

Adoption information pack



Your journey from
enquiry to adoption



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Thank you so much for taking the time to consider adoption in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, we hope this information pack is useful and we welcome you to get in touch with us at any point through your adoption journey.

Adoption Connects is a joint agency responsible for finding adoptive families for children who cannot live with their birth families and have a plan for adoption in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.

Our experienced and friendly team provide a range of services to families and we have written this brochure to help you understand more about adoption.

Adoption is an amazing life changing experience for both the adopters and the children and there are many children who need a loving and nurturing home. We understand that it's a big decision so, ask yourself:

- ♥ Why do you want to adopt?
- ♥ Are you ready to change your life to meet a child's needs?
- ♥ Do you have the time in your life to care for a child?
- ♥ Are you emotionally and financially secure?
- ♥ If you are not already, are you ready to become a parent?
- ♥ If you already have a family, does everyone in your family want to adopt a child?

We welcome you to get in touch to talk about adoption, to decide if it's right for you, to work out if you're ready and if we can help you become an adoptive parent.

You can reach a member of our team by:

Telephone: **0300 300 8090**

Email: enquiries@adoptionconnects.co.uk

We look forward to hearing from you and supporting you from the day you enquire, through to your incredible life changing adoption experience.

What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a new permanent family for a child or siblings who cannot grow up with their birth parents or family.

It's a legal procedure where all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters and the child becomes a full legal member of their new adoptive family. The child you adopt will take your family's surname and assumes the same rights as if they had been born to you.



Who can adopt?

Almost anyone can apply to adopt, and we welcome everyone who has an interest in adopting to give us a call on 0300 300 8090. Our telephone enquiry service runs from 10am – 4:30pm Monday to Thursday and 10am – 4pm on Friday. We provide an open, honest and non-judgemental service and want to give you as much information as possible.

We are also happy to call you and you can request a call back by emailing us at enquiries@adoptionconnects.co.uk.

To adopt you will need to be:

- ♥ Over 21 years of age
- ♥ Ready to provide a loving and secure home
- ♥ Able to commit to meet the needs of a child.

You don't have to be a British Citizen to adopt, but we do ask that:

- ♥ You (or your partner, if you are a couple) must have a fixed and permanent home in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man
- ♥ You (and your partner, if you are a couple) must have lived in the UK for at least 1 year before you apply.

Many people think there may be a reason why they can't adopt so let's dispel some of the myths about who can and can't adopt! We welcome enquiries from:

- ♥ People from all ethnic origins and religions
- ♥ Single people or couples (you don't have to be married to adopt)
- ♥ Families with children of their own
- ♥ People from the LGBT+ community
- ♥ People with a disability.

If you have a criminal record this will not automatically rule you out, we'll just need to carefully look into this and discuss this with you. People who have a criminal conviction of any offence against children or who are known to have harmed children or anyone who lives in a household with a person aged 18 or over who has been convicted of an offence against children or cautioned (and admitted the offence) cannot adopt.

“ You don't have to be a British Citizen to adopt, but we do ask that ”



Children needing adoption

The ages of children who need adoption can change so we very much welcome anyone thinking about adoption to give us a call to find out more. Our team are experienced, friendly and approachable and are happy to talk through how we can help you to become an adoptive parent.

Most children will have experienced loss in their lives as well as trauma of some kind. Some may have suffered abuse or neglect which might affect their behaviour and development throughout their lives. We are looking for people and families who can help children to feel safe and loved by providing a secure and nurturing home where they can flourish and grow.

Currently the children who need adoptive parents are:

- ♥ Babies – through fostering to adopt placements. Initially you would become a temporary foster carer for a baby or child where the plan is likely to be adoption pending court decisions
- ♥ Siblings – we strive to keep siblings together where possible
- ♥ Older children – over 5 years
- ♥ Children with additional emotional or health needs
- ♥ Children who need support to celebrate and support their past and heritage.

Different types of adoption

We have children of all ages and from a range of backgrounds and faiths who are looking for people and families to become theirs. We will support you by providing training and support throughout your journey.

Early permanence - foster to adopt

If you are considering adopting a baby, you may wish to consider foster to adopt. This is where you are a temporary foster carer for a baby or child where they are very likely to be adopted. This means that we can place them with prospective adopters who are temporarily approved as foster carers as early as possible, where they can start to build attachments with carers who may become their adoptive parent/s. This type of adoption is intended to place a child with a permanent family as soon as possible and minimise the disruption of moving to different families.

This type of adoption is not without risk as you will be expected to support contact with the birth parents and

there is a chance that the child may be reunited with their birth family, so resilient carers are required.

Inter-country adoption

Some people would like to adopt from another country, but this has strict protocols, both in this country and in any country that permits their children to be adopted by people from different countries.

If you would like to find out more about inter-country adoption, visit The Centre for Adoption (IAC) website: www.icacentre.org.uk.

Step parent adoption

Step parent adoption is sometimes considered when an adult enters into a relationship with another adult and becomes a step parent to their partner's child. A step parent can apply for an Adoption Order for a child they live with and wish to adopt. The step parent will need to meet a certain criterion and it's important to consider that this can be a difficult decision for everyone involved.

“ We just wanted to say a big thank you for getting us through panel and for all your hard work and patience so far. You truly do an amazing job and are very thorough, sensitive, helpful and dedicated to us and your work.”

Your journey to adoption

The process



The adoption process is a two-stage assessment, during which we will provide you with training and guidance. Here's a brief outline of the process from the first day you enquire to matching you with children.

Enquiry

The first step is to get in touch with us by calling 0300 300 8090. We'll take some details over the phone, ask you some questions but most importantly we'll give you the opportunity to ask us questions. We will invite you to meet with a member of our team at our offices (see initial meeting). We will also ask you to attend one of our information sessions, further details can be found on our events page www.adoptionconnects.co.uk/events. During this stage we'll make sure you have all the information you need to decide if adoption is right for you.

Initial meeting

We'll arrange an appointment with you to come in and meet one of our friendly and experienced workers. They will ask some questions about you, guide you through the adoption process, talk about the children who are in need of adopters and most importantly, answer any questions you have. We encourage you to be open, honest and ask as many questions as you'd like, we want to help you decide if adoption is right for you and your family.

Register your interest

If you decide that you are ready to adopt, we'll ask you to complete the registration of interest form. Your application will be reviewed by our team manager and we will contact you to let you know if we are able to accept your application to adopt or not. If not, we'll let you know the reasons why.

STAGE ONE

If we are able to accept your application, we'll start stage one. During this stage we'll be here for you every step of the way, providing information and guidance whilst we carry out some checks and references for you such as employment, a medical, personal references, a criminal background check and a few more which will discuss with you. We'll invite you to meet with a social worker to talk more about your application to adopt. We will also ask you to attend training at this stage

to help you develop your parenting 'tool kit' and learn more about adoption. Our training includes adoption preparation training, PACE parenting, attachment theory and therapeutic parenting. There is further training available through our comprehensive training programme throughout your adoption journey and beyond. Stage one takes a minimum of two months to complete. At the end of stage one, we'll talk to our team manager to confirm if you are able to progress to stage two.



STAGE TWO Home visit assessment

At this stage you will meet your social worker who will be doing your assessment. This looks at your life experiences, history, capacity to be a parent, your strengths and the qualities which make you an amazing potential adopter. Stage two takes a minimum of four months to complete.

Adoption panel

All the information we have gathered and the discussions we have had together in stage one and two are put together into a prospective adopter's report (PAR). This is shared with our adoption panel which is made up of people with various experiences and professions. You'll meet the adoption panel with your social worker, and they will review the information to make a recommendation on your suitability to become an adopter.

“ Thank you for all of your help and support over the last 7 months. We couldn't have asked for a better social worker! Thank you for helping us find our little man and making our home his forever home. ”

Approval as an adopter

The final decision is made by our Agency Decision Maker. We'll get in touch with you as soon as we hear back (usually 7 – 10 working days after panel).

Matching you with children

At this stage we can start to think about the children who need adoption and who together, we think will be a good match with you and your family. We'll give you as much information as possible including their needs and background. If you are ready, we'll then return to the adoption panel and ask them to formally match you with them.

Placement planning meeting

Once you have been matched with a child there will be a placement planning meeting which is attended by people involved in the child's life. This could be their foster carer, social worker, yourselves and your social worker. This is to plan how we will introduce you to the child and how they will be moved into your home. An important part of this meeting is how we can

make sure we support you the whole way through and beyond.

The adoption order

The courts will make the final decision about adoption. Once the child/ren have been living with you for ten weeks, the adoption application can be made. When the adoption order is granted, the child will legally become a full member of your family.

Second time adopters and foster carers who wish to adopt

If you are a second time adopter or a foster carer who wishes to adopt, you may be able to access the fast track procedure for an assessment as a prospective adopter. This will depend on the time since you last adopted or became a foster carer. It will also depend on the agency who approved you.

If you are able to progress through the fast track procedure, all references and checks (if required) are completed alongside the stage two home visit assessment and the process should take a minimum of four months.

If you would like to discuss the fast track procedure, please give us a call on 0300 300 8090.

Support after adoption

We will remain to be here for you, your child/ren and your family to provide support after you have adopted. We provide services for both people who are adopted or have been adopted. We have a team of highly experienced and skilled social workers who are friendly and approachable and focussed to support you as best they can. If you adopt a child or brothers and sisters, you can ask for an assessment of the child's needs until they reach 18 years of age. For the first three years after your adoption order your support will be provided by the local authority who placed your child/ren. Following this your support will be provided by your own local authority that you live in.



Support and training

Adopting a child is a wonderful life changing experience and we understand that sometimes you might need some guidance, advice or support. Our experienced and friendly team are available to help through our adoption support services, such as:

- ♥ Support for parents
- ♥ Work with children
- ♥ Liaison with schools
- ♥ Regular free training and elearning
- ♥ Newsletters from Adoption Connects
- ♥ Advice and information about other agencies and community services
- ♥ Supporting contact with birth family members
- ♥ Contact with other adopters in the local area
- ♥ Social events including an annual family day, a Christmas party, a dad's group and a mum's group
- ♥ Intermediary services
- ♥ Access to records
- ♥ Therapeutic services
- ♥ Financial support following an assessment.

Who can ask for adoption support through Adoption Connects?

- ♥ Adoptive families who live in Central Bedfordshire or Milton Keynes
- ♥ People and families who live in Central Bedfordshire or Milton Keynes and whose Adoption Order was granted through another agency over three years ago
- ♥ Adopted children who are under the age of 18 years and live in Central Bedfordshire or Milton Keynes
- ♥ Adopted adults who live in Central Bedfordshire or Milton Keynes who want to access their birth record
- ♥ People who have adopted from overseas and live in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes
- ♥ Birth relatives who live in Central Bedfordshire or Milton Keynes
- ♥ Step parents who live in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.



How are adoption support requests assessed?

Your request is assessed by an adoption social worker. Many requests can be dealt with quickly and we can signpost you to a service who can help you and offer support and advice. Some assessments may be more complex and need a more detailed assessment with involvement of other professionals or agencies before we can look at the support you need.

Once we've completed the assessment, we will develop an adoption support plan for you and your child detailing the support that can be provided.

“**Adopting a child is a wonderful life changing experience and we understand that sometimes you might need some guidance, advice or support**”

Frequently asked questions

What type of children are waiting to be adopted?

We are looking for people to adopt children of all ages who are from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. In particular babies by foster to adopt, sibling groups, older children (usually up to the age of 8 years) and those with additional health and development needs whose future development is

unclear. It's best to either give us a call or come along to one of our information evenings where you can learn what types of children are waiting to be adopted, as this can change.

How is adoption made legal?

Once a child has lived with you for at least 10 weeks an application can be made to the court for an Adoption Order. A social worker helps you complete

your application to a court, usually a local County or Magistrates Court. In due course you and your child are asked to attend Court for the Adoption Order to be made.

Do birth parents and other relatives have any contact with their child after adoption?

Each child's situation will be different but where possible children will have direct contact with some of their birth family for example parents, grandparents and siblings. It is also usual for there to be an exchange of written information, perhaps once or twice a year, via Adoption Connects.

Do adopted children want to trace their birth parents?

Most adopted children are curious about their history and birth family, but this doesn't mean that they don't love their adoptive parents. Since 1975 adopted people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have had the right to see their original birth certificate when they reach the age of 18; in Scotland the age is 16 and this right has existed since legal adoption was first introduced.

Some people are satisfied with the fuller knowledge and understanding gained in this way, while others want to try to trace their birth parents or other family members.

Do siblings have to stay together?

Siblings placed together are children who have a strong bond with each other and will benefit from staying together as a sibling group. We strive to keep siblings together but occasionally they may be placed apart if this is appropriate.

Do you get support once the adoption has gone through?

Yes. We have a full training programme you can access including elearning. You are legally entitled to an assessment of your adoption support needs until your child is 18 years of age.

Do we need to have a lot of money to adopt?

No, not at all. All you need is to have a sensible attitude toward your finances and be financially stable.



Is there an age limit to adopt?

There is no upper age limit to adopt, you just need to be 21 years or over. The most important thing to consider is the needs of the children and if you can support them through to independence. Older and more experienced people could take on the care of older children for example, provided that they will have the health and vigour to meet the child's needs and be there for them into adulthood.

Can I adopt a child if I smoke?

There is no blanket ban on adopting and being a smoker, but it will be one factor taken into consideration. If you smoke the social worker will discuss this with you and signpost you to services who can support, you to stop smoking. The council has a policy that a child under 5yrs will not be placed with prospective adopters who smoke.

“ There is no upper age limit to adopt, you just need to be 21 years or over. ”



Do I need a big house to adopt?

No, however, it is preferable that the child should have their own bedroom so you should have a spare room available.

Do I need to own my own home?

No, you can apply to adopt if you rent or own your home. What matters is that you can offer the child a stable home.

Will I have to give up work if I adopt?

Most children who are placed for adoption will have some additional needs and some may be less able to cope with day care, so it is very important for children to have consistency of carers.

We operate a flexible approach to employment by adopters, but it is expected that wherever possible one of a couple or the single person will take leave from work for at least 6 to 9 months after a child is placed with you. Adopters are entitled to adoption leave and we can provide further information on this.

I hold strong religious beliefs; will this be a difficulty?

We welcome applications from all communities and all religious backgrounds and recognise the commitment often shown by those with strongly held beliefs. We'll chat to you about your religion and beliefs during the assessment.

If I am approved how quickly will a child be placed with me?

It depends on the children who are waiting to be adopted and the needs of the child you are able to consider. If we cannot place a child with you within three months, with your permission, your details will be placed on the National Adoption Register and search for a child from national agencies

How do I get access to information regarding the child I wish to adopt?

We look to find out as much information about our children as possible e.g. medical, background, family health, their appearance, skills, achievements and the reasons why the child is

being placed for adoption. This means we can know the child well enough to match them with a person or family who can best meet their needs. It also allows us to give you as much information as possible and for us to record the information for the child. We give information to adopters so that they can pass it on to the child gradually at appropriate times as he or she grows up.

How can I prepare for adoption?

There are some things you can do to help you and your family prepare for adoption and for the arrival of a child such as:

- ♥ Gaining an understanding of the adoption process and of children who are waiting to be adopted, through recommended reading, training courses and accessing of information through relevant organisations
- ♥ Gaining experience of other people's children through voluntary work, babysitting for example
- ♥ Prepare your wider family for adoption, including development of a good support network and people who can support you



- ♥ Consider the impact of adoption on your current lifestyle
- ♥ Consider your present and future financial situation, including plans for continuing with employment after a child is placed with you including any child care implications
- ♥ Starting to think about a safe and stable home, making sure there is space for a child to join your family home
- ♥ Thinking about your physical and mental health, ensuring, as far as possible, that you will have the necessary health and energy to meet a child's needs into adulthood.

Adopters stories

Jenny and Carl's adoption story

My husband and I came to adopt as we wanted a family and didn't feel complete without one. Although, we went through a journey of loss and infertility treatments beforehand, adoption wasn't a second choice, it was something we considered alongside our treatment and ultimately, we had more faith that we would become a family by adopting, for us it was not only about becoming a family to fulfil our dream, but to be able to offer a forever home and loving parents to a child (or children as we have now). We now firmly believe that we had to follow the journey of infertility and loss to get to where we are now and to be matched with our amazing boys.

We were allocated a social worker, who was the perfect social worker for us, she really "got us" and we built a really strong relationship with her, she supported us and was our advocate. Although the home interview stage was time consuming, we both enjoyed it and learnt along the way, both

in terms of learning more about the long-term effects of adoption but also more about ourselves and our attitude to parenting and how this would be very different.

The best parts of the whole process, for us, was the support of our social workers (especially when I worry about things) and the perfect match of our boys – we couldn't have asked

“There are no words to say how happy we are with our new wonderful family. Our children are amazing, and we are so excited for the future we will have with them. We are so grateful for everything you, your team and especially our social worker have done for us. Thank you for your support, guidance and valuable training. Our social worker has been brilliant, we could not have wanted anymore from her. She has been amazing throughout, professional and supportive to all our needs, she holds a special place in our hearts and will always be part of our family story.”

for better; there are many similarities between us all and we have bonded quite well. The training provided was extremely useful and we have felt supported by the team as a family. Yes, there were frustrations along the way, but we knew they were in our corner and that helped to get through all the steps and challenges we faced.

The assessment process, through to being approved as adopters, took about

8 months. In the end, 4 months later, our match to the boys was approved and our boys moved in a month after that. The Adoption Order was granted just over 6 months later. The Adoption Order is not the end though; we will continue to seek support and attend some of the training and events, as it is important we have a good network of adoptive families as friends, so the boys understand they are not the only ones with an



adopted forever family, and we have made some great friendships along the way.

We chose to adopt an older sibling group of 2 brothers; something during assessment clicked and we felt we wanted to help keep siblings together and offer a home to an older pair of children who sometimes get left in the care system. This, combined with our ages and previous childcare experience, felt like the right route to take. We did always go in with an open mind and were never fixed on a particular age group. When we saw the boys' profile our decision was made. There was more information to obtain which took time, but I think we both knew from the start these were the boys that would make our family. It was certainly the right decision for our boys to be placed together, as they have a close bond despite the usual sibling rivalry and have helped each other to settle into their new home. We have mixed feelings about the early years we have missed with both our boys, but we are making many new memories together as a family.

It is still early days (the boys have been home for nearly 7 months); the Adoption Order was granted a couple of weeks ago and so we are looking ahead to our life together. It is not easy adopting a sibling group (because of the different issues they have) and going from zero to two children overnight was more challenging than we expected, but the training and reading we did beforehand has given us a good grounding to help parent them in the therapeutic way they need.

Every day is different, and you can go from having a really bad day because of challenging behaviour to a wonderful moment all at once; yes, that is part of being a parent, but it seems even more emphasised because of the journey we have all taken.

We know the future is uncertain and that there will be many challenges ahead, but we wouldn't change a thing. We have been very lucky with our match and love our boys so very much. I would certainly recommend adoption to anyone.

Michael and Jamie's story

Two guys, three social workers and two amazing little babies

On one rainy January evening we went for a 'chat' on whether two guys who lived in rural Bedfordshire could perhaps, do something amazing and have our own little one. Have to admit we were nervous, excited and cautious given all the bad press we had heard on the grapevine about the adoption process and we also wondered what social workers would make of a same sex couple that wanted to adopt.

Our social worker was a delight to meet. Warm, knowledgeable, helpful and so positive about same sex couples and adopting. She reassured us, answered our questions and we walked out on cloud nine. Finally, we thought we had a chance to be parents.

Over the next few days, we did a lot of thinking. It's vital you do this, as adoption is something everyone needs to take very seriously. It is a wonderful thing for you and the child and since our

little man came in to our family, we know we would do anything for him. Do ask yourself the right things before you go any further.

So, we submitted the 'expression of interest' form (yes, you'll get used to the odd terminology and expressions) and we heard back quickly. We met to discuss whether we would be accepted on to stage one. Lots of checks and more checks:

- ♥ DBS
- ♥ medicals
- ♥ training
- ♥ lots of forms, which took a good few weeks.

All came back OK and we met to discuss whether the agency would accept us on to stage two. Nerve wracking, but they said yes!

Adoption training was great. Alongside training, our assessment also started; ten weeks of a social worker visiting you and asking all the things you don't normally discuss with anyone! Daunting! You talk a lot about you but also kids at this stage and your social worker starts to know the kids out there that might be perfect for you and so it's a tight relationship.



We were readied for panel. We got our letter inviting us and we booked time off and went along looking smart and feeling nervous, nervous, nervous! The panel was lovely, no need to be nervous and thankfully we were approved as adopters! At this point, we had been identified for a little boy and from here we had to wait another 5 weeks to go to the matching panel.

We went to panel and again the people were great. You may or may not know, but you have to wait for the ADM (agency decision maker) approval post-panel and this took nearly three weeks after panel, in which time the desire to get the final stamp was huge. This was the hardest part of the process for us, just waiting! It came through and we were over the moon, definitely champagne that night!

We then had to plan the transition and were told that our little boy would move in before Christmas and his first birthday (overwhelmingly amazing news for us.)

We met his foster carers which was great. We are always going to be friends and they will always be a part of his life. Then, intros

started and went on for a week. Sounds short, but this is without doubt the most tiring, emotional and amazing time of the whole 'process' – you meet your new son/daughter, you are between foster carers' house and your own, you're preparing for the new arrival by decorating, buying furniture etc and you also are wondering whether your little person is going to even like you or not! Tough time!

Despite a baptism of fire with hand foot and mouth, cold after cold (never underestimate how much snot comes out of a 14 month year old) and a lot of emotions we didn't even know we had, we can honestly say we have a son that we love more than anything in this world and are so proud of him; how he has developed and the true strength he has shown despite a very tough start in life. Take your inspiration from them as they are truly amazing and remember that no parent is perfect; you will learn every day and then they will change again, and you re-learn. Enjoy them and on the tough days, just say 'tomorrow is another day' put them to bed, cuddle them, kiss them and all the troubles will just disappear, it is truly magic.

18 months on...

18 months after our little boy joined us and we were nicely settled, we looked at each other one evening and knew what the other was thinking. It's time to go through the process again in the hope we might be able to adopt again. No sooner had we sat down to complete the registration of interest form, a phone call came with the potential of caring for a full sibling, who was due in 3 months.

We were approved as temporary foster carers and with our second little man, we had lots of health issues to overcome. We had the new challenge of being foster carers with all that brings, but with the support of the social workers we have got through what has been an intense few months of no less than ten hospital visits, four trips in an ambulance, a week in Great Ormond Street Hospital, multiple court processes, panel preparation and approvals, contact visits and many other appointments with different professionals. Not to mention a gorgeous 3 year old to look after who was going through potty training and dealing with all the emotions a toddler goes through, plus having a new brother in the house!

We now have a 6 month old gorgeous, smiley little chap who has overcome so much in that short time. We truly love him and are proud to have had our match approved now. Hopefully, very soon, we can legally call ourselves his parents.

One final thought: parenting is tough, very tough. But with one smile, one giggle, one cuddle and a good support network, you can and will do anything to make that little person feel loved and get through all that life throws at you. Draw from their strength and that's enough to push you on, even during those tough times.

What the adoption team does is enable something wonderful: give kids a chance in life and create very proud parents who can truly accomplish anything. Trust me, I never thought we could, but we have and it's well worth it!

“parenting is tough, very tough. But with one smile, one giggle, one cuddle and a good support network, you can and will do anything to make that little person feel loved and get through all that life throws at you”

Kirsty and Ian's adoption story We wanted to keep siblings together

My husband and I came to adoption after a long journey with infertility, IVF and miscarriage. After the assessment process, panel and introductions, our boys (then 4 and 5) finally came home; seven months later they were legally our boys following the court process. The boys have now been home three and a half years, they are now 7 and 9. They are full siblings and despite the bickering, they are incredibly close and needed to stay together in their forever home.

When we initially started our adoption journey, siblings did not really cross our mind. However, as we went through assessment, we decided that we wanted to try and help siblings stay together – for us it meant we would have our family in one go and would not need to go through assessment twice. We felt it was important to keep siblings together, to stop them being separated. A sibling bond is incredibly strong, and sometimes people do not want to adopt siblings which can

make it harder for them to find a forever home. Going from zero to two children overnight was extremely challenging, but it meant our boys at least had each other while they adapted to being part of our family.

What a journey it has been so far. It has been the hardest, but most rewarding time of our lives. Between them, the boys have quite a few diagnoses and challenges. Thankfully, we have a number of professionals involved to help them and we are incredibly lucky that we have a very supportive school team, including the senco, teachers and head, who work and support us all. We are also grateful for the ongoing support (when needed) from the post-adoption team.

There have been some real challenges with behaviour and our boys are so very different that, as with normal siblings, they need different approaches. Routine and strong guidelines on behaviour/ what is expected are needed but, more importantly, a loving, therapeutic, understanding approach is what they both need.



We use a therapeutic approach to parenting and find we are always adapting and learning to work out what helps the boys the most as they grow up. We also have to think ahead with new events and the impact this may have, so we can support them through every step. At times, it is beyond exhausting (especially when behaviours escalate) – like average parenting but with the additional aspects of parenting children with additional needs and having had a traumatic start to life.

We are very open about the boys' adoption and will talk openly about their past with the birth family and foster carers. This is usually led by the boys, but when we

can sense they need to talk we will take the initiative; they know they can ask us anything and we will continue to support them and their changing need to understand as they grow older.

The greatest pleasure is to see how the boys have changed and continue to do so as they grow up, they really are amazing!

Would we change anything? No! We love our boys so very much as do all of our family and friends. Most of all, we have fun and love being a family of four! Based on our experiences so far, we would certainly recommend adopting siblings together.

Adoption; from babies to teens

Our story, by Lena and Michael

It was 2004 when my husband and I first began our journey into an unknown world of adoption. We both had always had a strong sense of family and so always wanted children; unfortunately, in this life, you don't always get what you want, and so different paths needed to be taken. For us, that path was to be adoption.

Soon after, I noticed a flyer for adoption and that was the start of a wonderful and exciting journey. We attended the information evening, which was very informative, interesting and inspiring. I knew at that moment it was something I wanted to do. My husband, however, took a little bit more convincing (but not too much) and before long, we had made our first call and were to be visited by a social worker.

The journey begins... The next 12 months consisted of meetings, assessments and paperwork, but nothing so stressful that it made me change my mind at all. Every

day was one day closer to becoming parents. We had, by now, completed all of the assessments and the training; now was the day we were going to be heard by a panel.

If I'm honest, I didn't really understand what we would face. I still remember now, walking into a room with the largest round table I had ever seen and lots of people sitting around it. We both sat down and probably looked extremely nervous, because that's exactly what we were!

We were asked a few questions and it really wasn't as bad as I had thought and soon, we were back outside with our social worker. She was called back inside and came out soon after to tell us we had been approved to adopt two children. 'Wow' was an understatement!

So, now the journey would start with our social worker, working to match us with two children. We didn't have to wait too long before we had a call to say they had identified a sibling group; twin girls, aged 8 months. This was just so exciting!

We spoke to our social worker in regard to the

girls and we were soon told we had been successfully matched – it was the most amazing news ever. It was now up to us to give them as much love as we possibly could; we were their new forever mum and dad.

At times, it wasn't easy; sometimes I wondered if they liked me, if we would bond, if we would get that mother and daughter relationship. I had so many feelings going through my mind. This wasn't going to happen overnight; it took lots and lots of sheer determination to show our little people that we do love them, they do belong with us and we are not going to give up on them. You have to be strong and never stop believing in yourselves.



Our advice on reflection...

If you are thinking of adoption, I would really advise getting as much information as you can. Talk to social workers and people who have adopted. The best possible advice will come from speaking to an adopter; it was definitely something I took away from my training. Also, don't be afraid to ask questions. This is about you changing your life, not just the children's lives.

After adopting, we both had the biggest culture shock ever. I no longer had 5 minutes to myself and certainly never napped during the day again.

Weekends away to friends stopped immediately; there was too much to take with us and as for eating out, it just seemed like too much hard work. I was too tired to put makeup on anymore, never mind make myself look decent for eating out! But this is the reality of any new parents, not just adoptive ones.

I would never lie; it was very hard in the beginning. I cried because I was exhausted, I cried because I didn't know if my daughters loved me, I cried sometimes for no reason. But no-one was judging me (if anything, it was me judging myself.) Was I doing this right?

The truth is, there is no right or wrong way when you adopt. Just like your friends and family who give birth, there is no book to tell you (or them) how, when and what to do you just have to do it your way and keep going and remember don't give up it really does get easier!

Someone once asked me if I would change anything about those first few weeks my answer was simple: I wouldn't change anything. We were new parents, we had no children before we adopted, I was tired and scared that I wasn't doing things right, but I never ever gave up. That fight remains with me, always, embedded in my heart where it shall remain until needed again!

I definitely tried far too hard in the beginning to be the most perfect mum, but you soon realise how things will best work for you. So what if its chicken nuggets and baked beans for lunch (again this week) and they are watching Peppa Pig for the third time this morning? If it helps me get the washing done and they are smiling, then that's been a really good day.

Our daughters are a wonderful gift and amaze me on a daily basis. They are funny, kind and thoughtful. Adoption is a beautiful thing. It's team work at its best; you must have a very big heart to share so much of your love.

I'm extremely proud of our journey: the tears, the tantrums, the worry and the feeling of not being good enough are all a big part of who we are today and what has made us stronger as a family.

Adopting a child is a wonderful decision. It's a lifelong commitment and one I am immensely proud to be a part of. For us, the journey continues as something we are very blessed to have.

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet.

We hope this has been useful and helped you to make the decision that adoption is something you would like to consider.

If you would like to take the next step and make an incredible difference to yours and a child's life, please call Adoption Connects on 0300 300 8090.

We are here to help you and want to give you as much information as possible to help you make the decision if adoption is right for you.

If you have any questions or worries, please do pick up the phone and speak to a member of our team, all questions are answered in confidence.

We really look forward to speaking to you and supporting you on your adoption journey!

 **Get in touch**
Telephone: **0300 300 8090**
Email: **enquiries@adoptionconnects.co.uk**



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