



A birth parent's guide to adoption



This leaflet is for you if your child is going to be adopted. This may be a very difficult time for you and you may be worried about what adoption means for you and for your child. Please talk to your social worker if there is anything that you don't understand.

What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for a child when living with their birth family is not possible. Only a court can make an **Adoption Order**, and they can only do that if they have the evidence to prove that it is the best thing for the child.

An Adoption Order ends the child's legal relationship with their birth family and gives their adopters parental responsibility.

As the birth parents:

- the court will want to know what your wishes and feelings are
- you are entitled to support from a worker who is different to your child's social worker.

In Devon we have a **Birth Relative Support Service**. This is a free service, which gives you the opportunity to talk about the process and get support through the adoption process and beyond. You can get more information about the service



in our **Birth Relative Support Service factsheet** at www.devon.gov.uk/cypsfactsheets

If Devon County Council believes that your family cannot care safely for your child, they will have a **Permanency Planning Meeting** where they will recommend that your child should be placed for adoption. You will be invited to this meeting unless there are particular reasons why you shouldn't be there.

What do I need to do?

Before we can arrange an adoption, we are required by law to ask you for a lot of information. You can help by telling us about:

- yourself
- your child's other birth parent
- your family background
- any health issues in your family – this is important as this may have implications for your child's health in the future.

This information will help us to find a family for your child which will meet their needs. The information you give us will also help your child's understanding of their birth family history.

This information is personal so we treat it as confidential. However there are some circumstances where we need to pass some of the information on to other people, such as prospective adopters. You will be able to see the information that we have gathered about you and have an opportunity to comment on it.

The information you give us will be collected into one document called a **Child Permanence Report**. The Child Permanence Report is then presented to the **Adoption Panel**.



What is an Adoption Panel?

An Adoption Panel is a group of ten people, including social workers and people with experience of adoption. They will look at all the information and will decide if adoption is the right plan for your child.

They will also look at a proposed plan for contact with your child. The Adoption Panel will make a recommendation about whether they feel that adoption would be the best thing for your child.

The Panel's recommendation is checked by the person who is the 'agency decision-maker', for Devon County Council. If the decision-maker agrees with the recommendation from the panel, they will make a **suitable to be adopted decision**. This means they support the plan for adoption.

What happens after the Adoption Panel?

The case will be taken to court because only a magistrate or judge can legally decide that your child can't live with you. The magistrate or judge will look at the care plan for your child prepared by their social worker and will talk to:

- you
 - your solicitor
 - your child's guardian
 - Children and Young People's Services
- before making a decision.

If the magistrate or judge thinks that you should not have parental responsibility they will grant a **Care Order**. This Order gives Devon County Council parental responsibility for your child and responsibility for deciding where they live and who they live with.

The Judge can also make a **Placement Order** at the same time, or at a later court hearing. This Order means that the Judge has seen enough evidence to show that your child will need a new permanent family, and will not be returning to live with their birth family.

When a Placement Order is made Devon County Council will start to look for an adoptive family for your child.



How do you choose the right adoptive family?

Your social worker will explain how we decide to match the right adoptive family with your child. Your views and involvement can be really important for your child, and for you, in this process.

We:

- make very thorough enquiries about any prospective adopters
- ask them for a lot of information about themselves and their background
- try to make sure we understand what kind of upbringing they would give your child.

Please tell your social worker if there is anything special you would like us to consider when choosing an adoptive family for your child. For example, you might want your child:

- to have a particular religious or cultural upbringing
- not to be the only child in their adoptive family

- to have the opportunity to develop any special interests, such as a talent for singing.

Older children will be helped to understand how adoption affects them and will be asked their views about the type of adoptive family they want to live with.

- When the right adoptive family has been chosen, we look at how they will meet your child's needs now, and as they grow up.
- This information is then presented to the Adoption Panel who will examine it and decide if this is the right adoptive family for your child.
- The Panel will make a recommendation to the agency decision-maker.
- The decision-maker will consider the Panel's recommendations and, if they agree, your child will go to live with the new adoptive family.

Devon County Council is responsible for your child's care and welfare until an Adoption Order is granted for the adoptive family. The adoptive family can only apply for an Adoption Order after your child has been living with them for at least ten weeks.

We try to arrange for all birth parents to meet the prospective adopters if it is appropriate. This is to help both sets of parents to know a bit more about each other. This can be an emotional meeting and the Birth Relative Support Service can help you get ready for this and talk it through afterwards.

What if my child is with foster carers?

Your child may have been looked after for a while by foster carers who would now like to adopt them. We still have to make the same thorough enquiries about the foster carers as we would about any other prospective adopters. We also have to be certain that it would be best for your child to be adopted by that family before we can support the idea.



What happens after the Adoption Order is made?

When a child is adopted this ends all legal ties with their birth family and they will usually keep their first name and take their adoptive family's surname.

The adoptive family will get an **Adoption Certificate** from the General Register at the office of National Statistics. This will show the child's new names and list the adoptive parents and the birth parents. This takes the place of their original birth certificate for all legal purposes. When the children go to live with them, the adoptive parents are also given a copy of the child's original birth certificate.

Adoptive parents are encouraged to bring the child up knowing they are adopted and knowing about their origins. It is

understandable that adopted people wish to know something about their birth family. This is why it is important that we know as much about you as possible and why you may be asked to provide photographs or other information.

When your child moves to live with the adoptive family, the adoptive parents will already have received much information that will be important to your child growing up. Your child will also understand as fully as possible what is happening and will have their own **Life Book** explaining their life in words, pictures and photos. We hope that this book will have been made with your help, as your child may want to know about you as they're growing up.



Can I keep in contact with my child after adoption?

In the past there has been a lot of secrecy around adoptions. This has changed and today it is considered better for the child to grow up knowing their origins and for adoptive parents to encourage this. All adopters have training in the importance of talking with an adopted child about their origins and supporting contact with their birth family if this has been agreed.

Many adopted children have clear, valuable memories of their birth families, previous carers and relatives and contact with these people may help the adoption be more successful.

As part of arranging an adoption we have to consider what contact will take place between the child and their birth family. These arrangements vary, depending on what we think is the best thing for your child. We will always consider your point of view.

There are two types of contact after adoption:

- **Direct** This is face to face contact between agreed members of the birth family and the child and only happens when the child has a positive relationship with the member of the birth family. This relative must also be in agreement with the plan for adoption and be able to support the adoptive placement.
- **Indirect** This contact involves birth families and adoptive families sharing information by an exchanging letters at agreed intervals, usually once or twice each year. We do this through a Letterbox Service. You can find more information about this in our **Letterbox** Service factsheet at www.devon.gov.uk/cypsfactsheets Your social worker will also give you advice and information about how it works.

Will my child be able to find me after adoption?

From the age of 18 your child, like any other adopted adult, has the right to have a copy of their original birth certificate if they want it. This will show their original name, the name of their birth mother and possibly the name of their birth father, as well as the address where they were living when their birth was registered.

There is a national **Adoption Contact Register**, which helps to put adopted people and their birth family in contact with each other if this is what they both want. You record your name and contact address on this register, then if your adopted adult child chooses to trace you, they can get information about you from the register. It is up to your child to decide whether or not to contact you. You can find more information about this in our Adult Adoption Counselling Service factsheet at www.devon.gov.uk/cypsfactsheets

If you have a Letterbox Agreement, the **Letterbox Service** will have details of the birth and adoptive family which will make it easier for an adopted person to establish a more direct link with their birth family if they choose. For this reason, it's important that you keep the Letterbox Service up to date with your contact details.

Since the Adoption Act 2002 a birth relative may also make an approach to an adopted adult through an intermediary agency, usually called **Adoption Support Agencies**, which are allowed to charge a fee for their services. We do not offer this service.

If an adopted person does not want to be approached by a birth relative they can place a **veto** on their adoption file. This means that they may only be approached under certain circumstances that they have outlined. An Adoption Support Agency making an enquiry on behalf of a birth relative will be told if a veto has been placed on file.

Where can I get support and advice?

Devon County Council offers a range of adoption support services for birth relatives. We can give you the opportunity to meet with others who have shared the experience of adoption in a relaxed and informal way through our **Special Days**. We also run more intensive small groups which address the issues and feelings that birth parents may be experiencing after adoption. We send out a newsletter to all adult birth relatives twice a year.

If you are unhappy about the idea of your child being adopted, it is important for you to get legal advice about what you can do as soon as possible. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau may know the names of solicitors who specialise in childcare cases.

You may be able to get free legal advice and representation in court (this used to be called Legal Aid). A solicitor will be able to advise you about this. When adoption is identified as the plan for your child you are entitled to an independent support worker, separate to your child's social worker, provided by the Birth Family Support Service.

For more information about the adoption process speak to your social worker. We also have a range of factsheets on adoption available at www.devon.gov.uk/cypsfactsheets





Contacts

Exeter office

Magdalen House
54 Magdalen Road
Exeter EX2 4TL
01392 384979

Totnes office

Parkers Barn
Parkers Way
Totnes TQ9 5UF
01392 386665

Barnstaple office

20 St George's Road
Barnstaple EX32 7AU
01271 388069

My Devon

Children and Families
0845 155 1013
www.devon.gov.uk



For further copies of this leaflet

tel: 01392 384848

email: adoption@devon.gov.uk