

We are Family

Come on everybody
and see ♥

Adoption information booklet

You can change a child's life
www.brent.gov.uk/adoption



Thank you for requesting this information booklet on adoption with Brent. Brent is the second most culturally diverse borough in the UK with a long history of ethnic and cultural diversity and our children represent a variety of different, cultures and faiths. Our varied ethnic and cultural mix is not only one of our greatest strengths it is also valued as an asset by those who live and work here.

What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of creating a family by providing a new home for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents. The information enclosed will give you some insight into adoption, the law, the children waiting and what Brent can do to help you.

Like parenting in general, it means sticking with it through all the ups and downs of family life.

When you adopt a child you become their permanent legal parent.

An adopted child loses all legal ties with their birth parents and becomes a full member of the new family.

Who can adopt?

All sorts of people can make a success of adoption and parenting. You can be single, living together, married or divorced. You can be gay or lesbian, unemployed or working full time. We welcome enquiries from people of all ethnic, cultural backgrounds and all faiths – or those with no religion at all. This list is by no means comprehensive so it's best to speak to us if you are not sure.

You need to be over 21 years of age, live in the UK and have no criminal convictions or cautions for offences against children or for serious sexual offences. Other criminal offences will not automatically exclude you but will be taken into consideration during the assessment process, so please be open with us from the start.

What's the difference between fostering and adoption?

Foster care is intended to be temporary care for children and young people unable to live with their birth parents. However, when a reunion with birth parents or adoption by another relative isn't possible, adoption becomes an option and is a lifelong commitment.

Foster carers have no legal parental rights, but when you adopt, you acquire the same legal rights and responsibilities for your adopted child as parents have for their birth children. The child is no longer the local authority's responsibility but is a full, legal member of your family.

As a foster carer, you receive a weekly allowance and rewards for the care you provide. With adoption there is no standard allowance, but financial

assistance may be available, depending on the needs of the child.

Whilst a child is in foster care; decision making is shared by the local authority, foster carers and the birth parents. When a child is adopted, the adoptive parents acquire full legal responsibility for making all decisions about their child.



Who are the children?

Most people would agree that the best place for a child to grow up is within a stable, secure and loving family environment. However, as a result of family difficulties, a crisis, or difficulty in their own backgrounds, some birth families cannot look after children and give them the good start in life that they need.

When this happens we need to find families to either foster or adopt children. Experience has shown us that for children aged 1 – 9 years old, adoption can be the best option and offer them the best life chances. There are very few young babies available for adoption in the UK; and often these babies have a degree of uncertainty about their health and development.

The children in our care may have been abused or neglected. All of them will have experienced separation; loss and instability at a young age and often feel rejected and responsible for the situation. It will take them time to trust you and they will need you to understand this.

Some children needing adoptive families will have disabilities or additional needs. These needs can range from learning difficulties, like dyslexia, to disabilities such as autistic spectrum disorder, or conditions affecting their mobility, sight, or hearing. All children need loving families and if you can consider adopting a child with a disability then we can offer you additional training and support. Although such conditions can seem daunting many people

already live with, or are familiar, with how to deal with them.

Many of the children waiting are of primary school age and are within sibling groups who need to stay together. We often struggle to find families who can consider larger sibling groups and welcome adopters that would like to adopt sibling groups and older children.

All children are different and they all need different families; do not rule yourself out without talking to us first.



The adoption assessment process

Pre-stage: Initial contact and enquiry from adoption applicant(s)

1. An information pack will be sent to you within five days. This will include dates of upcoming adoption information sessions.
2. The information session, which includes a talk from an existing adopter, provides you with the opportunity to hear more about adoption from an adoption social worker.

Stage 1: Initial training and preparation (two months)

This stage is **adopter-led** and begins with submitting your 'Registration of Interest Form'. We will then decide whether or not to accept the registration of interest within five working days (unless there are exceptional circumstances).

1. If accepted we will undertake a series of statutory and local authority checks about you. Medical and personal references will be requested, including those from your previous partners. We will also undertake an enhanced police check.
2. You will need to complete an adoption workbook giving detailed information about your accommodation, pets, family background, educational experiences, health, employment, relationships, finances and child care experience.
3. Preparation day training (optional)
4. At the end of stage one, a decision will be made by the adoption team on whether you can proceed to stage two.

Stage 2: Assessment stage (four months)

This stage will be **agency-led** and begins with you confirming with us that you wish to proceed with the adoption process.

1. A formal agreement will be drawn up between you and Brent, covering the stage two process.
2. You will complete a four-day mandatory preparation group.
3. You will be allocated an adoption social worker who will complete your assessment.
4. Your adoption social worker will complete the prospective adopter report, which will be presented to Brent's adoption panel. Both you and your adoption social worker will be invited to attend. The panel will decide on your suitability to adopt.

What is the prospective adopters' report:

Your adoption social worker will arrange to meet with you in your own home. Generally the assessment is completed within four months unless there are extenuating circumstances.

If you are working you will need to be committed to making yourself available for these sessions, which tend to take at least two hours. The assessment process involves:

- discussions with the adoption social worker about your background, your way of life, culture and religion, any skills in relation to caring for children and the likely challenges.

- The effect of adoption on you and your family. Your adoption social worker will need to gather evidence from you that you have experience in caring for children; promoting a safe and caring home environment; working as part of a team and that you have an appreciation that adoption is a life-long process.

Once all the information is gathered, the adoption social worker will write the prospective adopters' report for presentation to the adoption panel, which meets once a month. You will see the report (except the written references) once it has been written. If there are any points where you disagree with the adoption social worker's assessment, your comments will be recorded on the report. You will be asked for your comments and if you agree with the report you will be asked to sign it.



What is the adoption panel?

The adoption panel is a group of people with considerable experience of adoption and childcare. The composition of the panel is regulated by the adoption agency regulations.

The panel members will have questions about the assessment report, which they will put to you and your social worker. After the discussion they will arrive at a recommendation on your suitability to adopt, which goes to the agency decision maker.

After approval:

Once you have been approved as an adoptive family, your adoption social worker will help you find a child or children who are a suitable match for you. Your details will be shared with the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium boroughs (Ealing, Hounslow, Hillingdon, Harrow and the triborough: City of Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) to help us find the best match of child for you.

Your information will also be shared with the National Adoption Register. A register operating in England and Wales containing details of all available approved adopters and children waiting to be placed.

There is an in-depth matching process prior to a child coming to live with you. Once a child is placed with you, you can apply for an adoption order after a minimum of 10 weeks. You can wait longer than this before applying to the court, to give you and the child a chance

to settle down together. You would need to talk this through with your adoption social worker, who will help you with your application.

An Adoption Order is the legal order granted to you by a court which gives you sole and irreversible responsibilities for your adopted child. Every effort is made to make this a friendly and welcoming process. After the Adoption Order is granted, the post adoption team will be on hand to provide on-going support to your family.

What if you don't get approved to adopt?

If an agency is planning not to approve prospective adopters, the applicants can make representations to the agency asking them to review their determination. In England, as an alternative, applicants can request that an independent body (Independent Review Mechanism) undertake this review and make a recommendation to the agency.

What is Fostering for Adoption?

Fostering for Adoption places a child during the period of temporary local authority care with foster carers who are also approved as adopters. If the court agrees that the child should be adopted and the adoption agency approves the 'match' between the carers as adopters and the child, the placement becomes an adoption placement.

Fostering for Adoption has obvious advantages for the child:

- They are placed with carers who may become their adopters
- It avoids the damage caused by terminating temporary foster care relationships which they will have experienced as their primary parenting relationship
- It allows the early months and years of the child's life to be what most children need and expect

Each of these advantages is true for the adopters as well. It may be that some birth parents will understand these advantages for their child as well, even if their intention is to prove that they can take care of the child themselves. It must be remembered that until the court decides that adoption is right for the child, the parents' case remains to be decided.

This is only suitable for certain applicants due to the complexities involved in the process.



Frequently asked questions

Do I need to be a British Citizen to adopt?

No, but you must reside permanently in the UK and have the right to remain here. Your adopted child will acquire the same citizenship that you hold, but please contact us to discuss your own individual circumstances.

Do I have to be married?

No. Single applicants are welcomed and changes in the law mean that couples, including same-sex couples, who are not married, can both become legal adoptive parents for a child.

Will criminal convictions exclude me from adopting?

Not necessarily. All adopters have to undertake a check from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), which will show any convictions, spent or otherwise. Many offences will not prevent you from adopting. However, there are certain types of offences which will exclude you from adopting. Where applicants have spent parts of their adulthood abroad we need you to obtain police checks and character references from the relevant authorities in those countries.

What financial support is available for adopters?

In certain circumstances, following a means test assessment of income, a discretionary adoption allowance may be payable to support families who need financial assistance. This is reviewed annually and in exceptional circumstances, allowances might be payable until the adopted child leaves school.

Does the size of my accommodation matter?

No, but this really depends on the age of the child you want to adopt. Usually we will expect you to have thought about what you will do when the child is older, particularly if you are adopting siblings, or already have children, who may well want rooms of their own when they are older.

What happens if I have a medical condition?

It really depends on what the condition is. All prospective adopters have to have a health assessment with their GP who then reports to Brent's Medical Advisor. They will advise the assessing social worker and the adoption panel as to any concerns.

What are the backgrounds of children in Brent needing adoption?

Many children need to be adopted because of issues around alcohol and drug misuse within their birth families, often linked with domestic violence and abuse, mental health and learning difficulties.

Will I have to meet members of the child's birth family?

Often children will have contact with their birth families until they are matched with prospective adopters, so certain family members, including parents, will continue to be significant to adopted children. If it is considered safe and appropriate, your adoption social worker will facilitate a short meeting between you and the relevant family members. Often adoptive parents

comment on how important these meetings have been, despite their anxieties, as information that has never been shared with social workers is passed directly from parent to parent. It will be important for your child to know in the future that you felt able to make that link if it is offered.

Will all children have on going contact with their birth families?

Yes, in most cases. Wherever possible you will be asked to exchange information once or twice a year through our confidential Letterbox Scheme. Each case is different though and sometimes siblings, grandparents and even birth parents may have on going, face-to-face direct contact with their child. Such plans will have been thought through carefully and discussed with adoptive parents before placement. Often a contact supervisor will facilitate the contact and you will need to be present. Although it can seem daunting or complicated, our experience has taught us that children involved in such arrangements often develop a more secure relationship with their adoptive parents and make better sense of their Life Story.

Can I adopt if I have birth-children already?

Yes. Hopefully being an experienced parent will give you some idea about the reality of parenthood, although parenting an adopted child is different. We can help you to prepare your children for a new adopted sibling. Any birth children would need to be at least two years older than the adopted child.

Can I adopt more than once?

Yes, we welcome adopters that want to adopt for a second time.

What is panel?

The panel consists of professionals and independent members who are familiar with social work / adoption issues. The panel is chaired by someone highly experienced and independent to Brent. We currently have an adoptive parent, an adopted adult and a member from B.A.A.F. A Brent councillor, management representatives and medical advisor make up the remainder of the voting members. The panel is governed by law and regulations and makes recommendations to the agency decision maker, who is the assistant director of social care.

What happens if my application is rejected or I am not approved by the panel?

Once your registration of interest has been accepted you enter into a voluntary working agreement with Brent Council. We undertake to work in an open and honest manner with all our applicants and if at any time we have any concerns or issues we will raise these with you. We ask that all our applicants work openly and honestly with us and if you have any doubts about the process or adoption itself, please share these with us. If we decide to terminate your application during stage two, your social worker and/or a manager, will put the reasons very clearly in writing. If you disagree with us you are entitled to request that a brief report be presented before the adoption panel for further consultation. If after that process or if your full application is not approved by

the agency you can choose to apply elsewhere (we will be asked for a reference) or take up an appeal process with the Independent Review Mechanism, operated by BAAF.

What support is available to adopters?

- Counselling, advice and information
- Therapeutic services
- Support with contact arrangements
- Support groups, training and workshops
- Financial support
- Intermediary service

Who can ask for adoption support?

- Adoptive families living in Brent
- Adults and young people placed for adoption through Brent social services
- Adopted adults living in Brent that want to access their birth records (even if another adoption agency dealt with their adoption)
- Brent residents who are birth relatives of adopted people

What if I am unhappy with the service?

Brent operates a corporate complaints procedure, which as a customer you are entitled to request and use at any time. It is available at www.brent.gov.uk/complaints



What next?

- List any further questions you may have and discuss them with our duty social worker on the number listed or visit our web page.
- Attend our next adoption information evening. These are held every month at Brent Civic Centre. Please contact us to reserve your place.
- If you're ready and think adoption is right for you; contact us and we'll discuss what the next steps will be.

If you don't think Brent has the specific types of children you're hoping to adopt then contact our West London Adoption Consortium partners or the National Gateway.

Brent adoption duty service

Monday to Friday: 9am to 5pm

Tel: 020 8937 4525

E-mail: adoption@brent.gov.uk



Useful contacts

Adoption UK

Linden House,
55 The Green,
South Bar Street,
Banbury, OX16 9AB
www.adoptionuk.org
Tel Helpline: 0844 848 7900

British Association of Adoption & Fostering

Saffron House
6-10 Kirby Street,
London EC1N 8TS
www.baaf.org.uk
southern.helpline@baaf.org.uk
Tel: 020 7421 2652
(Advice given Mon-Fri, 9am - 1pm)

PACT

Diocesan House,
36 Causton Street,
London SW1P 4AU
info@pactcharity.org
Tel: 0800 731 1845

New Family Social

PO Box 66244,
London E9 9BD
www.newfamilysocial.org.uk
Tel: 0843 289 9457

First4Adoption

48 Mecklenburgh Square,
London WC1N 2QA
www.first4adoption.org.uk
helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk
Tel: 0300 222 0022

Post Adoption Centre

5 Torriano Mews,
Torriano Avenue,
London NW5 2RZ
www.pac.org.uk
Tel: 020 7284 0555

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road,
Wortley,
Leeds LS12 6AJ
irm@baaf.org.uk
Tel: 0845 450 3956

London Metropolitan Archive

40 Northampton Road
London
EC1R 0HB
ask.ima@cityoflondon.gov.uk
www.cityoflondon.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7332 3820

Adoption Services for Adults

PO Box 4621
Marlow
SL7 9DG
www.adoptionservicesforadults.org.uk
Tel: 01628 481 954

Policy on relevant offences

The position for which you are applying involves substantial opportunity for access to children. It is therefore exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. You are therefore required to declare any pending prosecutions or convictions you may have, even if they would otherwise be regarded as 'spent' under this act, and any cautions or bind-overs. The information you give will be treated in confidence and will be taken into account in relation to an application where the exemption applies.

The authority is entitled, under arrangements introduced for the protection of children, to check with the Disclosure and Barring Service for the existence and content of any criminal record of the successful applicant. Information received from the DBS will be sent directly to you. However, we are obliged to sight the original document.

The disclosure of a criminal record, or other information, will not debar you from approval as a foster carer or adopter unless the authority considers that the conviction renders you unsuitable for approval. In making this decision the authority will consider the nature of the offence, how long ago and what age you were when it was committed and any other factors which may be relevant; including appropriate considerations in relation to the authority's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Failure to declare a conviction, caution or bind-over may, however, disqualify you from approval, or result in termination of approval if the discrepancy comes to light.

If you would like to discuss what effect any conviction you might have has on your application, please discuss this with the duty social worker.

Data protection

All of our information on applicants is confidential and stored electronically on our Brent database system, the use of which all staff are required to comply with.

The Data Protection Act 1998 gives legal rights to individuals (data subjects) in respect of personal data processed about them. The act gives effect in UK law to EC Directive 95/46/EC (the 'Directive'). It received Royal Assent in July 1998, and came into force on 1 March 2000. It fully replaces the Data Protection Act 1984.

The Data Protection Act 1998 is designed to cover the collecting, storing, viewing, distribution, disposal and any other processing of personal data. The act requires data controllers to follow eight key principles in the processing of personal data. It gives rights to individuals about whom information is recorded.

This applies to all individuals whether they are an employee, elected member or a member of the public. Each individual has the right to access personal data, prevent processing likely to cause damage or distress and prevent processing for the purposes of direct marketing.

They also have rights in relation to automated decision taking, to take action for compensation if they suffer damage by any contravention of the act by the data controller, to rectify, block, erase or destroy inaccurate data and to make a request to the information commissioner for an assessment to be made of the data controller if they feel that the act has been contravened.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives a right of access to a wide range of information held by public authorities. Requests can be made in writing or by e-mail to us.

**For more information please visit
www.ico.gov.uk**

adoption@brent.gov.uk
020 8937 4525
www.brent.gov.uk/adoption

