Family Placement Team: 01225 394949

If you need this document in a different format, please telephone the number above

Bath & North East Somerset Council
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Adoption: some basic questions answered

What area does the Bath and North East Somerset adoption service cover?
We accept applications within a short travelling distance from BANES. At times of limited capacity, we prioritise applications from people living within the boundary. If in doubt, ask!

What sort of service can we expect if we apply to adopt with Bath and North East Somerset?
We are happy to report that we get very good feedback from people who adopt with us. We would be happy to introduce you to adopters who can share their experiences with you. We fully support the National Adoption Standards which set out what people affected by adoption should be able to expect from adoption agencies and local authorities.

I am married: can I adopt?
Yes, but both you and your spouse must adopt jointly.

I am single: can I adopt?
Yes.

I am living with my partner: can we adopt together?
Yes, you can adopt jointly.

I am lesbian/gay: can I adopt?
Yes. The answer above also applies to you.

I have children: can I adopt?
Yes. Many adoptive families have children by birth and adoption. We would be happy to talk with you about ways to make this work as well as possible.
Are there any age limits?
You have to be 21 years or over. There is no upper age limit but we will look at the age gap between the child and the adoptive parent. Age is one consideration amongst many when assessing the suitability of adoptive parents, including general health, fitness and emotional well being. Adoptive parents need to meet the demands of growing children and see them through into adult life. We are happy to look at individual circumstances.

I have a disability or health problem: will I be able to adopt?
In practice, very few medical conditions or impairments will prevent you from adopting. We do have to consider what impact your condition could have on a child in your care. We will also look at the support you have. People who wish to adopt have a medical examination with their GP. This is then looked at by a specialist doctor - the Agency Medical Adviser, who will complete the medical report.

Can we apply if we are undergoing fertility treatment?
People need to make a positive choice to adopt. Fertility treatment and adoption assessment are both time consuming and emotionally taxing. We would therefore wait until you have completed treatment before taking up an application to adopt.
What support is available to adoptive parents?

We recognise that adoptions are most likely to be successful when they are well supported. Support is routinely available and geared to the kind of issues we know adoptive families deal with. We work closely with colleagues in health and education to try and ensure that all children’s services are “adoption friendly”.

Adoption support services include the following:

- All prospective adopters have a social worker in the Family Placement Team providing support, information and advice
- All children have a social worker until they are adopted
- A child psychologist and paediatrician provide routine advice and support at key points in the adoption process
- An adopter’s support group meets regularly
- Adopters can access the independent services of After Adoption
- Financial advice about benefits, tax credits and adoption leave
- Adoption allowances are available for some children, subject to financial assessment of the adopters
- Letterbox scheme (see leaflet).
- Specialist social workers to deal with adoption support after adoption

What about the children?

Why are children placed for adoption?

Each child has a unique history. Many have parents who, for a variety of reasons are unable to meet their needs. Some have been neglected, or abused physically, emotionally or sexually. Some have health conditions or are disabled. All, over
time, have to deal with the emotional consequences of leaving their birth family. Some have had many moves before living with an adoptive family. All will have emotional needs over and above those of children who have not had these life experiences and losses.

**How old are the children?**
Children who need new families vary in age from babies to primary school age.

**Can we adopt a child from a different racial, religious or cultural background?**
Children who need new families come from a wide range of backgrounds. Factors such as ethnicity, culture, language and religion are important parts of a child’s whole identity. Placement with a similar family can be more likely to meet the child’s need as fully as possible and prepare them for life as a member of a multi-racial society. Many children, however, are placed with families who are different; in which case, careful thought is given to factors such as the extended family network and the community in which they live.

**Do children have contact with people from their past?**
Every child placed for adoption has an individual contact plan based on a careful assessment of their own particular needs. Most children have indirect contact via the Letterbox scheme (see leaflet). Some children also have some infrequent face to face contact with parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and/or previous carers. There are well researched reasons for helping children keep links with the past which are explored in the adopter’s preparation course.

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**Adoption Preparation and Assessment: What to expect**

**What training can I expect?**
We run preparation courses for adopters and are currently exploring joining up with other adoption agencies in the area to run these more frequently. We ask all adopters to attend, as we believe it is essential to have enough information about what adoption involves at an early stage. The sessions include input from adoptive
parents, foster carers, social workers and others affected by adoption or involved in providing support services. We aim to create a relaxed atmosphere where prospective adopters can have their questions answered and meet others taking the same steps. People who attend the course tell us that they find it very valuable. Adoptive parents can also attend ongoing training events alongside foster carers.

**What does an adoption assessment involve?**

From 1st July 2013, this is a two stage process, after we have provided you with all the information you need.

Providing information:

If, after reading this, you would like more detailed information, we will arrange to meet with you to provide this within 10 working days. If you then want to go ahead, you will be invited to *register an interest* in adoption and complete a registration form. We will decide within 5 working days whether to accept this. If we don’t have the capacity to offer you a service at this time, we will help you to make contact with other local adoption agencies which do.

**Stage One:**

We will draw up a Stage One plan with you, agreeing what we will each do. You will have an allocated social worker, who will explain all this in detail and be available to answer your questions. We will offer you a training day and materials to explore at home to help prepare you to adopt. Your social worker might suggest ways to gain more experience with children, or books to increase your knowledge and understanding of adopted children’s needs. We will ask your permission to take up personal references and do some background checks, including a criminal records check; we will also ask you to have a health check with your GP. This stage should last for 2 months, but you may ask for longer if you wish. At the end of Stage One, if you want to go ahead, we will ask you to notify us. If we consider for any reason that this should not happen, we will give you a clear written explanation.

**Stage Two:**

This stage is about intensive training and assessment. We will draw up a Stage Two plan with you, setting out the number of visits your social worker will make and the areas to be covered to complete your prospective adopter’s report. We will also arrange further training during this stage. The assessment should be an open and honest process, with your social worker helping you to make what is a
very big decision in your life. You will have opportunities to stop and talk about how things are progressing, and have your questions answered. If you have children living at home they will be sensitively involved as appropriate to their age.

This process will result in a Prospective Adopters Report which will contain full information about what your family has to offer and the sort of child you would do best with. You will contribute fully to this report and will read it all (except confidential personal references) before it is submitted to The Adoption and Permanence Panel. It is very important that you are happy with the final version. In the rare event of a difference of opinion between you and your social worker about the recommendation, you can write a separate account of your views.

The report is presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel who have the task of considering all recommendations to approve adopters. You can attend panel and contribute. You will have written information about the panel before you attend. A Senior Manager in Children's Services makes the final decision. In the rare event of the panel not recommending approval, you can ask to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism.

This stage should take 4 months.
What are we looking for in an adoption assessment?

Most people have the capacity to be parents and we have no blueprint for the “ideal parent”. We are certainly not looking for Superman or Wonderwoman - they don't exist! People all bring their own unique experiences and qualities. Like other parents, adopters will learn a lot “on the job”.

You bring your own experiences of childhood, of family relationships, coping with teenage years, leaving home and adult relationships. Understanding what your experiences have been and what you have learned from them helps us to understand what you will bring to adoptive parenthood.

Your support networks, via family, friends, community and religious groups are all important - we need to know who will be there for you. You can also rely on support from us. In addition we want to know about the extended family and the wider network your adopted child will experience.

It will be very helpful if you have experience of caring for children of different ages. You may have children, stepchildren, God children, nieces and nephews, children of friends or you may work with children. If you do not have much contact with children we strongly advise you to think about how you can increase this - e.g. by babysitting for friends, or volunteering at a local playgroup or school. This will be good experience for you and assist with the assessment as you will be able to link general issues about children to the real children you know.

Understanding how you have coped with sadness, difficulties or stress in your life also helps us to anticipate how you might cope with a child who will also have upset and angry feelings. It will be helpful to hear about how you have dealt with past problems.

If you choose to adopt because of infertility, or have experienced another loss or bereavement it is important to have given yourself some time to grieve and to feel emotionally ready for adoption.
Adopters need to understand and accept their child’s history and their birth family. Your child will need to make sense of their past and why they needed to be adopted. Their story is likely to be painful - we will help you to think about how you will share it with your child and help them with feelings of loss, sadness and anger.

We expect adopters to value their child’s racial, religious and cultural background. Adopters who value difference and respect individuals from a wide range of backgrounds will find it easier to accept their child’s background and promote a positive identity.

If you are a couple we will look at the strength of your relationship. It is important for children who are adopted that their new parents can cope with difficulties and disagreements and will support each other as parents.

If you are applying as a single person it is important to be sure that you have good support and people with whom you can share difficulties honestly, as well as sharing the good times.

The assessment is also an opportunity to discuss what your hopes and expectations are as parents and how that fits with the children who need new families.

This is just a brief account of the areas we look at with you. More detailed information will be shared when we meet you and you can ask any questions you have at any time.

Useful websites
- Bath & North East Somerset Council’s adoption pages: www.bathnes.gov.uk/adoption
- British Association for Adoption & Fostering: www.baaf.org.uk
- Adoption UK: www.adoptionuk.org/
- National Adoption Gateway: www.first4adoption.org.uk