

Guiding you through the adoption process



Blackpool Council

Lancashire
County
Council 

Introduction

Hello from your local adoption team

We know that you'll probably have lots of questions about becoming an adopter and what this involves, so we've put together this guide, which has all the important information you'll need to help you decide if adoption is right for you.

If at any stage you'd like some advice on adopting, if you have any questions at all, or if you'd simply like the opportunity to have an informal chat before proceeding, please get in touch with us on **0300 123 6727** or fill out the enquiry form on our website **adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk**.

This won't commit you to anything, but will provide you with an opportunity to speak directly with a member of our team who is experienced in the adoption process.



About Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool

We are two Local Authorities and we act as the corporate parents for lots of children, many of them waiting for their forever family. We find permanent homes for around 110 to 120 children each year. We don't make a profit from adoption, our motivation is to find the best possible outcome for the child.

We have a professional and dedicated adoption team who recruit, train and support prospective adopters in Lancashire and Blackpool. We're all passionate about what we do and really care about the lives of the children and adopters we work with. When we make a family's dreams come true we really do share their joy.

We work in the best interests of children, young people and their families at all times to ensure we make a positive difference to their lives.

Our team is highly qualified and very experienced in finding the right homes for our children.

We carefully match and place Lancashire and Blackpool children with approved adopters from across the county and provide excellent ongoing adoption support services. These include supporting contact arrangements, enabling access to birth records and facilitating support groups.

What is Adoption?

Adoption is a legal process which provides new families for children who cannot be raised by their own parents. It is a permanent solution for children who need a new home and is a commitment for life.

There may be a number of reasons why a child is placed for adoption. In some cases a court will decide that a child needs to be adopted due to concerns for their long-term welfare. In other cases it may

not be possible for the birth parents to look after the child and it is their decision for their child to be adopted.

Every case and every child is unique and we act in the child's best interest to find and place them in a new family which is best suited to their needs. For many children adoption may be their only chance of experiencing family life.



Who can adopt?

Over the years we have helped lots of people from varied backgrounds in Lancashire and Blackpool to adopt children and either start, or add to, their families.

You don't have to be any particular type of person, or in a particular type of relationship, to become an approved adopter in Lancashire and Blackpool. Many different kinds of people adopt. What matters above all else is your ability to look after the child and provide a safe and stable home throughout their childhood and beyond.

Age

Legally you must be over 21 at the time of application and live within Lancashire, Blackpool or in the surrounding area.

There is no upper age limit to adopting, although a child should be placed with a person or family who can support them until they are a young adult.

Spare bedroom

We believe that children of whatever age require their own personal space when joining a new family. Therefore you will need to have a spare bedroom. Children under the age of six months would initially sleep within your bedroom, but once they reach six months old they would need to have their own room. If you adopt siblings we would consider them having to share a room, as long as each child had adequate personal space.

Relationship status

You don't have to be married to adopt. You can be single, married, divorced, widowed or living with your partner. To adopt as a couple you must be in a stable relationship.

We welcome applications from both heterosexual and same sex applicants and from single people or couples regardless of gender or sexuality.

Having children already in your family does not prevent you from becoming an adoptive parent. It's important though that we consider the needs of existing children when we are placing a child with you for adoption.

Employment status

Whether you are working full-time or are unemployed and receiving benefits, you will be considered as a prospective adopter. People who want to adopt don't have to be well off, although you must be able to afford to take on and support a child.

Medical fitness

Applicants must be willing to undergo a full medical assessment by their GP, as your doctor will be asked to provide a medical reference for you. If you have a medical condition which is controlled and not life-threatening, it is unlikely that it will prevent you from adopting.





Criminal history

Not all criminal convictions exclude people from being able to adopt and we look at all circumstances individually. However, if you have a record of offences against children, or significant offences of violence, we will not be able to consider your application.

Smoking

Adoption Lancashire Blackpool follows the guidelines of good practice issued by Coram BAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy; which is not to place children under five years of age with adopters who smoke, nor a child over five years old with other conditions (e.g. chest problems, glue ear, or with a disability).

This recognises the need to promote a healthy lifestyle to our children and to protect those children who may have some respiratory problems. Help and advice is available to you if wish to give up smoking. We welcome your application if can show evidence that you are actively trying to stop

smoking. We would like you to have been smoke-free for a minimum of six months before placing a child with you.

Fertility Treatment

Applications are welcomed from those who have been through IVF treatment, although we would recommend that you have ended your treatment before you apply to adopt. It is important that you have had time to accept disappointments and are confident that adoption is the correct way forward for you.

Pets

Pet owners do not usually have a problem with their application unless the pets are known to be dangerous. If you are a dog owner you will be asked how you control your pet and if you own many pets, we will ask you to show that there are no health risks and you have enough time to also care for a child. We will make an assessment of all pets in the home

What kinds of children need adopting?

When most people think about adoption, they envisage young babies. Although we do have babies needing to be placed for adoption, the reality is that the majority of children who need adopting are over the age of one and there is a broad age range.

Many of the children may have complex needs resulting from an uncertain background or have emotional difficulties stemming from their early life experiences.

A lot of the children that come into our care are brother and sister groups. We try hard to keep brothers and sisters together and find them a forever family, but the reality is this can take much longer to happen.

Being able to stay together offers huge benefits for the children as they have already bonded and they will cope better with the move to a new family if they are with their brothers and sisters.

If you feel you are open to adopting two or more children, there are also advantages for you as you only have to go through the adoption process once and the matching process will be shorter than if you are waiting for a baby or individual child.

Adopting brothers and sisters could also appeal to you if you are adopting later in life.

You may have a fixed idea of the child you would like to adopt, or you may be open to finding out more about the different children currently waiting for someone to adopt them. In turn all our children need a special person or

couple, who can give them what they need. We'll work through the adoption process with you to make sure you and your circumstances are the best outcome for the child or young person.





Our adoption process

We have a two-stage process which aims to have all suitable potential adopters approved within six months of applying.

If you have already been approved as a foster carer or previously adopted you'll be able to access a slightly different and quicker process.

Our adoption process diagram on page 14 shows you the different stages of the adoption process.

If you have any questions about the process there is more information on our website **adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk** or you can speak to our friendly team on **0300 123 6727**.



OUR SIX MONTHS AD

Informal Initial Enquiry Stage

when you're ready

Get in touch with us



We'll speak to you to find out more



On the same or next working day

We'll give you some time to think things through

Stage One

approx 2 months

We'll request statutory references and you'll need to have a medical with your GP



You'll attend pre-adoption training



We'll talk to at least two of your personal referees

Stage Two

approx 4 months

Your social worker will visit you and your family over the next three months



We'll speak with your children, if you have any, whether you live with them or not



We'll speak with people in your support network

Congratulations! You're approved!

The Agency Decision Maker makes the final decision on your approval



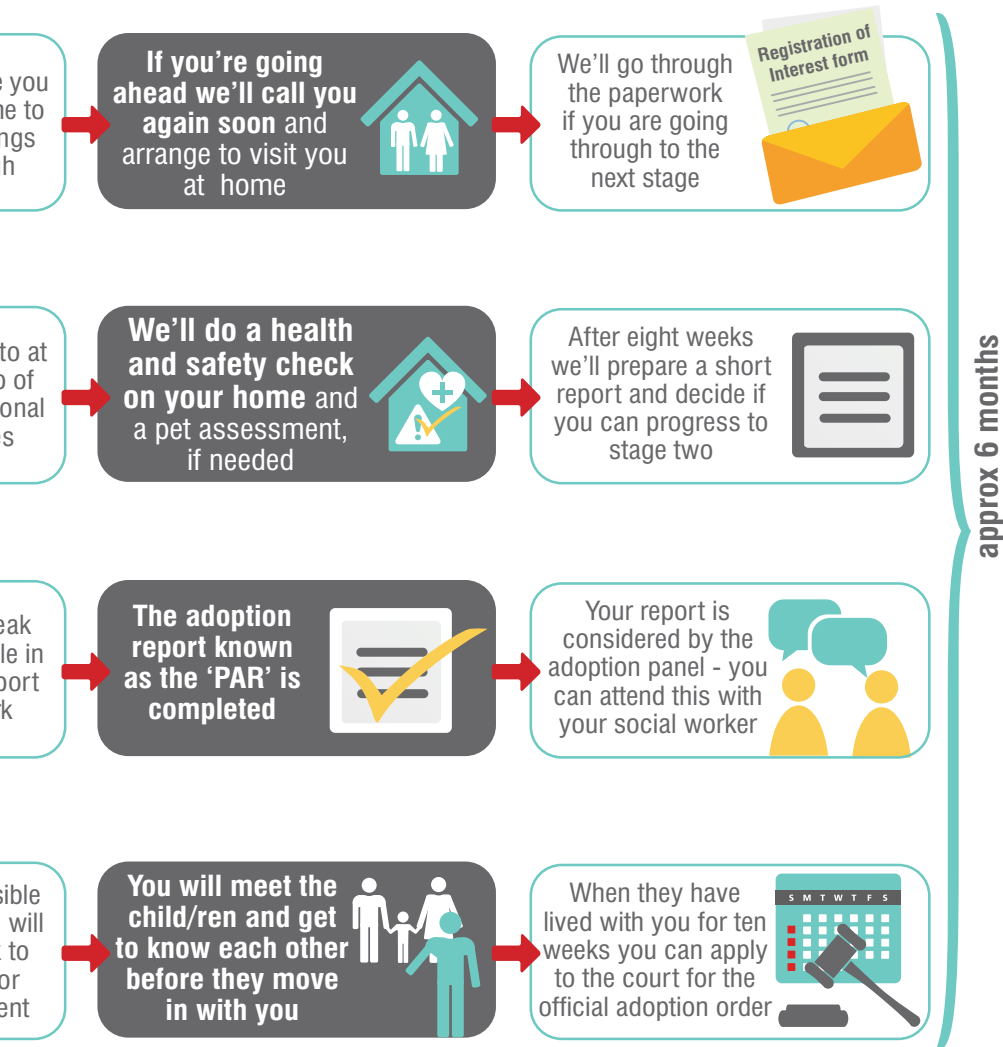
Your social worker will consider children who may be matched with you for adoption



The possibility of matching will go back to the panel for agreement

This is to give you an overview. If you have any questions

ADOPTION PROCESS



Questions just give us a call on 0300 123 6727

Early permanence

Early permanence allows prospective adopters the opportunity to parent a baby or child during the early weeks and months of their lives, offering them love and stability when they need it most and supporting them through key stages of their development.

Some of the babies and children in our care are likely to need adopting because there is a high probability of them not being able to return to their birth families. Whilst a significant number of these children will go on to be adopted, there is still a chance they could be reunited with their birth relatives.

There are two types of early permanence plans:

Concurrent placements

We call these 'Best for Baby'. These are designed to give babies and children under two years old a better start in life.

The young children are usually placed with concurrent carers in a fostering arrangement from birth or soon after, whilst the court decides on their future.

Fostering for Adoption

We call these 'Better Beginnings'. This is similar to concurrency but for children of any age including babies. Approved adopters become temporary foster carers for the child or children and they stay together whilst the court decides on their future.

Because early permanence carers are approved as both foster carers and adopters, a child does not have to move.

They remain with their carers who will become their adoptive parents if this is the decision of the court.

Early permanence placements aren't suitable for all children.

They are considered for babies and children of all ages where social workers believe it is highly likely that the child will be adopted.

You can find out more about this alternative route to adoption by calling us on **0300 123 6727** or by visiting **adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk** where you can also download our early permanence leaflet.



Real-life adoption stories

Over the years we have helped lots of people from varied backgrounds to adopt children and start their families in Lancashire.

Whether you have already made the decision to adopt or are still thinking about it, hearing the stories of people who have first-hand experience of adoption will give you a better insight into the process.



Rachel adopted on her own

I felt that I was at a point in my life where I could provide a child with the love, care, nurture and stability they required.

I had always envisaged becoming a mum. Sadly, I had never been in a relationship which I felt might lead to settling down and starting a family. As I reached my 39th birthday I acknowledged that my desire to become a parent had grown and I suppose I started to consider adoption more seriously.

I knew becoming a single parent would be challenging but this did not deter me and I was reassured by the response I received.

I suppose I worried how they would perceive my enquiry being a single childless woman but the social worker I spoke to was helpful, encouraging and reassured me.

On the training course I was surprised that I was not the only single applicant and I have maintained contact with another single adopter and we have been a great support to each other since.

I am now mum to a little boy aged four. He was placed with me 10 months ago. I can't deny that it is hard work initially – sleepless nights, temper tantrums and adjusting to living with a little person, but being his mummy makes it all worthwhile.

Charlotte and Stephen adopted siblings

My husband Stephen and I began our adoption journey in 2012 after a few years of unsuccessful IVF treatment.

We knew we wanted to adopt a sibling group and in January 2013 we were approved to adopt a group of two or three.

Within a few weeks we were matched with a sibling group of two, Charlie a three-and-a-half-year-old boy and Ellie a 16-month-old baby girl. We finally brought our children home forever in May 2013.

While Ellie was easy to love and care for, despite being on a number of medications due to being seven weeks premature, Charlie took longer to adjust. Being older Charlie had more knowledge of the situation and in the first few weeks and months we did have some very difficult behaviours to deal with.

We turned to our children's foster carer for advice regarding Charlie's behaviour and did in the end seek help from a child psychologist, who specialised in working with adopted children. After only days of using their suggested techniques, the change we saw in Charlie's behaviour was amazing to see.

When he finally started coming for cuddles and saying 'I love you Mummy' it was the best feeling in the world!

With both children now happy, we were settling down to our new life as a family of four, when in August 2014 we got a phone call to say that birth mum had had a baby girl called Grace and would we consider adopting her.

We spoke to Charlie and Ellie, who were very excited at the thought of having a baby sister, so we began the adoption process for a second time and in March 2015 Grace, who was now seven months old, came to live with us.

We settled into being a family of five very quickly. There has been no regression in either Charlie or Ellie's behaviour since we adopted Grace. The children have very close bond with each other and enjoy being together.

We have a very strong support network, which has helped us along the way, and the thing

we have found most valuable has been staying in contact with the children's foster carers (who we still see regularly).

This is a link to their past and a great source of help and advice for us.

We love our family unit and cannot imagine life any other way.



David and Katy adopted through concurrency

We knew from the start that we wanted to adopt a baby through concurrency.

We liked the idea that Best for Baby placements aim to ensure that babies and young children will only ever move between two families – birth family and the foster/adoptive family - meaning they will have less upheaval and will benefit from a more secure start in life.

Concurrency is amazing because it puts the needs of the baby or young child first. It made perfect sense to us to go down this route, it felt right for our family and we wanted to be a part of it.

We knew some parts of concurrency would be tough - especially the uncertainty of whether we would be able to adopt the child or they would move back to their birth family - plus we had our five year-old birth daughter's

feelings and vulnerabilities to consider. However, as a family we completely rose to the challenge and felt extremely privileged to be given the responsibility to look after someone else's child.

Our five-year-old amazed us with her resilience and maturity in light of what we were taking on. We were all so proud to be concurrent carers and felt that we were making a real difference to a child's life.

In our first Best for Baby placement we had a tiny, precious baby girl called Poppy placed in our care.

We met Poppy's birth mum once, prior to her being born, and again in the hospital birthing suite.

Poppy was our responsibility from when she was about six-hours old, but we only cared for her for a while as she was able to return to her birth family.

Poppy's time with us was brief, yet we had made a real connection with her and it was heart-wrenching to say goodbye. Nonetheless, after a period of reflection, our overwhelming feeling was that we had helped make a fairy tale come true. What a privilege to be part of that story!

After two or three months we felt ready to embark on our next current placement, and had a beautiful newborn boy called Harry placed in our care.

We took Harry to have contact with his birth family two to three times a week. Meeting birth family for the first time was nerve-wracking for us, but we quickly realised that they were just as nervous as we were, and we gently felt our way through this strange situation together. They had had a tough life and our hearts reached out to them to make contact times as positive as possible.

We built up a really good relationship with birth family, far beyond what we could have ever wished for.

Harry wasn't able to return to his birth family and therefore we went on to adopt him. We thought it was a real benefit to us having developed a good relationship with Harry's birth family from the start. Because of the conversations we had, the information we learnt, the gifts exchanged, the diary we kept, and the photographs we took, we now have a priceless gift to give our son when he grows up.



Maintaining links with birth families

It is common for children to continue to have some level of ongoing link with selected members of their birth family throughout their childhood.

When children are adopted as babies, contact normally takes place indirectly. This means that adopters and birth relatives send each other letters or cards once or twice a year, using our agency as a 'mailbox'. Photographs may be included as well, if this has been agreed as being in the child's best interests.

Through post adoption contact we are trying to support the child's sense of identity. It can also keep the door open for any future face-to-face contact, if and when the adopted young person is ready and happy for this to happen.

Sometimes, direct contact is agreed as being in the child's best interests. This could be with birth parents or other key members of the birth family (e.g. brothers and sisters or grandparents). This can work well, if it helps the child and everyone is satisfied with the arrangements.

Adopters should be prepared to consider allowing annual indirect contact as a starting point. This would involve sending letters, and where appropriate photographs, through our 'mailbox' scheme. This demonstrates that they are willing to be 'open' about the child's adoption and willing to recognise and retain the child's identity and history.

Adoption Support

Once you've adopted don't think you're on your own! We pride ourselves on the high quality of support we give to our adoptive families throughout the process and this doesn't end once a child is placed with their new family.

Adoption, Lancashire and Blackpool has a dedicated and experienced adoption support team that provides advice and support for Lancashire and Blackpool families when and if you need it.

From the point you are approved you can access our 'calendar of events' which includes workshops and training events on topics such as post adoption contact, telling issues, and therapeutic parenting. We also host family events throughout Lancashire, including summer picnics and New Year parties; these are now so popular that early booking is essential!

We offer 'stay and play' groups across Lancashire which are opportunities to meet other adoptive parents and, if needed, seek advice from an adoption support worker; we encourage new families to attend these groups.

Wherever you are in the adoption process, we can buddy you up with other adoptive parents so that you can support and advise each other; this can be invaluable for adoptive parents who want to be able to discuss issues with someone who has been through the adoption process and had similar experiences.

You can also receive our annual newsletter which contains the latest information about our local adoption service and articles about relevant adoption issues.



You can request an 'assessment of need' any time after the adoption order. The support offered to you may include: advice and information, direct work with children and families, signposting to relevant agencies, advice to schools.

We can consider commissioning therapeutic support for adoptive families where more specialist advice and support is needed. Currently we have access to

the Adoption Support Fund to support us in doing this.

We are constantly striving to improve our service but don't just take our word for it – our adoptive parents have described the service as 'fantastic'!

Advice, information, networking and activities are there if you need them, or if you just want to take part and have the opportunity to chat with other adopters.



Your next move

If you feel you are ready to consider adoption further, please call our team and we'll talk things through with you.

Considering whether to adopt is a big decision and we are here to help.

Not quite ready or have more questions?

It is understandable that you may still have more questions to ask, or need to mull things over.

You'll find a lot of further information and advice by:

- Visiting: **adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk**
- Coming to one of our information evenings – the dates are on our website or call us to find out when the next evening will be held
- Giving us a call on **0300 123 6727**

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