



Finding Forever Families

Information pack



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I would like to thank you for showing interest in Adopt South. We are a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services for the local authorities of Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton. We have joined together to find permanent and loving homes for children who are unable to live with their birth parents or wider family.



Our children range from babies to school aged children. We are particularly keen to speak to people interested in keeping brothers and sisters together and who have the skills and experience to offer a family to children with additional needs and disabilities.

Adopt South will support you through your adoption journey, and by joining together we have brought the best practice and experience from each of our local authorities.

We have exciting new opportunities to help and prepare you, such as the use of virtual reality to help applicants understand the experiences and needs of our children.

Our training, mentoring scheme and adoption support will not only prepare you before a child comes to live with you, but also support you after the Adoption Order.

This pack is designed to help you decide whether adoption might be right for you.

We welcome enquiries from across the South Region and beyond.

Rachel Reynolds,
Head of Adopt South Regional Adoption Agency

Become an adoptive parent

You're at the start of a journey where you could change a child's life for the better. We're going to help you understand and feel confident about adopting and the process.

We can't tell you exactly which child you might be adopting. All of them need a loving home and a place where they can feel safe, but each one has their own individual personality and background. They may have been removed from their birth family due to problems at home often associated with drugs, alcohol or domestic violence; others may have had parents who experienced mental health issues or have a learning disability which affected their ability to look after them.

If you become an adoptive parent, you will be helping to make a real difference to a child's development and helping them if they have any emotional, behavioural or educational needs. You could also change the lives of children with specific health conditions or diagnosed disabilities.



Early Permanence

Combining fostering and adoption is widely known as 'Early Permanence'. With this approach, you'll start by fostering a child to begin with, but you'll be ready and approved to fully adopt them if a court eventually decides they can't continue to live with their birth family.

You'll get training on Early Permanence to see if the plan is right for you during your main assessment to become an adoptive family. If it is, and you complete your assessment, you'll foster a child at the earliest opportunity of their care proceedings.

Early Permanence keeps the option open for a child to re-join their family or stay with you as their adoptive family. It means the child won't have to experience moves to temporary foster carers while we wait for their family to be assessed, so they experience the least amount of disruption as possible during their early years.

Keep in mind there's no guarantee you will adopt the child as Early Permanence carers; in some cases they may return to their birth parents.

Our offer

Adopting a child is a life-changing decision, so you're going to be helped at every stage once you've made your application. This will give you plenty of preparation for any difficulties, starting with training courses and followed by other events and workshops for you and your family.

Preparation training courses

Your assessment to become an adoptive parent starts with two stages of training. You'll have the choice of course dates during the week or at weekends.

The first stage is a one-day training course to give you an introduction to adoption. We'll explore the different types of adoption such as Early Permanence to see which route is right for you. You'll also have the chance to ask us any questions you may have.

The second stage is a four-day training course on the adoption process. You'll get a deeper understanding of the meaning of adoption and child development, plus how you can apply the principles of positive parenting.

We'll also walk you through how we match children with adopters and how an adopted child or birth parent can contact each other after adoption.

There will be a chance for you to hear from guest speakers, including an experienced adoptive parent and a foster carer. You will also be invited to training for paediatric first aid and care of infants.

Further workshops and adoption seminars

You'll get plenty of chances to learn the many parts of adopting through different classes and exercises during the second phase of training.

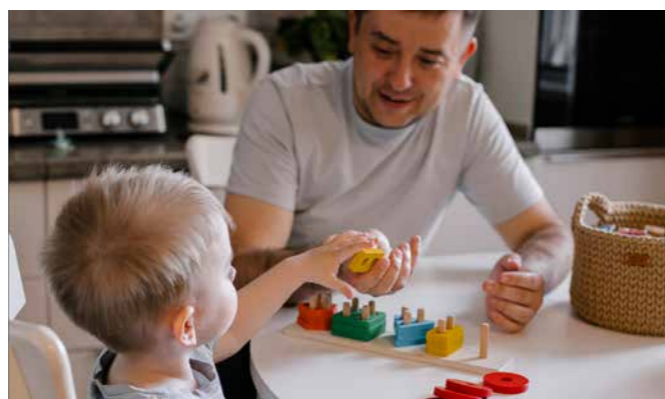
We'll link you with an Adopt South mentor who has previously adopted. They will support you through your adoption journey.

You can also bring your close friends and family to a relatives' workshop to help them learn more about the needs of adopted children and how they'll be able to give you their support.

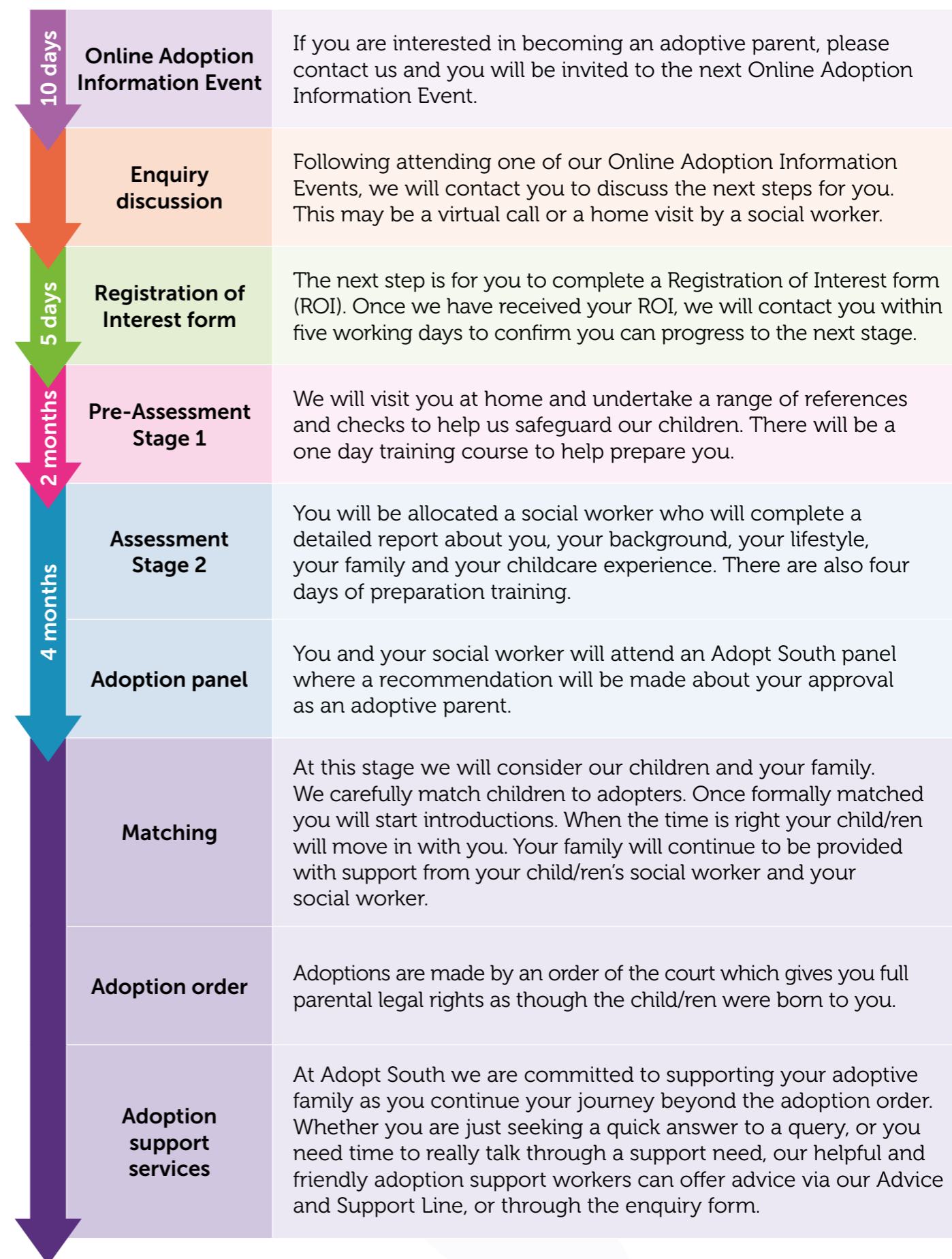
We also use virtual reality headsets to simulate what it's like for children in adoption and to help you understand ways you can support them.

You'll come to some advanced courses if you've completed training and had a child matched, or we can give you a taster of different workshops with the option to sign up to the full course later.

You can get advice and information from our Adoption Support team, after you have adopted your child/ren, but we'll keep you regularly updated by email about any extra training and support groups.



The adoption process



Who can adopt

Essential requirements

You **must be aged 21 and over** to start the adoption process. If you're adopting as a couple, you must both be over 21. There is no upper age limit.

To start the adoption process you also **must have:**

- **Previous childcare experience.** You'll either need to be a parent/carer already or have childcare experience in a voluntary or professional capacity. Please do not worry if you don't have childcare experience, as we can support you in getting this. You are still welcome to come to our Online Adoption Information Events and following this our Recruitment Team can advise you on how to gain childcare experience.
- **A spare room.** Children need their own space, or a plan in how you will gain a spare bedroom in the near future. We will consider siblings sharing a bedroom or children at different ages, where sharing a room is possible.

What won't prevent you from adopting

We'll look at all aspects of your home life and circumstances as part of your assessment process, but these things **will not** automatically disqualify you from applying:

- **Adopters who are single or solo.** We always welcome applications from single people as well as couples.

- **Identify as LGBT+.** We wholeheartedly support cultural and gender diversity, married or unmarried couples, or couples in civil partnerships.
- **Working full time.** Many parents have work commitments. You just need to think carefully about how you are going to care for a child during and around your working hours. The main carer should take at least six months adoption leave after a child moves in to help them settle into their new family life.
- **Disabilities.** We consider people of all abilities who have the capacity to meet a child's needs and offer them a fulfilling and active lifestyle.
- **Having children already.** Experienced parents often have a lot to offer. Bear in mind, though, the wishes and feelings of your child and ensure that adoption is right for them too; this will be part of your family's assessment. We'll also consider the ages of any children you have compared to the ages of those who you'll adopt.
- **Owning pets.** We welcome families with pets; they'll be included as part of your assessment process.

Things we'll need to consider

There are some things we'll need to look at in detail to make sure you're ready:

- **A criminal record.** It depends on what the conviction was for and when the offence was committed; we'll discuss any convictions during your application.

You and anyone who lives with you will take a Disclosure and Barring Service check with the police as part of the application process.

- **Debt.** We want to be certain that you're secure financially. We'll look at your financial situation as part of the assessment process.

Remember you need to meet the general costs of having a child and being a parent on top of rent or mortgage payments, any outstanding loan or debt repayments and your standard living costs.

- **Having counselling.** Mental health support and treatment covers a wide spectrum of issues and circumstances, so we look at your situation on an individual basis.
- **Fertility treatment/miscarriages.** It can take time to come to terms with bad news. If you've recently received treatment that wasn't successful or have had a miscarriage, we'll need to discuss it with you to be sure you're ready to start the adoption process. We look at each situation on an individual basis, though many people need a reasonable period of time for reflection after ending fertility treatment and adjusted to adoption instead.
- **Ex-smokers.** You'll need to have given up smoking for at least 8 months before you can have a home visit. However, you can still attend our Online Adoption Information Events to learn more about adopting.

When you register that you have given up smoking, we'll need evidence of your progress, such as a note from your GP.

- **Smoking or vaping.** You won't be able to adopt any child aged under five, or a child of any age who has any health conditions or disabilities, if you or your partner smoke tobacco or use e-cigarettes.

For children over five years, you will be expected to smoke outside and away from children.



Adopting brothers and sisters

We try to keep brothers and sisters together during adoption, so we're looking for adoptive families to give a home to a group of siblings. Consider whether you're able to adopt two, three or more siblings and we'll talk about your options during the assessment process.

There are occasions when brothers and sisters won't be able to be adopted as a group. If you adopt a child without their siblings joining them, you'll need to help them stay in close contact.



Black and minority ethnic children

It's not always possible to place children with families that match their background. We welcome anyone interested in adoption regardless of your ethnicity and culture.

There's a national shortage of approved adopters who reflect the cultural and ethnic needs of children who come from dual heritage or black and minority backgrounds.

What makes a good home, in my opinion, is a caring family who will look after you and people you can trust that make you smile.

Children with additional needs

Some of our children may need additional support to help with any learning or physical disabilities, or emotional and behavioural needs.

Many of these disabilities are because a child has been exposed to drugs and alcohol before they're born, but they can still live a rich and fulfilling life with the nurturing care and support of an adoptive family.

You'll need to make sure you can meet the day-to-day costs of caring for a child, just like any family. Financial support can be considered in exceptional circumstances, depending on the specific needs of the child, and would be part of our discussion with you during the matching process.



COMMITMENT
organisation **LISTENING**
Confidence to children
Stability and security in your own life
CHILD FOCUS The ability to offer confident and positive parenting **Sensitivity** **willingness to learn** **PATIENCE**
able to ask for help
GOOD network of family and friends to support you **Flexibility** **EMPATHY** **willingness to accept children for who they are** **PATIENCE**
TIME & ENERGY **COMPASSION** **CE**
COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS
A sense of humour!

How do I start my adoption journey?



There are several ways you can start your adoption journey with Adopt South:

- Call us to ask any questions on 0300 3000 011
- Visit us at one of our **Drop-in events**
- Attend an **Eventbrite** in-person or virtual appointment
- Join one of our Online Adoption Information Events

Our one hour **Online Adoption Information Event** is for anyone interested in finding out more about the adoption process, the children waiting and hear from one of our adoptive parent about their experiences. Guests join with their cameras off, and we invite questions in the chat box which we aim to answer by the end of the session. You will need to attend one of our **Online Adoption Information Events** to continue to the next stage of your adoption journey.

You may have questions before you attend one of our Online Adoption Information Events. You can **call us**, or meet us in person or at one of our drop in events or at one of our one to one **Eventbrite** appointments, before you start the next phase of your adoption journey.

The support and post-adoption work is so valuable and it has certainly helped our family grow stronger.

We look forward to meeting you!



If you are interested in finding out more about adoption with Adopt South, we would love to hear from you.



- Call us on **0300 3000 011**
- Make an enquiry



- Join us at one of our Online Adoption Information Events or come along to a Face to Face Drop-in Event

You can start today - why wait?

adoptsouth.org.uk

  @adoptsouth

About Adopt South

Adopt South was created as a Regional Adoption Agency in April 2019, combining the services of Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council.

By joining our adoption services together, we have brought the best practice and experience from each of our four local authorities. This means it's easier to match a child with an adopter in any of the councils.

It also means that adoptive parents, children and birth family members who live/born in Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton, have access to help and advice from our Adoption Support team, Keeping in Touch or Adopted Adults teams.

You can contact us on our single, central helpline on **0300 300 0011**, or make an enquiry online at **adoptsouth.org.uk**.

