

“All our children
have potential...”



Guide to adoption

The adoption process in Derbyshire.

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In Derbyshire there are children of all ages who, for many reasons, are unable to live with their birth families.

The best way of making sure these children have a secure future and a loving home is for them to be adopted.

Choosing to become an adoptive parent is a life-changing decision for you and your adoptive child.

You are at the start of an exciting and very rewarding journey and we're here with you every step of the way.

The adoption process is very thorough and takes a close look at you, your home and your family. It can take up to six months to complete - but you'll have full support throughout the process.

Becoming an adoptive parent

There are a number of stages in becoming an adoptive parent. By law we have to carry out checks on all our potential adoptive parents and follow national guidelines.

The assessment process is a way for us to decide whether you should become an adoptive parent and to make sure children are placed in a safe and caring home environment.

The stages you will go through are:

- Initial enquiry stage
- **Stage One** - reference checks, medical and workbook
- **Stage Two** - full adoption assessment, three days of training and completion of prospective adopters report
 - Adoption panel
 - Approval and beyond

Enquiry stage

Following your initial enquiry an adoption social worker will contact you to collect information from you, discuss your circumstances and give you more detailed information about adoption.

If you feel it's the right time for you to continue they will arrange an initial visit to your home.

If, following this visit, you want to continue you'll be asked to complete and return a Registration of Interest (ROI) form.

We'll let you know if your ROI has been accepted within five working days of receiving it. If it's not been accepted then we will give you clear reasons why.

If your ROI form is accepted then you will move onto stage one of the adoption assessment process.



Stage One

Over the next few months we will take up a range of checks and references. These will include statutory checks such as criminal records, financial records and personal references. These will include references from any children you may have parented as well as ex partners.

Medical Report

You will be required to have a medical examination. This will be carried out by your GP who will usually charge for this. We need to make sure that you are in good physical and mental health and that there are no issues that may impact on your ability to provide a safe, happy home.

Our medical advisor will make recommendations based on the medical report and may, if you are in touch with other medical professionals, contact them for more information with your consent.

When looking at your medical report the medical advisor will consider:

- Lifestyle and family history. This will include diet, weight, smoking and alcohol use
- Current guidance is that no children aged under five or children of any age with respiratory problems should usually be placed within a smoking household
- Mental health issues are given careful consideration. We understand that many people may have experienced depression linked to specific life experiences and this does not necessarily affect your suitability to adopt

The results of your medical, along with the references we take up, all help us to reach a decision on your suitability as a prospective adopter.

Experience and training

During stage one you might also be asked to gain additional childcare experience. This may be by volunteering at a nursery or preschool. You will be advised if we think this is necessary.

You'll be given a range of reading materials and resources. This will help you find out more about what it means to adopt and whether this is right for you and your family.

You will be asked to complete a personal chronology, family tree and eco-map which is a structural diagram of your most important relationships with people, groups, and organisations. Support will be offered if you need it.

You will need to complete a workbook before moving to stage 2 of the adoption assessment process. The workbook is not hard to complete, we'll just need you to provide some information about yourselves, do some reading and complete some exercises.

Finally, during stage one you will complete a health and safety form and a pet questionnaire if appropriate. Once all this is completed an adoption manager will decide whether you can continue onto stage two of the adoption assessment process. This is known as a pre-assessment decision. If you're not accepted to proceed at this stage you will be given clear reasons why.

If you are accepted to continue onto stage two of the process you will have six months to decide whether you want to proceed. If you take longer to decide then you will need to make a new enquiry.

You'll need to inform us in writing of your intention to proceed. We will then complete your full adoption assessment within four months.

If, in exceptional circumstances, we need more information and this means we will exceed this time period, we will inform you of this in writing along with the reasons why.

There may be occasions when we are not able to progress your assessment to stage two. In these rare circumstances we will let you know and advise you to approach other adoption agencies.

Stage Two

At the start of stage two your assessing social worker will complete an Adoption Assessment Agreement with you.

This will involve setting out dates for interview appointments as well as a proposed date for your approval to be considered by the adoption panel.

You'll need to attend three days of preparation training and dates for this will also be included in the agreement.

Attachment style interviews

A decision will be made whether an attachment style interview will need to be part of your assessment. This interview forms part of the overall process. The attachment style interview:

- predicts the levels of support you may need, particularly in times of placement stress
- helps us understand your support networks, relationships and resilience
- helps with placement matching

Your assessing social worker will give you more information about this if they plan to ask you to take part in one.

Sometimes towards the end of the assessment a second opinion visit will also be carried out by another adoption social worker.

Your assessing social worker will write a report known as a Prospective Adopters Report. You'll have the chance to read it and any comments you make will be recorded in the report.

How you can help

As a potential adoptive parent, there are things that you can do during the assessment procedure to help make the process run smoothly.

- Be open and honest
- Learn as much as you can about adoption during the assessment period
- Discuss adoption with your extended family and friends so they understand the support you may need as an adoptive family
- During stage one tell us about your experience of looking after children and look for any opportunities that will help show this
- Nominate suitable referees - these should be people you've known well for over five years. Preferably they will have seen you with children and can comment on how they view you as a prospective adoptive parent



The Adoption Panel

Once the Prospective Adopters Report is completed you and your social worker will be invited to attend the adoption panel.

The panel is a group of experienced people with a broad knowledge of adoption and the range of children looking for adoptive families. The meeting is chaired by an independent person.

The job of the panel is to read the reports that your social worker has prepared. From this information, as well as meeting with you, they will make a recommendation about your suitability to become an adoptive parent.

Panel members may ask you and your social worker questions but you will be supported throughout the whole process.

What happens next?

A recommendation is made by the panel which is then considered by the agency decision maker.

The decision maker is a senior manager of Derbyshire County Council's children's services and makes the decision on our behalf. Once the decision is made you will be notified in writing.

If the decision is taken that you are not suitable to become an adoptive parent then we will write to you and tell you why.

You will also be given advice on how to appeal against the decision or how to have the decision reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism.

For further details on the IRM and how to apply for a review, please call 0845 450 3956 or visit www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk/adoption



Approval and beyond

If you're successfully approved to become an adoptive parent then your report will be read by social workers looking for families for children in care in Derbyshire.

In addition your details may be passed to other adoption agencies for consideration. If, three months after approval, you've not been matched with a child from Derbyshire then you will also be able to consider children from other parts of the country.

The search for the right child can take time and you may need to consider a number of children before everyone is happy that they are right for your family.

It's impossible to say how long it will be before you're matched with a child but we are committed to finding the right child for you as quickly as possible. Once a child is identified for you a report is presented to the adoption panel to approve the match.

Placement of your child

Once a match is approved we will work with you to gradually introduce the child to you and your family.

This is usually through a build-up of visits and overnight stays that help you both get to know each other.

When your child is with you, you will be supported by your social worker and you'll have regular reviews to keep an eye on your progress.

You'll be kept up to date with any legal proceedings which may need to be resolved before an application for an adoption order can be made.

Adoption Orders

To make an adoption legal, you need to apply for an adoption court order. This gives you parental rights and responsibilities for the child. An application for an adoption order can be made at any point once a child has been placed with you for at least ten weeks.

Your social worker will assist you in making your application and we pay the court fee.

Once the adoption order has been granted the adoption becomes permanent and you will get an adoption certificate. This will replace the child's original birth certificate and will show the child's new name if applicable.

Now your adoptive child has the same rights as if they were your own birth child.

Beyond adoption

Once an adoption order is made and you become the child's legal parent, there is no requirement for us to remain involved.

This may signal the end of our involvement but we want you to feel you can contact us at any time if you need to. There is also an adoption support service should you require it.

For further details of post adoption support please visit:

www.derbyshire.gov.uk/adoptionandfostering

We aim to resolve any problems which may occur during your time with our adoption service.

However if you are unhappy with any aspect of the service you receive then you can use the comments, compliments and complaints leaflet in your adoption pack or email contactcentre@derbyshire.gov.uk



Additional information for second time adopters, approved foster carers and people adopting from overseas

As experienced adopters or foster carers the assessment process may be shorter and tailored to your individual circumstances.

Second time adopters

You will need to make an initial enquiry and will have the chance to discuss your situation with an adoption social worker.

This will help you decide whether the time is right for you to make a second application. You'll be allocated an adoption social worker who will then start your adoption assessment at stage two.

Depending on the length of time since your first approval, additional medical and criminal checks may be required. Contact will be made with your previous referees to establish your suitability to adopt for a second time.

Foster carers wanting to adopt a child they are caring for

You'll need to discuss your expression of interest with your fostering support worker and also put your request in writing to the district manager of the child's social worker.

A protocol meeting will take place and a decision will be made about whether to proceed with your adoption assessment. Your fostering support worker or a social worker from the adoption service will carry out the adoption assessment.

Your adoption assessment will start at stage two. Depending on the time since your initial approval to become a foster carer, additional medical and criminal checks may be undertaken. Contact will be made with your previous referees to establish your suitability to adopt.

Adopting outside of the UK

Adopting children outside of the UK is known as inter-country adoption. Regulations concerning inter-country adoption can be found at www.derbyshire.gov.uk/adoption

The assessment process for adopting a child from overseas is the same as for all adoptions and is fully covered in this booklet. However there are some additional stages that you will need to go through.

Following an initial discussion with an adoption social worker you will be asked to attend a consultation day arranged by the Inter Country Adoption Centre. Please note there is a cost to attend the consultation day.

For more information on this please call 0208 447 4753 (10.30am - 12.00pm) or visit www.icacentre.org.uk

We do make a charge for inter-country adoption assessments and details of costs will be explained to you. Once your adoption assessment is completed and you're approved as an adoptive parent your details will be sent to the Department of Education to arrange notarisation of the approval documents and the certificate of eligibility.

We hope that, having read this guidance, you feel fully prepared, confident and ready to become an adoptive parent with Derbyshire County Council.

If you have any questions about the process or about adoption in general, please call 0800 083 7744.





Call Derbyshire for free
0800 083 77 44

derbyshire.gov.uk/adoptionandfostering