this with you before accepting your Registration of Interest.

"They are devoted to each other, being adopted together has been of great support to them. They share friends, they argue sometimes, just like all brothers, but you can't separate them. That's why it's so important that we adopted all 3 brothers."

more frequently asked questions overleaf...



Frequently asked questions continued



9ⁱ

I have children already is that a problem?

No, the experience that you have already gained in parenting children can be valuable. However if you have birth children, we would expect your youngest child to be at least four years of age before you start the adoption process.

An adopted child should always be the youngest child, with at least a two year age gap between them. Research has shown this approach has the most positive outcomes in adoption. We will generally want to meet any children not living with you, including grown up children, and to talk to them about your plans to adopt.

10ⁱ

Is it a problem if either myself or my partner smokes?

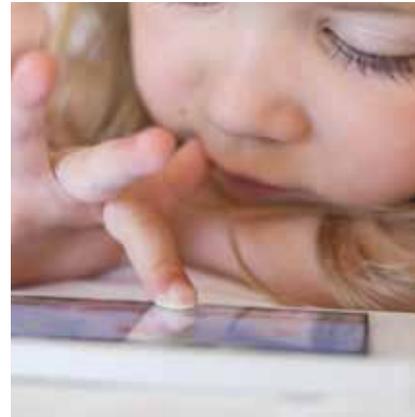
Due to medical evidence about the adverse effects of passive smoking on children, we do not place children with people who smoke. If you have been a smoker we would expect you to have given up smoking for at least six months before accepting an application from you. We apply the same criteria to the use of any nicotine related devices, including e-cigarettes and vaporisers.

11ⁱ

I work full time, is that OK?

Adoption is a time consuming process and parenting children takes time and energy. The children we place for adoption have experienced loss and changes of carers and therefore need their parents to be available for them. They may not thrive with substitute carers, childminders or in day nurseries. However, most people are entitled to adoption leave for 12 months and employers are often sympathetic to requests for part-time hours. Under some circumstances for a limited number of children, there are some means-tested allowances available to help if finance is a problem.

"Our family and friends were so supportive when our daughter first arrived - we were so anxious to get everything right."



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Can we apply to adopt if we are having IVF or other fertility treatment?

If you have been involved in fertility investigations or treatment, this should have ended before you progress an application to be approved to adopt. Depending on your situation we may ask you to wait at least six months after concluding your fertility treatment before you start the adoption process in order to give you time to fully come to terms with your situation.



How long will it take to be approved to adopt?

You should expect it to take around six months from when your formal application is accepted. We aim to work to the timescales recommended in the Adoption Regulations, however this will depend on your availability, or if delays occur in us receiving your references, this is likely to extend the process.



What help will I get?

Adoptive families often need extra support at the start of their new life together and many will need support later on as their children grow older. Our Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Teams are available to provide advice and information and will support you to also access other services within your local community.



"We weren't sure when we started the adopting process but all the preparation and support made us certain that we could parent an adopted child."



Who's who in adoption?

"The support has been wonderful since making contact with the adoption support team. They have given us emotional support, communicated with us on a regular basis and acted as an advocate/intermediate. Even just receiving a quick email from her to touch base has been uplifting and supportive. It has been a positive experience for all of us. She has been great and we cannot thank her enough."



If you make the decision to adopt, you will have access to a team of professionals who will be there to support you and your child or children at the different stages of your adoption journey.

Our Enquiry Officer:

is your first point of contact who can answer your initial questions and advise and support you at this very early stage. They will invite you to attend an information meeting.

Our Adoption Social Workers:

During Stage One an adoption social worker will support you in completing the tasks that this stage requires. Our social workers also host preparation groups, usually supported by an experienced adoptive parent.

Once you proceed to Stage Two you will be allocated an adoption social worker who will be your primary link to the service who will work with

you through the assessment process, write your home study report and present your application to the Adoption Panel.

Following your approval to adopt you will continue to have a named social worker who will meet with you regularly, making sure you are able to access post approval training and the advice and support. When a child or children are placed with you, your allocated social worker will continue to provide you with support and help you to access other support services for you or your child if needed. You can call your social worker any time to talk about any problems that you may be experiencing or to request help.

Our Adoption Panels:

are made up of an Independent Chair, a Panel Advisor, social workers, and independent members with experience of adoption. The Panel's role is to consider all the information available about you and to then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who will then



"Our son had a difficult time before he came to us, it's sad and I wish it had been different, but we will be there to support him when he needs it"



make the final decision about your approval. At a later stage, the panel will also recommend your match to a particular child.

The Child's Social Worker:

each child has their own social worker who is there to make sure that the child's interests are always taken into account. They will visit you and your child until at least the adoption order has been made.

Our Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team

Being an adoptive parent can bring lots of wonderful moments but also challenges. Many adoptive parents, whatever their previous experience, need some advice and support along the way. Our Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team offers a range of support and training to adopters, through:

- ♥ Advice and information
- ♥ Support groups for adopted children and adoptive parents
- ♥ Counselling
- ♥ Assistance with contact
- ♥ Services to address children's therapeutic needs
- ♥ Signposting to other services, such as education
- ♥ Training and hosting special activities for adoptive families
- ♥ Publishing an adoption newsletter
- ♥ Managing our Letterbox and direct contact scheme

Adoption Support Help desk:

Our Adoption Support Team runs a help desk during limited office hours. Our help desk worker will be able to provide you with information and advice or signpost you to relevant services. You may also be invited to come into the office to talk further.

The Buddy Scheme:

Our buddy scheme enables us to provide adopters who have children newly placed with additional support by linking them with an experienced adopter who can provide them with a listening ear and informal advice and support. Once you are matched to a child or children for placement your adoption social worker will discuss this scheme with you.

Others:

There are lots of other professionals who you may work with both in the period leading up to your child or children being placed with you and subsequently. These may include: teachers, medical advisors and therapists.

Mailing list:

If you opt to be on our post adoption mailing list you will be kept up-to-date with local training opportunities, and receive newsletters and information about adoption picnics, support groups and activities for adoptive families.



An adopters' story

Meet Theo and Alex

♥ 2005



We met whilst working at sea.

♥ 2012

We briefly lived in Australia then came home to begin the adoption journey!

♥ 2013

In January we attended an information event

Chance to ask all our questions and decided to take the plunge.

- During February we called the Adoption Team and said that we would like to start the process and an initial meeting was planned at home.
- Then in March we started stage 1.

Stage

1

- Stage 1 includes lots of fact finding, DBS checks, life chronologies, medicals, references and our Preparation Workshop.

- We decided we also wanted to share a name...



Our wedding Bubbles flowed!

- Attended the Preparation Workshop – was also a chance to meet others going through the same thing.

Stage

2

*"Oh no... Not home study!"
We were dreading it!*

Meeting the panel.



Apprehensive, but relief the end was in sight.

The children

- Receiving 'THE email'

"Hello my name is Jack and this is my sister Millie"





Whirlwind of emotions and questions:

Excitement but panic!

Can we really cope with two?

Nature or nurture?

Do we really want to do this?

Are we strong enough for this?

What have these two beautiful children been through?

Can we cope with their potential problems?

Where have they come from?

Are they healthy?

What's the relationship like between them?



But by then we were in LOVE and for us... there was no going back.



Matching Panel... Suddenly there was so much more at stake

Yet another whirlwind:

Telling our family and friends that we had been approved as J&M's forever family

Preparing our home so we were safe and secure!

Decorating and furnishing two kids rooms

Making final decisions about work (Adoption Leave/Paternity leave) and finances

Making introduction books for the children

Preparing our family on how to best support us - lock down etc

Buying a new Daddy Wagon

Car Seats/Push Chairs

Shopping, Shopping, Shopping!

Building a shed (Random but true)!



Our social worker was incredibly supportive throughout and in particular during the final stages of meeting the children.



Introductions - there was a lot to take in, it was intense but the foster carers were absolutely fantastic!

3 years on...



and our family is growing stronger and stronger!





Your next step

If you are considering adopting a child but are still not quite decided, or if you are ready to take the next steps to adopt please give us a call on 0800 731 0171 to discuss your interest with a member of our team.

Alternatively you can drop us an email at:
adoptthamesvalley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

We are here to answer any questions that you may have and we will be happy to talk with you about anything that you are unsure about.



We would love to hear from you.



Inter-Country adoption

This service is provided by the Inter-Country Adoption Centre (IAC) via a contract with Adopt Thames Valley. IAC will provide advice to people who are considering adopting through an inter-country arrangement and also undertakes the assessments of inter-country adoption applicants. Once approved and a child is placed with them, IAC usually provides supervision of the placement and can support adopters with the legal adoption process in the UK. IAC charges for their services and will be able to give details of their current fees for completion of home study assessment for overseas adoption/s. IAC also offers a range of support service for inter-country adopters.

IAC can be contacted at:

The Inter-Country Adoption Centre,
22 Union Street, Barnet,
Hertfordshire, EN5 4HZ

Advice line: 0208 447 4753

Website: www.icacentre.org.uk

Other local or national agencies involved in Adoption

First4Adoption

General for information about adopting a child.

Telephone: 0300 222 0022
Email: helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk
Website: www.first4adoption.org.uk

CoramBAAF

Books & information about adoption and fostering.

Telephone: 020 7520 7517
Email: pub.sales@corambaaf.org.uk
Website: www.corambaaf.org.uk/bookshop

Adoption UK

Books and information concerning adoption, Publishers of 'Adoption Today'.

Helpline Number: 0844 848 7900
Email: helpdesk@adoptionuk.org.uk

New Family Social

A self-help membership organisation formed in 2007, to enable LGBT adopters and foster carers to support each other and to give children adopted or fostered by LGBT the confidence of knowing other families like theirs.

Telephone: 0843 2899457
Email: membership@newfamilysocial.org.uk

PACT (Parents and Children Together) (Reading)

A Voluntary Adoption Agency in the ATV area

Telephone: 0300 456 4800
Website: www.pactcharity.org

Adoption Focus

A Voluntary Adoption Agency

Telephone: 01865 822339
Website: www.adoption-focus.org.uk

The Inter-country Adoption Centre

Confidential information and advice service for inter country adopters at any stage of the adoption process. The Centre organises 'consultation days' for prospective inter country adopters, as well as other courses. The Centre can provide information packs, and country specific information.

Advice Line: 020 8447 4753
Website: www.icacentre.org.uk

The Adoption Register for England & Wales

Telephone: 0345 222 9058
Email: mail@adoptionregister.org.uk



*"My friends ask me 'What do you call your adoptive parents?'
... they're my mum and dad, just like yours."*



Call us on 0800 731 0171

www.adoptthamesvalley.co.uk