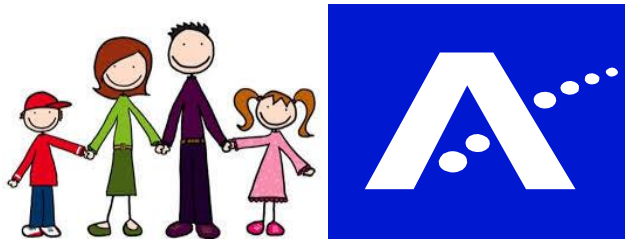


Information for parents and family members when a child may be adopted



What is Adoption?

Adoption is a process which allows someone other than the child's birth father and mother to become their legal parents. It is a legal procedure in which all the parental rights and responsibilities are transferred to the adopters.

Adoptions are made legally binding by the Court and once finalised, cannot be changed.

Who can arrange an adoption?

Adoption can be arranged by approved and registered Adoption Agencies. Aberdeenshire Council is an approved Adoption Agency.

When is adoption considered for a child?

A mother or both parents may decide that it is in the best interests of their child to be adopted, if they believe they cannot give the child everything they need growing up. As an Adoption Agency, we can help and support you to understand the process of adoption and how we can find a family for your child.

If the mother is unmarried, and the father does not have parental rights and responsibilities, his formal agreement is not needed, but Social Work will always seek the views of unmarried fathers in terms of best practice. The Social Work Service is required by law to try to contact him, if possible, as well as any other members of the family, to hear what they think about the adoption plan, and to collect information that will be helpful to the child later on. Mothers do not have to reveal the identity of the child's father, but it's important for the child to have this information for when they are older. An unmarried father who does not have parental responsibilities and who disagrees with the plan for adoption should seek legal advice.

In some cases where it has been fully assessed that parents are unable to safely care for their child, parents may agree to their child being adopted or alternatively, Aberdeenshire Council may apply to the court for a Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt. This is a process which assists in the process for the child to be adopted, without parental agreement. It is likely that, where parents do not agree with their child being adopted, that the child is likely to be referred to the Children's Hearing, which is the legal system in Scotland which supports children who need their care and protection secured with a legal order to ensure their safety.

What services can Parents expect?

Parting with a child or children for adoption is acknowledged to be incredibly difficult, whatever the circumstances.

As the adoption plan progresses, either before you sign any formal agreement during the adoption process or after the adoption, support is available from Social Work and the Adoption Service to parents. Seeking legal advice is also recommended. Seeking counselling can help you to talk about feelings and to think about how you are going to tell people, such as future partners and children about your child that was adopted and this time in your lives. The Social Worker will help parents and family members to understand the emotional effects of adoption and the alternatives to adoption as well as legal effects of adoption and how to get legal advice or advocacy. Any brothers and sisters of your child may also need a full range of advocacy, counselling and any practical support services. Should you need help either at the time or at a later date you may contact the Adoption Service to ask for adoption support. You can find contact details at the end of this leaflet.

How is a decision made for a child to be adopted?

All children who are accommodated in local authority care have regular Reviews and the recommendation may be that adoption is in the child's best interests. This is a very serious recommendation and is not taken lightly, without first considering **ALL** other options, such as returning to parents or Kinship Care with a relative or close family friend.

When Adoption is recommended, the child's Social Worker will write a detailed report about why adoption would be in the child's best interests within 12 weeks and will present it to the Permanence Panel.

The Permanence Panel will also seriously consider whether a child should or should not be adopted. They must consider if any other permanence option would be in the child's best interests. They must consider the views of the child about any plan for his or her future (if the child is old enough to express his or her wishes and feelings). If the child is 12 or over, his or her consent is also required. The Panel will also consider the views of close relatives who have been involved in the child's upbringing.

If the Permanence Panel think adoption is the best way to ensure the child will be brought up safely and will support the child's welfare throughout their life, they will recommend this to the Agency Decision Maker, who is a Senior Social Work Manager, who will make a decision on adoption within fourteen days.

Adoption does not become finalised until a decision is made by a Court at a later stage. The child may, however, move to the care of a prospective adoptive family soon after the adoption plan is made.

What information is needed for the Child?

Knowledge of their family is important for children who are adopted. The Social Worker will encourage parents and other family members to share as much information as possible about the family background including health, race, religion, culture and any wishes they may have for the child. The agency will try, as far as possible, to take the child's origins into consideration when seeking an adoptive family for them.

The involvement of fathers and other family members in sharing information and planning can be very helpful to the child.

Medical reports on the child and both parents (if known) are carried out so that any health needs of the child can be taken into account and it is important that parents give their consent to access health records to be able to gain full information about the child's health and family history.

The child's Social Worker will send all the information to the Permanence Panel, so that they can have all the necessary information when considering an adoption plan. This report will be shared with the parents, who will be asked to sign it.

What happens next?

If a decision for adoption is made, the Agency Decision Maker will send the parents a form giving more information.

The parents are asked to sign and return the form to say that they have read and understood the plan for the child.

The parents are also asked to sign and return a form to say whether they agree or disagree with the plan for adoption.

The form should be returned to the Agency Decision Maker by the parents.

If the parents do not respond within 28 days, Aberdeenshire Council must apply to the Court for a Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt within a further 28 days. If the child is on a Compulsory Supervision Order, Advice from the Children's Hearing must also be consulted about the adoption plan for the child. If the Children's Hearing agree that it is in the child's best interests to be adopted, the child may move to a prospective adoptive family, and the prospective adoptive parents will apply to the Court to adopt the child in due course. Parents are always invited to the Children's Hearing to give their views.

It is very important that you seek your own Legal Advice from a Solicitor at this time if you are not in agreement with the plan for your child to be adopted. This is your right, and we suggest you do this at the earliest opportunity.

How is a family chosen for a child?

In Aberdeenshire Council we require all prospective adopters to attend a 5-day adoption preparation course. The course provides detailed information on becoming an adoptive parent. This is followed by a full and thorough assessment of the family's suitability to become adoptive parents. This involves several meetings with a Social Worker as well as background checks of criminal records, social work records, health check assessments and an assessment of the safety of their home. The Social Worker for the prospective adoptive parents will also speak with people who know them well and will seek a reference from their employer. The assessment will focus on the family's ability to provide safe care and promote a child's interests throughout their life, which includes knowledge of their family and why they came to be adopted. This is a very rigorous process to ensure that all adoptive families are safe to care for children.

The Permanence Panel also recommend to the Agency Decision Maker whether the family would be suitable as adoptive parents, and the Agency Decision Maker will decide whether to approve them.

Once the Agency Decision Maker has agreed an adoption plan for the child, a family is sought at an early stage.

Social Work staff who specialise in adoption will consider families who seem best able to provide for the child's needs throughout their life. You will be encouraged to be involved in planning for your child and to give your views, particularly regarding the religious and cultural upbringing of the child. These views will be considered in choosing a family for the child. The Permanence Panel will be asked to recommend to the Agency Decision Maker which family could best meet the child's needs and will give this careful consideration. The Agency Decision Maker must then decide whether to agree the match of this family and your child.

Social Workers who specialise in adoption will firstly consider families who have been approved as adoptive parents by Aberdeenshire Council. If a family cannot be found locally, without giving confidential information, Social Work will try to find a family in the wider area across Scotland (or the UK if necessary).

In choosing a family, Social Work will try to choose a family who can reflect and/or support your child's ethnic, cultural background and religion. Other factors considered are your child's health, education, social and emotional development.

The child's Social Worker will listen carefully to your child, if he or she is old enough to give their views and will record these views and take them into account when considering adoptive families. If your child has brothers and sisters, Social Work will try to find a family where they can grow up together, if this is in their best interests. If, after careful consideration, Social Work reaches a view that brothers and sisters should live separately, then this will be discussed with parents, and will be clearly recorded in the child's case file.

There is now much more openness in adoption and it is important the children can maintain links with their families, where this is safe. Adoptive parents are sought who can manage this. Sometimes the parents and adoptive parents may meet and, depending on the needs of the child, parents and child may have contact throughout childhood, possibly face to face or by letter arranged through Social Work.

If the child has brothers or sisters living elsewhere, arrangements will be made for your child to keep in touch with them, where this is appropriate.

Where grandparents or other family members have been involved in the care of the child and share close relationships, ongoing contact will also be considered, where this is in the child's interests, either through face to face meetings or by letter.

Provided the child is old enough, their Social Worker will give a detailed explanation about what will happen now and in the future, and will try to answer questions that they might have. They will be given more information as the plan progresses. If Social Work does not act in line with your child's wishes, then the reasons for this will be explained to them and these reasons will be clearly recorded.

If Social Work does not act in line with your expressed views, you will be told the reasons and these will be clearly recorded. You should feel that you are being listened to and involved in the adoption process.

Moving to a new family

When your child is matched with an adoptive family, they will be given information about the new family, and may be given written information or a photo album about them, to help them prepare for meeting this family. Your child will be encouraged to ask questions about this family where they are old enough.

Your child will later meet their prospective adoptive family in their Foster Carer's home, with their Foster Carers and Social Worker. It is very important for your child to have as much support as possible at that time. The introduction will be carefully planned and will progress at your child's pace, until they are ready to move. This might take anything from 1 week to a few weeks depending on the child. Parents may have the opportunity around this time to meet the prospective adoptive family.

We know this might be very difficult for parents to support their child to move to a new family or to meet their new prospective adoptive parents. It is very important that your child is supported by all the adults in their life to move on, so that they can soon be settled. It is important that everyone thinks about how their actions will affect the child at this stage and do all they can to help and support the child. Support is available for parents to manage this stage of the child's life, which is recognised as very difficult for parents.

Aberdeenshire Council's Letterbox Scheme

Aberdeenshire Council has an established Letterbox Scheme, and where this is in your child's interests, parents and relatives and the child can write to each other through this scheme. Your Social Worker can provide information about this scheme.

Sometimes it is in the child's interests to have direct face to face contact with members of their family after they move to their adoptive family, and if so, Social Work will make arrangements for this to happen where it is recommended. It is important to remember that children grow and change over time, so any contact plans must be flexible to allow for the changing needs and wishes of the child. Contact may increase or decrease at times as they get older. Having an ongoing knowledge of their family is always important however and Social Work will try and maintain connections. All decisions about contact are always made in the child's interests and family members can ask for support at any time from the Adoption Service about contact matters. When a child is old enough, their views and wishes must be taken into account.

The Adoption Service can continue to provide support to your child after they have been adopted. For this reason, the Social Worker will encourage parents to share as much information as possible about the family background and give this information to the adoptive family, so that the child has knowledge and an understanding of their family and the reasons why they were adopted. This information will be carefully recorded in the child's case file, held securely and privately.

Social Work will ensure that the child's move to the new family is made as quickly as possible in a way that best meets the child's needs, and without long delays, and will also try to ensure there are no unnecessary delays in court.

Support after the move

The Adoption Service will continue to offer support promptly to your child and their new family, for as long as they need this. Support can be requested by your child or their new family at any point as your child grows up. Support is equally available to you and to extended family members and siblings in the same way. You will find contact details at the end of this leaflet.

What happens when my child is an adult?

By law, Social Work has to keep the child's file for 100 years, and an adopted person can have access to their adoption record from the age of 16. Social Work records are held privately and securely and will contain full and accurate information, including information about the child's family, medical information, social history and needs at the time they were adopted.

All children in Scotland have a right to receive their original birth certificate on request, once they are at least 16 years old. They can also have access to the original documents prepared at the time of adoption. The information could make it possible for your child to trace you, should they wish. The Adoption Service can assist adopted people trace family members after the age of 16. It may be helpful to keep the Adoption Service updated of any changes of address or changes in family circumstances over time.

Family members do not have the legal right to information about an adopted person once they reach adulthood, but the Adoption Service can help in making connections and exploring contact. Birthlink in Edinburgh hold Scotland's Contact Register, where adopted people and their family members can register with the possibility of being reunited in the future. However, this is generally always when the adopted person wants this.

Representations and complaints

Whilst it is Aberdeenshire's aim to provide a good service, parents and family members of children being adopted have a right to make representations and complaints and will be given the leaflet "Have your say Compliments, Comments & Complaints" on request. This is available from Social Work offices and on Aberdeenshire Council's website - <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/contact-us/have-your-say/>

Aberdeenshire Council's Adoption Services are regulated by the Care Inspectorate in Scotland and you may also make a complaint to them by calling 0345 600 9527 or completing an online form via their website - <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/online-complaint-form>

Contact Details:

Aberdeenshire Councils Adoption Service –

Email: adoption@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Telephone: 01467 532800

Letterbox Administrator –

Email: letterbox@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Birthlink – Scotland's Adoption Registry, Tracing, Adoption Support & Advice –

Email: <http://www.birthlink.org.uk/>

Care Inspectorate in Scotland –

Email: <http://www.careinspectorate.com/>

Citizen's Advice –

Email: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/>