

# Croydon Social Care Information For Adopters





## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
<b>Adopting a child</b> . . . . .	<b>2-5</b>
<b>The adoption process</b> . . . . .	<b>6 - 9</b>
<b>Adopters' story</b> . . . . .	<b>10-11</b>
<b>General information</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>
<b>Notes</b> . . . . .	



# Introduction

**Thank you for your interest in adopting a child through Croydon Council.**

**This booklet is to give you the basic information you need to help decide if adoption is right for you. We hope that you will find it both interesting and informative and that it will encourage you to take the next step: formally registering your interest in adopting a child.**

**We have many children from diverse ethnic backgrounds and ages who need a loving home.**

**We are committed in Croydon to work with adopters to provide permanent homes for children, and value the life changing commitment you make to the children you go on to adopt.**



# Adopting a child

## Some common questions adopters ask us are...

### *What exactly is Adoption?*

- Adoption is a process by which the parental responsibility for a child is transferred from the birth parents to the adopters when the court makes an Adoption Order.
- It is a way of providing permanent new families for children who cannot be brought up by their birth parents for reasons such as parental ill-health or other family problems, or that the children have been neglected, or abused or at risk that this might occur.
- All other options for the child to be looked after in the birth family including relatives are also considered first before the local authority and court agrees that the child should be placed for adoption instead.

- Our understanding about adoption has changed over the years including that it is important for children to grow up knowing that they are adopted, and to maintain any positive links for them with people who are important to their well-being.

### *Who can adopt ?*

#### ***We suggest you ask yourself these questions:***

- Can you provide love, time and commitment to a child?
- Can you empathise with a child who may never have experienced the security of feeling safe and loved?
- Can you be patient and flexible, to supportively adapt to whatever unique challenges may come from the child's circumstances?
- Do you have the energy and health to provide a long-term family for a child?
- Are you over 21?

If you believe the answer to all those questions is yes, then there is a good chance you could be an adoptive parent. The final decision will always be made by this **Adoption Agency** after taking time to get to know you and your circumstances, but answering yes to the above is enough to start thinking about the process.





The legal **Eligibility Criteria** are simply that:

- You must be at least 21 years old
- You (or at least one of a couple) must be domiciled in the UK or have been habitually resident for not less than one year
- No applicant or joint applicant is eligible to adopt if they have been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence. Details of these serious offences are contained in the Adoption Agency Regulations, and mainly refer to offences against children. If you are concerned that this requirement may affect you, please discuss this with a social worker from the adoption agency.

***There are some common myths about who may adopt, so we would like to make clear that...***

- You do not have to be younger than 40 to adopt.
- LGBT adopters are welcome.
- A low income isn't a barrier.
- First time parents are not treated differently.
- Adopters may reflect or may actively promote a child's culture and ethnicity.
- Adopters are both sometimes single or a couple.

***What if I am still undergoing fertility treatment?***

Adopters find the adoption process intense and time consuming on its own. We advise that you complete any fertility treatment before moving on to adoption and take a break of up to 6 months between them.

***What about smoking?***

There is clear research now about the harmful effects of carers smoking and passive smoking on children. So adoption agencies encourage smokers to undertake a programme to give up smoking so that children's health is not harmed.

***Is where I live an issue?***

There is a limit to how long workers can devote to travelling so we ask that you live approximately within 60 miles of Croydon.

If you live at a greater distance we may be able to consider you for a specific child.

If you live in Croydon for any Croydon children we would need to discuss with you the safety of children who have relatives in the area. You may also wish to consider children from another Local Authority for example other members of our South London Adoption Consortium, Wandsworth, Lambeth, Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark. Our website is <http://www.thesouthlondonadoptionconsortium.org.uk>



# Adopting a child cont.

## ***What sorts of children need adopting?***

The profiles of children currently needing adoption are available from the Adoption Team. The South London Adoption Consortium is also developing their website to make all the consortium children profiles available in one place.

The children's backgrounds commonly involve neglect or abuse or other family problems. It is usual that it is the court that has decided a child should be adopted. Occasionally a few children are "relinquished" by parents or abandoned.

There are always a wide range of ages, backgrounds, ethnicity and needs, and there is always a particular need for more adopters for siblings together, older children, children with disability or complex emotional needs and children of Black Minority Ethnicity.

## ***Will there be contact with the birth family?***

Increasingly children do have some form of contact with their birth family where this contact is agreed by everyone to be beneficial to the child.

This is only where agreed by both the professionals and by the adopters as they are confident it will be in the child's best interests.

Mostly this is indirect 'letterbox' contact, and occasionally it is direct contact with siblings. Less often it is direct contact with a parent or other adult relative.

## ***How much are adopters told about the child's history?***

You will become the child's parents so adopters are given as much information by the social workers as possible about the child's history and will arrange for you to meet and talk with the people who best know the child including their foster carer.

Our Medical Adviser is always happy to meet with our adopters to explain particular children's health and development history and needs and answer any queries and we will arrange this.





### **What support will I receive?**

For every child placed for adoption there is a Support Plan completed which describes the child's needs and how these will be met when they are placed with you for adoption.

It is expected that Health and Education will also continue to provide the universal services available for any child.

Local authorities provide and fund a range of support services for children adopted from care. These support services can include:

- counselling, information and advice
- help with behavioural, attachment and other problems
- money e.g. to help with special care needs, or for former foster parents
- help with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family
- meetings and other events to enable groups of adopters and adoptive children to get together
- training to help adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive child
- short breaks for an adopted child with another carer
- help where an adoption breaks down.

Access to these services depends on your circumstances but you can ask for an assessment at any time, no matter how long after the adoption.

### **Which local authority does this?**

The local authority that places the child with you is responsible for assessing your adoption support needs for three years after the adoption. After three years it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live (if different).

### **How is fostering different from adoption?**

When a child is fostered, the local authority remains responsible for decisions made about the child while they are 'looked after'.

Fostering is often temporary and for children where their plan for permanency is yet to be decided. These foster carers will assist children where they move on to adopters.

Sometimes children are placed with foster carers who then go on to adopt them. Some adopters may also be approved as foster carers in order that children do not then need to move from their care when the Court's finally agree that they may be placed for adoption.

Sometimes, particularly for older children who cannot return home but still require regular contact with their birth family, long-term fostering or Special Guardianship is agreed to be the best permanency plan for them.





# The Adoption Process

Adoption is a process. From the moment you first consider adopting you are on a journey to discover if adoption is right for you and what kind of parent you might be.

That journey is made together with the social workers and staff at an adoption agency, either in Voluntary Adoption Agency or a Local Authority Adoption Service, which does not have to be the local authority you live in except for inter-country or step-parent adoption.

## Initial enquiry

When you make an Initial Enquiry to Croydon Adoption Team, we will send you written information about adoption, (which you can also access on our website [www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaseservices/adopt](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaseservices/adopt)).

We will arrange for a social worker to have a planned telephone call with you. Then we will also offer you an informal meeting with a social worker to meet with you at a time that suits. This is a great opportunity to get a feel for each other and will hopefully flag up any potential issues before you get too far into the adoption process.

We also run Information Meetings for adopters and can give you further information about these.

You can also find information on the Adoption Process at the National Gateway for Adopters, also known as First4Adoption, by going to their website at [www.first4adoption.org.uk](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk)

## Stage 1 – Registration & checks

Although you can make contact with as many agencies as you like, you can only make a single formal application to adopt. When you have found an agency that you are comfortable with, you then need to formally register your interest with them to become an adoptive parent and undergo the first round of checks, now known as Stage One. This stage will take

no longer than two months. Croydon at this stage will send you a form to Register Your Interest which is a formal application with consents to checks to be made.

### Getting turned away

If the agency says they cannot help you after meeting with you, they will give the reasons for this. Adoption agencies all have their own immediate needs and priorities, and being turned away by one does not necessarily mean you are unsuitable to be an adopter, and you may contact other agencies. If you are unsure, ring the **first4adoption** information line and one of their advisors will talk you through your options.

### Registration

No later than 5 days after we receive your Registration of Interest form, we will confirm regarding progressing with Stage 1.

We will then arrange for an allocated social worker to meet with you to agree a Prospective Adopter Stage 1 Plan with the agency. This will set out both your own and the Croydon's responsibilities and expectations for this stage of the process.

Croydon will then collect basic factual information from you such as:

- factual information about you and your household – such as names and dates of birth, and information that will be useful in preparation for the next stage of the process
- information on you and your partner – a questionnaire covering issues such as income, occupation and health, and a chronology
- the names of three referees the agency can contact, two of which must not be related to you
- basic information on the kinds of child you are open to adopting

There will be disclaimers for you to sign, including one that states you are not in the process of applying to be adopters with any other agency.





### Checks and references

Your application form will include permission to take references and perform a medical and criminal background check with the Disclosure and Barring Service, as well as contacting your local authority. We will ask for referees to then complete three written references, two of which will need to be from non-family members. The medical check is completed by your GP, and is simply to ensure that you are fit enough to cope with the rigours of parenting. The police check is simply to confirm that you have no convictions or cautions that would prevent you from being an adoptive parent. Remember, having past convictions doesn't necessarily exclude you, but it is important that you share anything that might come up with us. We can then discuss the potential issues with you.

### Preparation groups

You will be invited to attend a group with other prospective adopters, which will help you explore adoption.

### Pre-Assessment Decision

Your social worker will meet with you again at the end of Stage 1 to discuss the information gathered during this period and whether you wish to proceed. Then Croydon will make a decision on whether you can continue to the assessment and training stage (Stage Two).

### Complaints

If Croydon decides that you are unsuitable to adopt then we will provide a clear explanation of the reasons why. Should you wish to complain about this decision you can make a complaint using our complaints procedure, and we can send you information about this.

## Stage 2 - Assessment and approval as an adopter

### Assessment plan.

We will allocate a social worker to complete your Assessment and they will meet to agree with you an Assessment Plan, to include the timescale for interviews, completion of the Prospective Adopter Report and the proposed Adoption Panel date.

We will also arrange for you to attend any available Adopters Preparation Groups.

You will also have the opportunity to meet experienced adopters and talk to them about the realities of family life. As well as key parenting skills, the group covers the special skills adoptive parents need to care for children who may have experienced neglect and abuse. The aim is to give you the skills you will need in the future.

It is expected that the process to approval as adopter should not exceed 4 months, and will also draw on information from Stage 1 to achieve this.

### Adoption panel.

You will be sent the completed **Prospective Adopter Report** prior to the Adoption Panel for your signature and for any comments you wish to make, and you will be invited to attend. The Adoption Panel is independent of Croydon and includes a range of experience including adopters, social workers, elected councillor or experience of education, therapy or as adopted person. They will have seen your report in advance of panel. Social workers will also attend with you to answer Panel's questions. They will make a recommendation as to your approval as adopter/s and let you know shortly after you have attended. The Adoption Panel may also give Croydon advice regarding children that might be placed with you for adoption.





# The Adoption Process cont.

## Agency decision

The Croydon senior manager who has this role will then make the **Agency Decision** as to your approval as adopter/s and will confirm this in writing to you.

## Stage 3 - Being matched with a child

### Discussion of the children

Croydon will discuss with you during your assessment any possible matches with Croydon children, and again after your approval to confirm which children are available and possible matches with you.

In the event there are no Croydon children who may be matched, with your consent we will circulate your details within our **South London Adoption Consortium of Local Authorities** and enable you to consider any children available within the Consortium.

With your agreement 3 months after your approval as adopter we can also refer you to the **National Register** which maintains a list of approved adopters and children waiting for adoption placements to enable matches to be made nationally.

With any child considered we will aim to provide you with the fullest possible information and to meet with the child's carer and Medical Adviser as well as the social workers and any other relevant professionals involved.

### Adoption panel

If we are all in agreement with proceeding for a particular child, then the reports will be prepared for the **Adoption Panel** to consider whether to recommend that the child should be placed for adoption with you. The reports will include information from you and the social workers as

to how you will meet the needs of the child, and the Local Authorities support plans. As with your approval as adopters you will be invited to attend the Adoption Panel, the Panel will recommend and the Agency Decision Maker will decide if the child should be placed with you.

### Adoption placement planning meetings

A **Planning Meeting** will confirm with you the plan for the introductions of the child/ren to you, to help you all to get to know each other and to plan their moving to join your family.

## Stage 4 – Placement for adoption & adoption order

The child remains a 'Looked After' child until an Adoption Order is made. So until then the Local Authority shares Parental Responsibility with you, and will continue to hold Statutory Reviews to discuss with you and the social workers how things are going and what support you need.

After the child has lived with you for 10 weeks, the law allows you to apply to the court for an Adoption Order, and we will support you with the court process and to apply to court at the earliest opportunity.

If it is needed, we will support you to have legal representation to assist with the adoption application and to represent you in the court hearings.

We will also at the same time provide the Court where you apply with the required Local Authority Report.

The Court makes the Adoption Order on one day, and then makes a further date for a celebration hearing to allow for the child, adopters and if they wish their relatives, to attend the court. Occasionally they will be able to do both Order and Celebration on the same day.





## Stage 5 – Post adoption & support

Adoption Support is the continuum of services from when a child is placed with you for adoption, provided by Education Services, Health Services and the Adoption Agency/Local Authority.

It is also the Adoption Support provided for all parties involved in the adoption process, including birth families and adopted adults.

If you adopt a child through Croydon the adoption support may include:

- Attendance at Croydon Support Groups
- Information about training events and workshops
- Support and advise on contact with birth family including providing a 'letterbox service' where indirect contact has been agreed with you regarding birth relatives
- Putting you in touch with other useful resources such as local support groups, Adoption UK, New Families Social or the Post Adoption Centre.
- Assisting with referral to your local CAMHS service, or providing a service through the Croydon Adoption Therapy Project.

## The Adoption process in brief

### 1 – Information gathering & checks

- Initial Enquiry • Information on Adoption given
- Planned telephone discussion with Duty Social Worker
  - Initial Interview meeting with Social Worker.
- Registration of Interest • Decision to proceed with Stage 1
  - Allocated Social Worker. Stage 1 Plan & Agreement
  - Information Gathering by Adopters/assisted by LA
  - Checks & References • Decision to Proceed with Adoption Assessment

### 2 - Assessment & approval as adopters

- Allocated Social Worker for the Assessment
- Assessment Plan Agreement • Home Study
- Preparation Groups • Prospective Adopters Report
  - Adoption Panel & Recommendation
  - Agency Decision to Approve as Adopter/s

### 3 - Being matched with a child

- Child identified • Meetings with Social Workers, Carer and Medical Adviser • Decision to Proceed
  - Preparation of Reports for Adoption Panel
- Adoption Panel Recommendation • Agency Decision
  - Placement Planning Meeting

### 4 - Placement for adoption & adoption order

- Shared Parental Responsibility • Statutory Review Meetings • Application to Adopt • Court Report completed
  - Adoption Order granted • Celebration Hearing

### 5 - Post adoption

- Adoption Support Plan • Adoption Support Services
  - Assessments of Need





# Adopters' story

## Sally and George

**“When we were first visited at home by a social worker she asked us to think about some questions and to be honest with ourselves about the answers and with hindsight we would advise people thinking about adoption to ask themselves the same questions.**

Do you have the time in your life to devote to a child?

What changes are you willing to make to your lifestyle to accommodate and adjust to a new member of your family?

Can you cope with feeling rejected by a child for some time?

Are you able to accept progress being in small steps?

How would you feel when your child is a teenager and in the heat of a row they say “you are not my real mum or my real dad”?

We thought long and hard about these and other questions and balanced them with what we had heard from 2 people who had adopted and had talked to us about the realities of adoption and also shown how adoption can be a joyous and rewarding experience.

We decided to go ahead and have never looked back. Although it was intense, sometimes intrusive, sometimes difficult and often emotional, it did make us think about ourselves and our lives in ways we could not have imagined.

After we were approved, about 3 months went by and out of the blue our social worker rang us and said that there was a child needing a new family who may be a possible match with us for us to consider and she sent us his profile. The child's name was Robert and he was 4 ½ years old.

We were interested and so our social worker visited us with Robert's social worker and told us some more about him and showed us photos and a video. His development was delayed and the reports said that he would likely have mild learning difficulties. He was also asthmatic and being treated for eczema.

We felt he was the child for us and that we could give him the family, love and support that he needed. The social workers agreed, and a month later we were back at the Adoption Panel for a match and 3 weeks after that he was living with us in our home, our new son, full of energy, full of life.

Before he came to live with us there were some introductions, that were intense and tiring but we spent a lot of time with him and initially with his foster carer, and learnt a lot about Robert, his likes, his dislikes and his routines. Robert recognised us when he first saw us, which made it a very positive first meeting. We did a video about ourselves, and a photo-book which his foster carer had used to prepare him to meet us.

We also met with Robert's birth mother with her and our social worker. We were worried about this, having read about the family history and the damaging care Robert had received when with his parents. However she was also very anxious, relieved when we told her how much we were looking forward to caring for Robert, and





answered some of our questions including how his name came about. She said some positive things about us adopting Robert and we are pleased we can tell him about this in the future.

It was quite sad at first because Robert kept asking for Margaret his foster carer and sometimes cried at night. We arranged a date for us and Robert to see her and re-assured him that he was not forgotten. We also talked with the foster carer after Robert was placed with us and she gave us some helpful advice.

Robert was also very excited from day one about his new bedroom, and the first time he saw the bedroom it already had some of his familiar toys in it that we brought from the foster home. He became instant best buddies with our two nephews when he eventually met them. Very quickly he just seemed a part of the family. We wanted to constantly give him hugs and kisses but we knew we had to give him time so took things at his pace.

The next 2 years flew by. There were some trying times like when he started his new school and when he needed a hospital admission for his asthma. Robert's social worker visited until the adoption order was made. After that the adoption team social worker was helpful with advise when we rang and we attended two interesting adopters groups they ran with guest speakers, one about attachment and another about education.

We used his life story book at times to talk about adoption, and sometimes he would ask to get it out to look at. We had lots of photo's from the

foster carer and a few of the birth family. So we hope this has helped to make adoption an ordinary part of his life with us.

Bottom line is that we could not even imagine life without Robert."





# General information

## Comments and complaints

If you are unhappy with our service or how you have been treated please let us know or ask for a complaints form.

We always welcome feedback about our service, any suggestions for improvement and what you have found particularly helpful.

## Useful contacts:

### The National Gateway for Adoption

(First4Adoption)

<http://www.first4adoption.org.uk>

Help-line 0300 222 0022.

Monday – Friday 10am to 6pm

Provides useful information on the adoption process and what it is like to be an adoptive parent.

### The South London Adoption Consortium

<http://www.thesouthlondonadoptionconsortium.org.uk>

### British Association for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF)

<http://baaf.org.uk>

Tel: 020 7421 2652 (Advice given Mon-Fri, 9am - 1pm)

BAAF Southern England  
Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street  
London EC1N 8TS

A UK charity for agencies and individuals who have an interest in fostering, adoption and the well-being of children. They are an excellent source of literature on adoption and publish a bi-monthly Be My Parent newsletter including children available nationally for adoption.

### Adoption UK

<http://www.adoptionuk.org>

Tel: 01295 752240 Mon - Fri 9am to 5pm

Adoption UK  
Linden House, 55 The Green  
South Bar Street  
Banbury OX16 9AB

UK charity run by and for adoptive parents and foster carers, offering support before, during and after adoption. Whether you are considering adoption, going through the process or established as an adoptive family, Adoption UK will support and encourage you. Monthly magazine 'Children Who Wait' and website. Articles and children available for adoption.

### New Family Social

<https://www.newfamilysocial.org.uk>

UK charity and network for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) adoptive and foster families. UK charity led by LGBT adopters and foster carers and works with adoption agencies and local authorities to widen the pool of adopters for children.

## Further information please contact

London Borough of Croydon  
Adoption & Permanence Team  
7th Floor, Jeanette Wallace House  
1 Edridge Road  
Croydon CR9 1FE

Tel: 0208 726 6000 ext: 64025

[www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaservices/adopt](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaservices/adopt)





