



# Your guide to adopting with APSE

Adoption  
Partnership

South East



# What is adoption?

Adoption Partnership South East is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which works across the London Borough of Bexley, Kent and Medway. Within these three areas we have children who for a variety of reasons are not able to live with their family of birth. We need adoptive parents who can offer the children a stable loving family life and meet their needs throughout their childhood and into adulthood. Adoption is a process by which all of the decision-making rights and responsibilities towards a child are transferred to adopters.

The children who need adoptive families are likely to have a variety of additional needs. They may have developmental delay, emotional and behavioural difficulties due to their life experiences or they may have a disability.

The children range in age from 0-8 years; they may need to be placed on their own or together with siblings.

Many have had a difficult early start in life and need parents who can offer particularly sensitive care and attention.

Whilst adoption can be challenging at times Adoption Partnership South East is by your side to help, advise and support you to meet the challenge.

We are an experienced service who can understand people's different life experiences and backgrounds and what these mean in terms of what people will be able to offer as adopters.

We can give you lots of information to help you decide if adoption is right for you.

# Why are children adopted?

Some families have problems looking after their children or keeping them safe from harm. These problems can range from parents experiencing illness and depression through to drug abuse or alcohol misuse.

Often the children have experienced poor or inconsistent parenting and some have been subject to abuse or neglect. Alternative permanent homes are sometimes required if children can't stay in their birth families because problems are so significant.

Adoption can give a child the chance of a new family.

It is common for adopted children to feel sad, lost rejected and hurt. They may not be able to express their feelings in the same way as other children do so they need parents who can understand their history and show patience and sensitivity.

Prospective adopters come from a wide variety of backgrounds and many have not previously parented a child. In Adoption Partnership South East we provide a thorough assessment and training programme that fully prepares adopters for the task.

We can also continue to support you beyond the adoption order as we know that sometimes adoptive families need support as a child grows up.



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# Who can adopt?

Adoption Partnership South East need people who are patient and adaptable as well as practically and emotionally prepared to take on the responsibility of looking after a child. All children are now told about their adoption so you would also need to be comfortable talking to a child about their history and their birth family.

People from a range of different backgrounds become adopters but there are some legal requirements:

- You must be over the age of 21 and although there is no upper age limit we do have to consider the needs of a child when placing them for adoption.
- You can be single or married, in a civil partnership, divorced or living with a partner. We welcome interest from all irrespective of gender or sexual orientation.
- You can be childless or already a parent. However, we do need you to have some childcare experience. This could be from looking after your own or others' children, through work or volunteering.
- You do not have to own your own home but you must have enough living space for the child and your home must be suitable at the time of your application.
- You must be domiciled or habitually resident in the UK.
- You must have no serious criminal offences - particularly against children.
- If you have a disability you can adopt. Experience of a disability can be positively welcomed.
- Adopters can be from many different cultural, ethnic religious or social backgrounds. We have to carefully consider all of a child's needs including ethnicity, culture, religion and language when we place them and it is important that you understand all of your child's needs.

If you are unsure about whether your individual circumstances are right for moving forward at this time please contact us. We are here to help you make the decision.



# What is the process?

## **Step One: View the video presentation and read this information**

Our comprehensive information pack will provide you with everything you need to know about the adoption process and will help you decide whether adoption is right for you.

## **Step Two: Contact the Initial Enquiries Team to book onto a Consultation Session**

If you would like to continue with the adoption process after reading the information pack, please return your completed contact form to our friendly initial enquiry team via [adoption.partnership@kent.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.partnership@kent.gov.uk). They will then contact you to arrange an initial enquiry call to complete an initial enquiry form (which will take 15-20 minutes) and book you in for a consultation session.

## **Step Three: Attend the Consultation Session**

We have monthly consultation sessions which take place in the evening across Bexley, Kent and Medway. The sessions will last approximately 1 ½ hours and will give you an opportunity to hear from someone who has adopted. You will then have a one to one time with an Adoption Social Worker. You will be able to discuss through any questions you have and any issues you would like to explore further to consider if this is the right time for you to move forward with adoption.



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# What is the process?

## **Step Four: Request and return a Registration of Interest form**

After the consultation session, if you decide you would like to start your adoption application then you will contact the initial enquiry team and we will send you a Registration of Interest form (ROI), this a form you complete, sign and return to us.

## **Step Five: Acceptance of Registration of Interest**

You will be notified in writing within five working days whether your Registration of Interest (ROI) has been accepted and that Stage One has begun.

When the ROI is accepted, you are in Stage One of the assessment process and will be supported by a social worker who will visit you at home. The first stage of the assessment process is adopter led and you will be provided with self-assessment forms, three days training and access to eLearning. All parts of Stage One need to be completed before you can be considered to proceed to Stage Two.

All checks and references need to be satisfactory.



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# What is the process?

## Step Six: Completion of Stage One

After successful completion of Stage One you will receive a letter inviting you to enter into Stage Two of the process.

## Step Seven: Stage Two Assessment

Stage Two of the assessment is your home study assessment. You will be allocated a social worker to undertake home visits and find out more about your family background, lifestyle, your support network and your strengths and weaknesses. Your social worker will then write a report called a Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) which you will be able to read and make comments on. As part of this assessment you will need to attend Stage Two Adoption Preparation group sessions. These will be run over two days and will give you the opportunity to learn more about children's needs, strategies for parenting adopted children, as well as the opportunity to meet other potential adopters.



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# What is the process?

## Step Eight: The Adoption Panel

Once your PAR is completed your social worker will present your recommendation of adopter approval to our Adoption Panel. The Adoption Panel is a legal requirement of adoption agencies in England and Wales and has responsibility for recommending to the Head of Adoption Partnership South East whether applicants should be approved as adopters.

When adopters are approved, they will be referred to our Mentoring Scheme. They will be allocated an experienced adopter who is a trained mentor and will be able to support them through the next few months of matching and placement. The mentor will be matched as closely as possible to the adopters' circumstances.

## Step Nine: Being matched with a child

Adoption Partnership will then try to match you with a suitable child. You will be consulted about any child identified as a possible match. It can take some time to identify an appropriate match for all involved. All matches are presented to our Adoption Panel and the match is then ratified by a senior manager from the Children's Service.



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# What is the process?

## **Step Ten: Placement of a child**

A child identified for your family will be placed with you in a planned move.

## **Step Eleven: Adoption Order**

Adopters can make an application for an Adoption Order supported by Adoption Partnership once a child has been placed for 10 weeks. Once an Adoption Order is made adopters have full legal parental responsibility for the child and the child will take on your surname.

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# What adoption support is available?

Adoption Partnership South East can continue to support you even after you have been granted an Adoption Order for a child.

We provide a range of services and support to adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families.

These can include:

- Counselling, advice and information
- Support groups for adopters, adopted children and their birth parents.
- Social events for adopted children and families
- Assistance with contact, including help writing letters to birth family members.
- Therapeutic services to adopted children and their families.
- Services to support adopters, such as training to help meet the child's needs.
- Assistance to prevent placements reaching a level where adoptive families feel they can no longer cope.
- Adoption Support Fund [www.adoptionsupportfund.co.uk](http://www.adoptionsupportfund.co.uk)
- Adoption Partnership South East fully understand complex issues that adopted children come to families with and will always be available to advise and assist.

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# What else will be considered?

We will need to apply for checks from the Disclosure and Barring Service. If there is a record of offences these will need to be looked at, but apart from some offences against children they will not necessarily prevent someone from being assessed.

All adoption applicants will need to have a medical with their GP and health issues will be explored. you are responsible for the fee. Any lifestyle issues that could be detrimental to your health or a child's health will be investigated.

Because of the harmful effects of smoking, vaping and passive smoking on children and young people we will encourage prospective adopters to undertake smoking cessation programmes. Adoption Partnership South East do not place children aged 0-5 years with adopters who smoke.

If you have undergone fertility treatments we would ask you to wait for a period of time (often up to 6 months) from your last treatment before beginning your assessment.

If you have recently experienced or are about to experience significant life events (e.g. bereavement, change of job, moving house) we would also ask you to wait until you are more settled with your new situation.

The adoption process is time consuming and intense. We need you to be able to be fully focused on learning about the needs of adopted children so that you are as well prepared as possible for the joys and challenges of parenting an adopted child.



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# Early Permanence

Early Permanence placements are used for young children and babies when the Local Authority assesses the most likely plan for a child will need to be adoption and there is no one within the family who can care for the child.

Early Permanence places a child with approved adopters who are temporarily approved as foster carers to care for the child. The Early Permanence carers will foster the child whilst assessments and final decisions are made by the court. This can take between 4-12 months and sometimes longer.

The Early Permanence carers need to be able to deal with the uncertainty of the period before the court's final decision. If the court agrees that the child should be adopted and the adoption agency approves the 'match' between the carers and the child then the placement becomes an adoption placement.

## *What are the advantages of early permanence?*

- The child is placed with carers who may become their adopters at an early stage and this avoids multiple placements for the child.
- It will avoid the stressful upheaval for the child if he/she has to move from foster home to a new adoptive family once a court have reached a final decision.
- The bonding period between the child and adoptive parents can begin sooner thus creating a secure and loving family life for the child.



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# Early Permanence

*Is Early Permanence right for me?*

There will be a number of things that you will need to think about as an Early Permanence carer.

- *You will need to deal with the uncertainty before the court reaches a final decision.*
- *Children often placed in an Early Permanence placement are very young and therefore there are likely to be uncertainties about the child's future development due to a number of factors.*
- *During the fostering stage of the placement you may be asked to bring the child for contact with members of the birth family at a supervised contact centre.*
- *You would need to think about the possibility of the court not agreeing with the local authority's adoption plan and the child returning to their birth family. You would need to work together with the local authority to manage this in the most sensitive way for the child. It can be a very distressing time for the Early Permanence carers, even though it is judged to be the right thing to do by the court.*

As part of the support we provide, all EP adopters will be referred to the mentor scheme at approval stage and will be allocated an experienced EP adopter who is a trained mentor and will be able to support them from approval to Placement Order being granted, no matter how long that may take.



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# An Adopters Story - Jason and Becky

We had often talked about adoption and we both wanted to give siblings a chance to stay together. It took us a while to make that first telephone enquiry because we wondered if social workers would place two children with people who had never been parents. So we contacted Bexley adoption team and they were friendly and helpful. They invited us to an information meeting that was the beginning of a process that lasted about eight months.

The assessment process was tough at times and we won't pretend it wasn't. They talked about personal things like the reasons why we were not able to have our own children. But we learned so much about ourselves and our social worker reassured us that we have lots of strengths and abilities we hadn't even thought were relevant before.

So we were approved as adopters and four months later they were with us. Six-year-old Jess and two-year-old Morgan, brother and sister who had already experienced several moves to different carers in their young lives. It's true there were huge challenges early on but we were resilient and flexible and determined to make any changes to our lives necessary to help these children through the most difficult part of their lives.



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# An Adopters Story - Jason and Becky

Probably the hardest thing for us was making Jess believe that she was no longer responsible for caring for her little brother and it was now us who are responsible for caring for her. The adoption team helped us and they even sent us on a one-day training course to help us manage the situation.

And six months ago we got our adoption order.

We took the children to meet the judge and it all just felt so natural, two happy children and two happy parents.

We know it's not all going to be easy and there is sadness when we show the children their life story books and talk about their birth mum and dad. But we won't let them forget and Jess and Morgan will always know what special children they are.

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# What happens next?

**You are welcome to attend one of our Consultation Sessions**

**Please contact the Initial Enquiries Team on 03000 422373 for further details.**

**We look forward to hearing from you!**

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# Further Information on Adoption

Our website <https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/>

Our Privacy Statement <https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/privacy-statement>

CoramBaaf [www.corambaaf.org.uk](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk)

Adoption UK [www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)

First4adoption <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/>

Visit our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/AdoptionPartnership/>

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