



# Adopting a child in the UK

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Adoption is a life-changing journey that helps to provide loving homes for children in need, matching them with those who are ready to embrace the responsibility of parenthood. The United Kingdom has the advantage of having a well-regulated, supportive adoption system, but the process can be confusing and overwhelming. In this guide we outline the main steps involved with adoption in the UK.

## What is adoption?

Adoption is a legal process that oversees the transfer of all parental rights from the birth parents or legal guardians to the adoptive parents. As soon as this process has been completed, the adoptive parents become legally responsible for the child and will provide the same love, care, and support as if they were the biological parents. There are several main reasons why individuals or couples may choose to adopt:

**Infertility:** For people unable to have biological children they can choose to adopt, as adoption is a good alternative way to build a family.

**Provide a loving home:** Plenty of adoptive parents just have a deep desire to provide a stable, loving environment for a child in need.

**Family expansion:** Some families decide they want to expand their families through adoption after having biological children of their own.

**Philanthropic reasons:** Some people are highly motivated to help society and adopting is a way to assist a child in difficult circumstances.



# The adoption process

## Who is eligible to adopt?

Most individuals or couples living in the United Kingdom can adopt, regardless of marital status, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. There are some criteria that everyone must fulfil to be eligible however, as all those looking to adopt must:

- Be over 21 years of age (there is no upper age limit on adoption).
- Reside permanently in the UK, Channel Islands, or the Isle of Man.
- Be financially secure enough to be able to provide for a child.
- Be prepared to offer a nurturing, safe, loving environment.
- Pass all relevant background checks, including criminal record checks.

## Adoption agencies

In the UK adoption is regulated by the government and is carried out through registered adoption agencies. If you are looking to adopt a child, you can choose to work either with a local authority agency, or an independent agency. Adoption agencies usually provide a range of services, from evaluation and matching, to support both during and after the adoption.



# Steps in the adoption process

**Information and orientation** – Begin researching adoption agencies and attending relevant information sessions that are held about the process. Learn about adoption and the support that's available.

**Application** – Choose an agency you'd like to work with and submit an application for adoption. The agency will then run a preliminary check to ensure you meet the basic criteria.

**Preparation and assessment** – This is one of the most intricate stages as those looking to adopt have to move through several steps. Expect to undergo interviews, background checks, and home visits to assess your suitability as an adoptive parent.

**Training** – Attend adoption preparation courses or classes so you learn more about adoption and your role as a carer, particularly how to look after a child with a history of abuse or neglect.

**Matching** – Once you've passed the relevant initial checks, your preferred adoption agency will match you with a child whose needs are in sync with your ability to provide care.

**Placement** – As soon as a good match has been found, your child will be placed with you. After your child has been placed in your home, there will be a period of assessment and monitoring, with support provided so you can adjust.

**Court process** – Any adoption taking place in the UK must be legally approved by a court, and once you have completed the process, an adoption order will be granted.

**Post-adoption support** – Once the legal process is done, your chosen agency will continue to provide you with any support you need.

The specific time the adoption process takes dramatically varies in length, but typically, it can take around six months from the submission of the initial application to be matched with a child. Depending on several factors, including the availability of suitable children up for adoption though, these timeframes can be far longer.



## Types of adoption

There are three main types of adoption that happen in the UK:

**Domestic adoption** – This refers to when you adopt a child with UK Citizenship. Domestic Adoption can happen through either an independent agency or a local authority agency.

**Fostering to adopt** – It's also fairly common that some children get placed with prospective parents as foster placements in the first instance. If after evaluation, the placement is thought to be in the best interests of the child and the foster parents want to go on to adopt, it can be converted into an adoption placement.

**Inter-country adoption** – This term is used when you are looking to adopt a child from another country and you are a permanent resident in the UK. Inter-country adoption is typically extremely intricate and involves a distinct set of regulations and processes.

## Post-adoption support

The adoption process doesn't stop when your child is placed with you and post-adoption support is a pivotal aspect of the process. It's important to receive adequate support, not just for your child's sake, but for yourself and any other parents tasked with the responsibility of caring for your child. This support may include:

**Therapeutic services:** Therapy is often provided for adoptive children who have previously experienced trauma or abuse. Getting access to therapy or counselling sessions may be an absolute essential if your child has a history of trauma, abuse, or neglect.

**Respite care:** Respite care is often provided when a child is especially troubled, or has a condition that places extra strain on the adoptive parents. This can include placing children with a suitable carer temporarily, or having carers take them on short breaks or trips, to give adoptive parents a short break when needed.

**Education support:** Adoptive children need adequate access to educational support, particularly if they have special needs.

**Support groups:** When you are an adoptive parent, it can be especially helpful to connect with other adoptive parents, to share experiences and gain insight and invaluable emotional support.

## Legal aspects

In the United Kingdom, the legal side of adoption involves securing an adoption order from the court. As soon as this order has been granted, the prospective adopted child becomes an immediate member of the family looking to adopt and the birth parents' legal rights cease permanently. Securing an adoption order before you can adopt a child is mandatory in the UK, as it is a legal requirement that all adopted children be issued a new birth certificate.

Sometimes it's deemed that it is in the interest of the child to maintain some level of contact with their birth parents. This can include meetings, letters, or other types of contact and the adoption agency will decide on this together with all parties involved, on an individual basis.

## Sources and additional support

There are a number of organisations and support groups in the UK that can help you along your adoption journey and these can be a goldmine of resources. Whatever stage you are along the process, you need to stay informed, so seeking guidance or support from a dedicated adoption organisation or group can really help.

**Adoption UK:** Provides support to adoptive families, including a helpline, information resources, and internet forums.

**First4Adoption:** This is the national information service for adoption in England and it offers potential adoptive parents information, advice, and guidance.

**Adoption Support Fund:** Helps adoptive families secure needed funding for therapy and support services.

Adoption has brought fulfilment and joy to many families in the UK. When you're embarking on this transformative journey, it's important to understand the process and seek out the necessary support that will help you care for your newly adopted child.

Getting properly prepared will help you in embracing a new role and set of responsibilities – so you can provide a loving home for a child in need while experiencing the joys of parenthood.



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