Your guide to becoming an adopter with Action for Children

We’re with you every step of the way

actionforchildren.org.uk/adoption
Wishes from children adopted through Action for Children...

‘I wish that every child had a permanent mum and dad like my mom and dad.’

‘To have a lovely mummy who gives me lots of kisses and a daddy who takes me to the shop.’

‘For Mummy to be Queen and my sister and I to be princesses for the day.’
Adoption with Action for Children

We believe all children and young people have unique potential and that they should have the support and opportunities they need to reach it. As a leading Children’s Charity, we are committed to breaking through injustice and being there for children and families for as long as it takes.

Since becoming an adoption agency in 1926, we have helped many children grow into confident and happy adults through finding caring and loving homes.

At every stage of the process, from initial preparation to post-adoption, you will be supported by our friendly and experienced team. We work in small teams so that our adopters are promptly taken through the process and you receive the best possible training, assessment and matching. Because we are a Children’s Charity, you will also benefit from being considered for a range of children from local authorities across the UK.

Choosing to adopt is one of the biggest decisions you will ever make. This brochure guides you through the many questions you may have. Our approachable teams are always on hand to guide you through the process and answer any questions.

What is adoption?
Adoption connects children and young people who cannot grow up with their birth families with supportive, secure and loving families. It is the legal process where by a child or children becomes a permanent member of your family. As an adoptive parent, you hold the same rights and responsibilities you would have as a birth parent.

Why children need adoption
There are many reasons why children and young people are adopted. They may be at risk of or have been abused or neglected, or they may not have been given love and stimulation.
As a result, many children are angry or confused about what is happening to them. They need a great deal of stability, love and attention to help them adjust to stable family life.

Which children need adopting?
We help a range of children from around the UK find adoptive families, but also specialise in children who may not otherwise get the chance to be adopted.

Some of the children waiting to be adopted:
• Brother and sister groups
• Children of all ages and ethnicities
• Children who have disabilities, medical problems or learning difficulties.

‘I chose Action for Children as they offered a robust support package, a focused timescale for assessment and approval and were helpful, honest and accessible.’
Who can become an adopter?

Our main intention is to place children in stable, loving families who will meet their individual needs, whatever those needs might be, now and into adulthood. Because of this, we aim to be flexible and not limit potential choices by setting strict criteria. We particularly welcome enquiries from people interested in adopting older children and sibling groups.

We believe children need families who can help them grow up feeling good about themselves, with knowledge of their own culture, language and religion and children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

During the assessment, we look at all the factors contributing to your ability to care for a child or children – your health and wellbeing, your parenting skills, understanding of children’s needs and strong support systems are all taken into account.

If you are in any doubt about whether you can adopt, please don’t rule yourself out – talk to us about your circumstances and we can advise you on the best way forward.

What we look for in an adopter

Some of the specific requirements Action for Children has for all prospective adopters are:

| Age | Legally you must be over 21 to adopt and we don’t have any upper age limits. We will expect you to have the health and vitality to see your children through to an age of independence. Consideration will be given to your age comparative to the age of the child you want to adopt; younger children are more likely to be placed with younger parents. |
| Health or disability | Health or disability – We look for adopters to have the energy and health to provide a long-term family for a child. Being disabled does not automatically exclude anyone from becoming an adopter but it is one of the many factors that will be considered. Smoking will not necessarily rule you out from adopting but consideration will be given to this and any other specific health risks. If you smoke, we would not generally match you with any children under five years old or children with breathing or chest difficulties. |
| Marital status | We don’t have any requirements about your marital status. Our adopters may be single, married, in a civil partnership or living with a partner. |
| Sexuality | We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adopters whether they are single or looking to adopt jointly. |
| Family | Some adoptive families already have children, and some do not have children of their own. If you already have children, you would have considered how you will meet the adopted child(ren)’s needs as well as your existing family’s needs. For infertile couples looking to adopt, we require that you have stopped fertility treatment. |
| Home | Our adopters live in all sorts of homes. You don’t need to own your home or even have a garden to adopt. The most important thing is security. There should also be places nearby where a child could play outdoors. You do need a spare bedroom. |
| Finances | All financial situations will be considered. We need to ensure you and any child(ren) placed enjoy economic well-being. |
How the adoption process works

This is an opportunity for you to learn more about parenting an adopted child, to ask questions and to think about the children that you might be able to care for. During this process, you will find out about adoption and think about the type of children you can give a home to. There are three stages to the adoption process:

**Pre-stage 1 is about you finding out more information about adoption**

You will have a chance to find out about what different local authorities and children’s charities like us can offer you. Key areas for you to consider are the breadth and the profiles of children placed, different levels of support offered pre and post adoption, matching and preparation courses.

You will be offered materials to read, invited to an information event and will have a pre stage 1 assessment appointment. At the end of this process you can register your interest with an adoption agency to continue onto the next stages.

“Decided on Action for Children for their warm, informative, inviting response and consistency.”

94% of adopters said that the information event was very good or good

92% of adopters said that the helpfulness of staff on initial contact was very good or good

**Stage 1 is about gathering information on you, checks and preparation groups**

Once we have received your registration of interest and we have decided to proceed, you will receive a welcome pack from us and have a office visit from one of our friendly social workers. We will then start the checks and references; you will do some self-evaluation and attend our Stage 1 Training. This should take a maximum of two months.

“Our adoption preparation classes enlightened us. And we met two of our closest friends there, who have been a great support to us.”

90% of adopters said that the home visit was very good or good

**Stage 2 is about assessments and intensive training**

At the start of your assessment your home study will commence, you will undertake intensive training, your social worker will meet your referees and you will be given a date for panel. This process should take no longer than 4 months.

“It made us think about ourselves and the type of parents we might be.”
What to expect after you have been approved and have adopted

Once you are approved

Coming up to your approval and once you have been approved as an adopter with Action for Children, we will be communicating and working with a range of local authority contacts to achieve you a suitable match. We will work with you to look at children’s profile who you might be suitable adopters for. In addition, we work with the National Adoption Register, local authorities across the UK, BAAF’s ‘Be my Parent’ and Adoption UK’s ‘Children Who Wait’ to help the search. We carefully match to your family’s needs with the children who are in care.

Once a child or children are placed

We understand the particular challenges that you and your child(ren) may face and will offer you support and assistance. Your social worker will visit you regularly and make sure you receive all of the services you should be receiving, including any financial support that you might be entitled to. In addition to the support offered by the team at Action for Children, we organise support groups and social events where you will meet other adopters and learn from each other.

How will your life change after adopting?

- ‘Adoption has changed our lives 100%. We literally hit the ground running, and learnt by our mistakes. We love him to bits and can’t remember what is was like before he came!’

- ‘Our lives have been enriched with our beautiful children. Life is also hectic, busy and tiring but the thought of life with out our children is impossible. They have brought a huge amount of happiness to us and our family.’

- ‘It has changed our lives massively and all for the better. We love our family unit and it has made us stronger and more loving. We have learnt so much. Our lives are more complete and adopting has been a great journey for us which we plan to do again. We are so happy and grateful that we now have a family of our own’.

- ‘Our lives changed from day one. We took on a 5 year old and a 7 year old which meant we had no chance to settle in gently. We are now a family and work as a unit. We wouldn’t change it for the world.’
Advice adopters would give to others considering adoption:

• ‘Go for it! Adoption is very rewarding, satisfying, challenging and wholesome. It is an incredible joy to be able to have and become a mother and friend. A fabulous experience and journey awaits you.’

• ‘Adoption is a wonderful and fulfilling thing to do, but it is harder than you can possibly imagine, especially with two children at once.’

• ‘Go into it with your eyes wide open. Accept all the help and support offered. Get the children and yourself good specialist adoption counselling and enjoy every minute!!!’

• ‘Think very carefully about how children do change your life completely – but oh my goodness it is so worth it! All the hard work, tears and waiting seems a distant memory when your little one calls you mummy or daddy, when all they want is you if they are hurt or unwell, how proud they make you when they stand up in front of the whole school, to read (when six months before they didn’t even know their alphabet!’

The best bits?

• ‘We became a family. Adopting has given us happiness of our children growing up, tears as teenagers and seeing them become lovely people, having partners and a lovely 10 year old grandson.’

• ‘Growing children and family home. Being a mommy and daddy. Sharing fun times, holidays, DVD nights, family meals, birthdays and Christmas.’

• ‘Getting to know each other and knowing that our three children will be kept together (as they had faced being separated).’

The most challenging bits

• ‘Introductions were exhausting and non stop fast pace of having younger children is tiring but nothing we weren’t expecting.’

• ‘Having a child join our family that we didn’t know – although we learned a lot about her before we were matched it was hard to suddenly have a three-year-old.’

• ‘Missing out on first years. Dealing with behaviours that you are not sure where they have come from, people not understanding the issues they bring and therefore not taking your concerns seriously.’

Advice adopters would give to others considering adoption:
Some of the key reasons adopters choose Action for Children are:

**Support for as long as it takes**

Through every step of the process, from the initial stages through to placement and the adoption order, our experienced team will support you and provide you with the advice you need to succeed. We understand the particular difficulties you and your child may be facing.

Your own dedicated Action for Children Social Worker will:

- provide individual guidance tailored to your strengths and experience, helping you to acquire new skills
- hold regular discussions and visit you
- advocate for you and make sure you receive all of the services you should be receiving, including financial support and further training
- liaise and communicate with the local authority on your behalf
- be as passionate about adoption as you are

86% of adopters said that our on-going support was very good or good

94% of adopters said that the speed of response on initial contact was very good or good

‘High quality of support - lots of listening, encouragement, knowledge and back up.’

‘Action for Children’s support is of the utmost quality. I have never had a time when I haven’t had a reply from a call or query.’

‘High quality of support - lots of listening, encouragement, knowledge and back up.’
Training and development opportunities

We have extensive experience and expertise in assessing and preparing people with the skills to adopt children who have been abused or neglected.

‘Sound advice, practical ideas and access to resources. Plenty of courses available as well as support groups.’

Thorough assessment and preparation

You will receive careful and thorough assessment and guidance to help you think through how adoption will affect you and your family. In addition, our preparation groups and training courses will help prepare you and your family.

96% of adopters said that the preparation course was very good or good.

‘I chose Action for Children as they offered a robust support package, a focused timescale for assessment and approval and were helpful, honest and accessible.’

Careful matching and planning

We work closely with Local Authorities and specialist organisations across the UK to find you a suitable match.

96% of adopters said that our matching process was very good or good.

Inclusive and accessible

Our projects connect adoptive families from all backgrounds, reflecting the specific needs of the children that require a new family. We also have a specialist project that focuses on finding families for children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

‘The people who staff it, their clear values of hope and love for children and for families and their deep understanding of minority ethnic communities.’

We also welcome adopters from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community and are a proud sponsor of LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week. Adopters can access advice, events and guidance through our partnership with New Family Social; a specialist UK charity which provides a network for LGBT adoptive and foster families.

We are delighted with our feedback from LGBT adopters and foster carers to New Family Social - 98% said that we had a satisfactory attitude to sexuality and gender identity (82% said it was good or excellent) which exceeded the national average of 91%. We are graded as the forth highest ranking charity in the Stonewall’s annual workplace equality index in 2012 (and graded at 102 when compared to all organisations).

‘Our lives are completely different and now complete. As we have adopted older children we have had a lot of challenges but it is the best thing we have ever done.’

An Action for Children LGBT adopter

We are as passionate about adoption as you are

As one of the UK’s leading’s children’s charities, you will be assured that we will have the interests of the child(ren) and your family at the heart of every decision we make. We are not about making profit or wanting to ‘tick boxes’, but about making a difference and being there for you for as long as it takes.

Access to support groups and social events

In addition to the support offered by the team at Action for Children, we organise support groups and social events where you will meet other adopters and learn from each other.
Case study

Marcia and Tony’s story

Like many couples today, Marcia and Tony didn’t make the decision to start a family until Marcia was in her mid-thirties.

After two years of trying to conceive, the couple began fertility treatment but without success. By this time Marcia was 39 and the couple had almost given up hope. After a great deal of thought, they agreed that what they wanted the most was a family, so they decided to adopt.

A big family

Their family is now considerably bigger, having adopted three siblings: Nadine and twins Tyrone and Dominic. ‘We went from being just a husband and wife to a family of five!’ says Marcia. But it wasn’t an overnight process.

Both Marcia and Tony thought these sessions had an important role to play. While you can never be totally prepared for the changes that happen when you adopt three children, the courses that Action for Children provided were really useful.

They addressed issues like the feelings the children might have about being adopted and how we could help them through it. I’m not sure we could have coped without them. They also enable you to meet other adopters and share your experiences – a real help!’ explains Richard.

Three children

Marcia is asked to describe the children and she instantly chuckles: ‘All three are completely different characters. Nadine is bright and bubbly and while she takes full advantage of being the big sister, she also enjoys a good dose of rough and tumble with the boys!

‘The boys have offered a much greater challenge! Boisterous and full of energy that unfortunately doesn’t always extend to their schoolwork! They were born premature and later were diagnosed with having oral dyspraxia and glue ear.

All of which, on top of their disrupted lives, has contributed to some major learning difficulties and speech and language delay. However they are adorable and very lovable and after nearly five years with us are beginning to make good, steady progress.’

The right support

Asked if they had any pointers for people thinking about adopting, Tony had some good advice: ‘Remember this is something for life – it’s probably the most important decision you will ever make, so think long and hard about it. And don’t try to do it alone. There’s lots of support out there but it’s important to find an adoption agency that’s right for you – we liked the fact that Action for Children offer independent advice and support, and we felt they always acted in our best interest right throughout the process and have continued to offer a high level of support. And even now, they are always keen to know how we are getting on!’
Useful addresses, websites and reading lists

For general advice and information about adoption:

**BAAF Adoption and Fostering**
Saffron House
6–10 Kirby Street
London EC1N 8TS
Phone: **020 7421 2600**
Email: mail@baaf.org.uk
Website: www.baaf.org.uk

**Adoption UK**
48 The Green
South Bar Street
Banbury OX16 9AB
Helpline: **0844 848 7900** (5p per minute)
Website: www.adoptionuk.org

**First4Adoption**
48 Mecklenburgh Square
London WC1N 2QA
Phone: 0300 222 0022 (local rate)
Email: helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk
Website: www.first4adoption.org.uk

**New Family Social**
PO Box 66244
London E9 9BD
Phone: **0843 2899457** (Calls cost 4.2p per minute(+vat) from a residential BT landline. Calls from a mobile phone may cost more)
Website: www.newfamilysocial.org.uk

**Adoptionlink**
Website: www.adoptionlink.co.uk

**British Infertility Association**
Website: www.bica.net

Reading list

BAAF has a wide range of books, guides and other resources available. For the latest selection, visit [http://www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop](http://www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop)

Adoption UK sells a range of items including books, publications and audio CD’s. All profits go directly to Adoption UK and support on-going adoption children, young people and their families. Visit their shop at [http://www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)

‘[Action for Children provides] sound advice, practical ideas and access to resources. Plenty of courses available as well as support groups.’
Contact us

If you want more information on the adoption process or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your local office on the details below:

Action for Children Adoption

Action for Children needs adopters who can help children and young people transform their lives. In return, we offer:

- training and support, for as long as it takes
- an experienced, responsive and friendly team
- shared passion, values and straightforward communication

Talk to us: 0845 355 5533

Email: adoption@actionforchildren.org.uk

actionforchildren.org.uk/adoPTION

Adoption and Permanency – Midlands
Wheatfield Close, Smiths Wood,
Birmingham B36 0QP
Tel: 0121 770 0591

Adoption and Permanency – South West
637 Gloucester Road, Horfield,
Bristol BS7 0BJ
Tel: 0117 958 0158

Adoption and Permanency Mosaic -
(specialises in Black and Minority Ethnic families)
12A Hackford Walk, Hackford Road,
London SW9 0QT
Tel: 020 7582 3687