



Children's guide to adoption

I'm adopted

This guide has been made to help you understand some of the things that have happened in your life and the changes that have taken place.

People sometimes say that life can be like a jigsaw puzzle. This guide will help you to put some of the pieces together by helping you to understand what adoption is.

Did you know that lots of children are also adopted like you? Even some of your favourite characters like Paddington Bear, Superman, Batman, Stitch from Lilo & Stitch, and the three little girls Margo, Edith and Agnes from Despicable Me are all adopted too.



What is adoption?

There are many different sorts of families.

Sometimes children live with their birth mummy, birth daddy or both. Some live with two daddies and some live with two mummies.

Some live with one mummy or one daddy. And some live with their grandparents, or aunts, or uncles.

Your birth family might include mummy, daddy, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Similar to your family now.

If a child cannot live at home with their birth family, they may be adopted. Adoption is a way of finding new parents for children who can't be brought up by their birth parents.

When we are born, we all have a family and we call this our 'birth family'.



What is adoption? (continued)

There are lots of reasons why children cannot live with their birth family. Maybe their birth parents find it hard to look after them properly or keep them safe from things that might hurt them. Children can't live where they are being hurt or not cared for properly.

Adoption means you will live with your new adoptive family. In your new family you will have a parent or parents. There may also be children already living in the family and they will become your brothers and sisters.

Sometimes birth families want their children to keep on living with them even if they can't look after them properly or keep them safe. Then the social workers and a judge (at a family court) decide that a child needs to be kept safe and that would mean not living with their birth family anymore.

Sometimes birth mummies and daddies may not feel that they can look after a baby and may make the really hard decision to give the care of their baby to someone else. This means that they asked the social workers to find an adoptive family for their baby. For children this is known as being a relinquished baby or child.

What is a social worker?

A social worker is someone whose job it is to help people when they have problems. If they're worried about a child or think a family needs help, they will talk to other professionals, like teachers and health visitors and see what help is needed to keep a child safe. If they still feel that a child isn't safe, they may find a foster family for the child to live with, until a decision is made about what's best for the child.



What is a judge?

A judge works in a court where all sorts of decisions are made. A judge listens to everyone and reads lots of reports to understand what children need to be happy, healthy and safe.

A judge is one of the main people who makes decisions. If it's decided a child can't live with their birth family, it's agreed the child should have a chance to belong to a new family.

Adoption is a way of finding new parents for children who can't be brought up by their birth parents.



What do children need?

To be safe and happy, children need parents who can give them lots of things. Number one is love but children need lots of other things like:

Fun, play, food, boundaries, routines, to be kept safe, to go to school, to visit the doctor and dentist when needed, cuddles, toys, clean clothes, kind words and lots of happy memories.



Do I have to forget about my birth family?

No.

You'll have your own special Life Story Book with photographs and information to look at, and your parent or parents will be given a Later Life letter they can show you when you're older which has more information in it.

You can talk to your parent or parents about your birth family, and they can help you understand.

Sometimes, the social worker will decide it's okay for children to keep in touch with some members of their birth family, if that's what they want. This might mean they can send letters each year. Some children are able to meet with members of their birth family if the social worker and their parents know this will be safe and good for you.

Sometimes it's better if children and birth families don't stay in touch, because it won't help them. If the social worker is worried about you seeing your birth family, even if it's what you want, they will explain to you why they think it shouldn't happen.

Even if it's decided that you shouldn't stay in touch with your birth family, you can always ask questions about them. Birth parents can still love their child even if they can't look after them properly or keep them safe.

You can ask questions and talk about them with your parent or parents.

What about my brothers and sisters?

Social workers try to keep brothers and sisters together. If you can't be in the same new family together, the social worker will try to make sure that you can stay in touch with one another, although sometimes this isn't always possible.



Who are adopters?

When you first met your new parents, it might have felt very exciting or it might have seemed a bit scary, or a mix of both. But you soon started to get to know them.

When everyone agreed that this is the best new family for you, the Adoption Order was made by a judge. After that, families often have a celebration, because this is a very special occasion. You are now a forever family.

Adopters are people who would love to have a child to come and live with them so they become their parent or parents - and become a family.

They are people that might not have any children yet, some may have children already, and some may have adopted a child before.

Before they can adopt a child, parents spend a lot of time learning how to be the best parent and how to keep a child safe and well. Social workers help them with this.

What are adopters like?

Families come in all shapes and sizes. It may be a family with a mum and a dad, or two mums, or two dads, or just one mum, or just one dad. It may be a family with other children, or a family where you would be the only child. Some adopters live in a town, others live in the country.

Notes and thoughts

For example, you could write down your name and the name of your social worker.

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Do you want to talk about adoption?

If you ever have any questions or worries about your adoption, you can ask your parent or parents for help.

You can also talk to an adult, like a teacher.

You can talk to a social worker. You can do this by asking your parent or parents to call **Adopt South West** who organise adoptions for families in Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay. Our telephone number is **0345 155 1076**.

Or you or your family can talk to one of these independent organisations. The people don't work for Adopt South West. They will help to make sure that your views are heard, if you don't think that you are being listened to.

Voices from Care

Freephone: 029 20451431 email: info@vfcc.org.uk

Child Law Advice Line

Telephone: 0300 330 5480

Childline

Freephone: 0800 881111

Childline will listen to you about anything and particularly help children who are being hurt.