you can adopt!
your adoption information pack

change a child's life

Gloucestershire County Council
Adoption is all about making a positive difference to a child’s life and providing a stable, loving and permanent home for a child who, for whatever reason, is not able to live with their birth family.

Making the decision to adopt is one of the biggest steps anyone can make, but also one of the most rewarding. In order to decide whether adoption is the right thing for you we think it is important that you find out as much as you can.

This pack aims to provide you with as much information as possible about adopting a child through Gloucestershire County Council’s Adoption Service.

What type of children are available for adoption?

There are all kinds of children who need adoptive families in Gloucestershire. We are looking for adopters for children of all ages, including babies and toddlers. We are particularly seeking people who can adopt children who need to be placed with a brother or sister. We welcome applications from people who could care for children with specific medical needs or needs arising from physical or learning difficulties.

Children available for adoption have usually experienced some distressing and neglectful experiences. These children need adoptive families with time and patience to help them thrive. All children looking for adoptive families will benefit from a stable, loving and permanent home.

What do I do if I’m interested?

We recommend that everyone who requests information about adoption reads this pack thoroughly. We have included a useful booklist information sheet at the back of this pack to help give you advice and information.

If you are interested in taking your application further, please come to one of our information sessions, where experienced adopters and adoption workers will be present to share their experiences with you, and answer any questions you may have.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please feel free to contact us on:

01452 427753

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/adoption

“When I found a mum and dad I didn’t expect to gain a sister too”
"Could you make a child's life colourful and fun?"

**The children**
Many of these children may have been abused or neglected. Most will not have received the love and stimulation they need, so finding a family who can offer the time, patience and commitment to help them adjust to a secure family life is the ultimate aim for our adoption team. Each child we have available for adoption is very different. The children profiled below are not real examples, but are typical of the type of children waiting to be adopted in Gloucestershire.

Sam & Freddy
Sam and Freddy are brothers who are currently in foster care. Both brothers have cheeky smiles and interact well with those around them. They were showing signs of developmental delay when they came into care, but have made good progress and are now within the expected ranges for children their age.

Sam (aged 5) has a good vocabulary and can be very animated when engaged in conversation. Sam enjoys playing with his cars and trains, as well as doing art and craft projects. He is very attached to his favourite teddy bear called Fluffy.

Freddy (age 3) attends preschool three mornings a week and has established a good number of friends to play alongside. Freddy’s favourite activity is being outside and playing in the muddest, wettest part of the garden.

Sam and Freddy share a close relationship with each other, and it is therefore very important that they are placed together. The boys have shown that they can respond well to a family offering stability, consistency and reassurance. They long for a family who can give them the support and love they both deserve.

Chloe
Chloe (aged 18 months) is from a mixed heritage background (White British and African-Caribbean).

She is a lively, vibrant little girl who has an infectious giggle. She loves to be around others and is sure to make her presence known if she feels that you’ve forgotten that she’s in the room.

Chloe was born prematurely by caesarean section; this was due to her not getting enough nourishment from the umbilical cord. She stayed in hospital for a total of five weeks before moving into foster care. Chloe is currently meeting all of her milestones and in some areas is achieving slightly above. However, Chloe does have a mild hearing problem, which will need medical attention, but this does not affect her day-to-day care.

Chloe needs an energetic family who can offer her time and attention. She would benefit from being placed with a family that can reflect her heritage.
Julie & Peter’s story

“Peter and I had been together for about three years when we decided to think about adoption. Peter already has a child, Simon, who is now 19, from a previous marriage and unfortunately, due to some medical problems, we were unable to have our own children.

We decided from the outset that we would like to adopt a brother and sister, ideally of early school age. We found the actual adoption process really informative but at times quite exhausting; but we recognised the need to explore every avenue of our backgrounds. The preparation course helped us think about the reasons why we wanted to adopt and we both found it an interesting learning experience. It was useful to find out more about the type of backgrounds some of the children may have come from, and how our parenting style may differ from Peter’s experience with Simon.

We were so relieved when we came to the end of our assessment and our application was taken forward to the Adoption Panel. We were approved for a brother and sister between the ages of three and seven. We agreed we could consider a child with a mild disability, so that was discussed in more detail.

Just months after we were approved we were introduced to Connor and Jessie. Connor was five and Jessie was seven and they had been in foster care for a year. Jessie has diabetes, which although was controllable on a day-to-day basis meant we had to gain extra advice and read up on the subject. The post adoption support team were extremely helpful in offering advice.

Both children were very withdrawn when they came to live with us and it took about six months for them to really start to trust us. Three years on and they are both very happy children. They are doing well at school, although Connor still needs additional help in numeracy and reading. Connor has bonded extremely well with Simon and both spend time chatting and playing football together.

We are in regular contact with the post adoption support team in Gloucestershire, which is useful as it keeps us up to date with new developments. We also exchange letters twice a year with Connor and Jessie’s grandmother and their birth father. Adopting was definitely the right choice for us. It’s not easy, but we would not change a thing.”

Niamh’s story

“I had thought about adoption for some time, but as I was single and in my 40s, I thought I wouldn’t be looked at too favourably. After hearing an advert on the local radio, I decided to find out more. After contacting the adoption team and reading through the information pack they sent through to me, I decided to take the plunge and attend an information session. I found this extremely helpful, especially in terms of clarifying the process and it made me even more determined to adopt.

Having discussed my personal circumstances with a member of the Adoption Team and given permission for my references and statutory checks to be taken, I was ready to get started. Attending the first sessions of the preparation course was so interesting and really opened my eyes to a lot of areas that I hadn’t previously thought about, such as the background of the children available for adoption.

Throughout the assessment I discussed many things about my background with my social worker and looked to the future in terms of the type of child I felt able to adopt and the extent of my family/friend network. The process was hard work, but definitely worth it.

The best way to get a first hand view of adoption is by talking to people who have already adopted. The following case studies are fairly typical of adopters who have been through the process.
When I was introduced to Toby, I was smitten. Over the next two weeks I met Toby every day and he came to stay with me overnight. Each time we met I felt I bonded to him more. The day arrived when Toby came home. Looking back now it was a period of major adjustment with some difficult times, but the Adoption Team were always on hand to offer advice and support. Two years on Toby is a happy, content little boy. He is due to start school this year and we have regular face to face contact with his sister, who is in foster care and we exchange letters twice a year with his birth mother. All the initial problems we encountered seem so long ago. Adopting was the best decision I have ever made and I find it hard to remember what life was like without Toby.”
We receive many questions from prospective adopters. These answers may help you...

- I don’t currently have a partner. Will this mean I won’t be considered for adoption?
No. We have approved single adopters who have gone on to adopt successfully. We also accept applications from unmarried couples who have been together for at least two years. The Adoption and Children Act allows unmarried couples and couples who have formed a civil partnership to apply together to legally adopt a child.

- My husband is only 21. Is that too young to adopt?
No. We accept applications from anyone over the age of 21 and we don’t have an upper age limit. We just need people with the energy, commitment and patience to see an adopted child into adulthood.

- I’m White British and my husband is African Caribbean. Will this affect what child you could choose to place with us?
Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children could have a longer wait for adopters with a specific ethnic or cultural match. However, all children need to be placed for adoption without undue delay so we would continue to consider all reasonable options. Most importantly, children need to be placed with adopters who can understand and be sensitive to their cultural, religious, physical and emotional needs and be committed to their long term welfare. We would therefore consider placing BME children with adopters who do not have the same ethnic origins, but do live in multi cultural areas with links possibly through family within the BME communities so the child’s ethnic and cultural needs are promoted.

- I’m currently renting and don’t own my own home. Will this be a problem?
No, all you need is a spare room to care for a child and a home that will provide a secure environment.

- I’m gay. Will this rule me out?
No. Our aim is to provide children with the best possible life chances and that means offering the opportunity to adopt to a wide range of people. There are many qualities that different people bring to parenting and we are interested in your ability to provide

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a loving, stable home to a child. We have approved applications from gay and lesbian adopters in Gloucestershire – both couples and individuals.

• I’m overweight. Will this affect my chances?
No. Simply being overweight won’t stop you from adopting a child and shouldn’t affect your ability to care for a child into adulthood. However, if your BMI is over 40, we may need to explore your family’s health history and work with you to help you reduce your weight and risks to your health.

• My husband smokes. Does this mean we can’t adopt?
Being a smoker will not necessarily mean you can’t adopt. However, we would not place a child under the age of five years old with you or a child who has asthma.

• We already have children of our own. Can we still apply for adoption?
Yes. Some children will actually benefit from being placed within a larger family. If you already have your own children we will take into account the effect of adoption on the whole family and we normally recommend that the age differences between children are not too close.

• My wife is disabled. What are the implications of this?
We welcome applications from people with disabilities and you will not be ruled out just because of this. We would need to assess your wife’s ability to parent the child as we do with all other applicants.

• I have a criminal record. Will this count against me?
Having a criminal record does not necessarily mean you won’t be able to adopt - it depends on the nature and seriousness of the crime and how long ago it was committed. However, people with convictions for violent or sexual offences against children cannot adopt.

• We’re currently undergoing fertility treatment. When should we apply?
We suggest that applicants leave a 12 month gap between the end of their IVF treatment and proceeding with their enquiry to adopt.

• Will the child still see their birth family?
Most children benefit from continuing to have contact with members of their birth family or other important people in their lives. Adults adopted as children have expressed how important it was to know about their past and where they came from. The level of contact suggested depends on the child and the situation and, as every case is different this is something that will be discussed before a child is placed with you.

If you have any further questions about adoption, please contact: 01452 427753
Statutory Guidelines and National Minimum Standards for adoption set timescales for the various stages of the adoption application process. The two stage assessment process now takes six months with the option to take up to a six month break at the end of Stage One. We also aim to fast track second time adopters and foster carers within three months wherever possible. We are working closely with other agencies to ensure preparation programmes are readily available.

Stage One (eight weeks)

Information session
You will be invited to attend an information session within ten days of receiving your initial enquiry. Experienced adopters and adoption workers will be present at the meeting to share their experiences with you and answer any questions you may have. At the end of this session you will be asked to complete a Registration of Interest if you wish to continue.

Acceptance letter
Within five working days of receiving your Registration of Interest, if we conclude that your circumstances, experience and understanding of adoption could enable a child to be adopted by you we will invite you to continue the process. At this stage you will also need to give permission for us to take up statutory checks e.g. DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service), NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), and Children's Social Care Services, as well as undertaking a medical assessment with your GP. In addition, you will need to identify six personal references which we will need to obtain to gain a fuller understanding of your background and skills.

Work book
Over the following eight weeks you will be given a work book to complete at home, the work book is designed to help you look closely at your background and better understand adoption in order to prepare you. The adoption team are available to support you through this, and will be in regular contact. You will also be given the contact details of a worker who will be on hand should you require help or support at any point.

Preparation course
Throughout Stage One and Two of the process, you will be invited to attend four days on a preparation course; applicants are required to attend every session and to participate fully throughout. Within a challenging and interactive process we cover a wide range of topics, including child development, how our own experiences and relationships influence our parenting, contact with birth families, telling your child about adoption and understanding and managing behaviour. The course is run by Clifton Children’s Society (CCS) in Bristol. We will encourage regular opportunities to discuss any issues that may arise.

Allocation of a social worker/home visit
At the beginning of Stage One, you will be allocated a named social worker who will arrange a time to visit you at home. This provides both parties with an opportunity to look further at your experiences, what you can offer an adopted child, and for you to ask any questions you may have. At the end of Stage One you will be invited to a review meeting. This meeting will review all the information, workbooks and checks. A decision about proceeding onto stage two will then be made.

Stage Two (four months)

Assessment
The assessment process consists of a number of home visits by your adoption social worker over three months to assess whether adoption is right for you and what kind of children you would be best matched to. This is a demanding and challenging process that requires applicants to consider their own development and beliefs and how they could meet the needs of an adopted child. At the end of the assessment your social worker produces a Prospective Adopter’s Report (PAR), which includes the opportunity for you to add your own contributions.

Adoption panel
Your full application report is presented to the independent Gloucestershire Adoption Panel, comprising social workers, County Councillors, medical and independent people, who may have personal experience of adoption, for recommendation for approval. You are invited to attend this meeting. Your social worker will support you throughout this process.

Placement
We try to place children with prospective adoptive families as soon as possible within the agreed Statutory Timescales and National Minimum Standards for adoption, but there are no set rules as to how long you may have to wait for a child. However, we will keep you updated on a monthly basis during the waiting process. Once a match has been found, social workers will support you to gain as much information as possible about the child, their background and needs. If you decide to proceed the Adoption Panel will be asked to approve the match and an initial meeting with the child will then be arranged. After a gradual period of introduction the child will come to live with you.

The Adoption Order
Legally the Adoption Order can only be applied for once the child has been living with you for at least ten weeks. As soon as this order is made all legal rights and responsibilities are transferred to you. Prior to this, social workers will work closely with you to provide advice and ascertain how your future needs as a new family will be identified and supported as necessary.
We can produce this document in braille, in large print, on audio tape and in other languages. If you would like a copy in one of these formats, please call:
01452 427753

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