

Information Pack

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Hello

Thank you for choosing to find out about adopting with Adopt Coast to Coast.

Reading through this pack is the first step on your journey to building a new family.

There are many good reasons for wanting to adopt:

- you may not have your own children but want to be a parent
- you may already have a family but feel you still have the time and space for another child or children
- you have masses of love, security and happiness to offer to a child who has not had a great start in life.

Adoption gives children the chance to be in a permanent stable family, filled with the trust, love and care that they need.

We are looking for people who can offer a child a loving home for life and provide them with the care and support they need to grow and flourish.

Whether you are looking to adopt one child, or brothers and sisters, babies or older children, we will support you through the process to find the best match for you and the child or children you adopt.

As with raising any other child, raising an adopted child is not always plain sailing. Our children come from very different backgrounds and all have different needs. Some have faced hardship or neglect, and some may have good and bad memories of their birth family and have faced loss. They need time to gain your trust and develop an emotional bond with you, but rest assured you won't be alone in helping them with this and we'll be with you every step of the way.

If you think adopting is right for you, please fill out the enquiry form on our website at www.adoptcoasttocoast.org.uk and one of our adoption experts will contact you the next working day to discuss your enquiry in more detail.

About us

Adopt Coast to Coast is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which brings together the extensive knowledge and expertise of Durham County Council and Together for Children, which delivers children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council.

The two local authority adoption agencies are fully committed to the shared vision for Adopt Coast to Coast. Working together as a RAA, speeds up the adoption process and helps us to find the best match for the babies and children in their care.

Our two local authorities provide adoption services which are rated Outstanding by Ofsted, creating a strong foundation for us to continue working collaboratively to find secure and loving homes for our children.

What's the difference between a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA)?

RAAs are a partnership made up of local authorities who work together as one adoption agency to find families for the children in their care. Adopt Coast to Coast is an RAA who find families for our children across County Durham and Sunderland local authorities.

Both RAAs and VAAs do similar work in finding and assessing prospective adopters, however, the main difference is that RAAs have children in their care but VAAs do not. They both find adopters for children who are in the care of a local authority.

RAAs will approach VAAs for adopters if they are unable to find a suitable family from their own pool of adopters and need to widen their search. As RAAs are made up of local authority adoption teams, these teams work closely with wider children's services to identify early those children who need families, this helps to improve the matching process for adopters.



What is adoption?

Adoption is the legal process by which a child or a group of brothers and sisters, who cannot be brought up within their birth family, become full, permanent and legal members of their new family.

As the adopter, you become the child's legal parent(s), with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was born to you.

Early Permanence

Early Permanence is a route to adoption that allows a child to be cared for by approved adopters who would foster the child in the first instance while a plan for their future is still to be agreed by the courts.

Early Permanence allows you to foster a child/ren before you legally adopt them. There are benefits to choosing Early Permanence, these include:

- building a relationship with the child at the earliest opportunity
- fewer moves for the child, which can make it easier to build a secure attachment
- additional training for those who consider Early Permanence
- support, training and advice is available throughout the process

Why adopt with us?

We work with the adoption teams in our two local authorities, both teams have years of experience in placing children and approving and supporting adopters. Both have a full range of services available to support you seamlessly throughout the entire adoption process.

We can also:

- provide you with training and support to make sure adoption is right for you and for the children waiting to be adopted
- support you through what we call the matching and moving in process – we'll be there for you right up until you get your final Adoption Order
- provide lots of advice and information, as well as holding workshops, and running support groups and social events where you can meet other adopters
- access to a range of post adoption support services

More about our children?

The decision to place a child in care is never taken lightly, but it is done in the child's best interests. As local authorities we have children who are waiting for their forever families and they range in age from babies upwards.

Some children need to be placed alone, and some with their brothers and/or sisters. Some will have health or medical issues or uncertainty about their future development. Some may have development delay, or physical, emotional and/or learning disabilities. This might be because of their poor start in life or be something they were born with.

Most children will have complex family backgrounds. They may have been living at home with family for some time before there were sufficient grounds or concerns to remove them.

Examples of what the children could have experienced are:

- Misuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Mental ill health difficulties
- Domestic abuse

Any of these issues may have had an impact on the child's emotional and behavioural development.

Meet some of our children

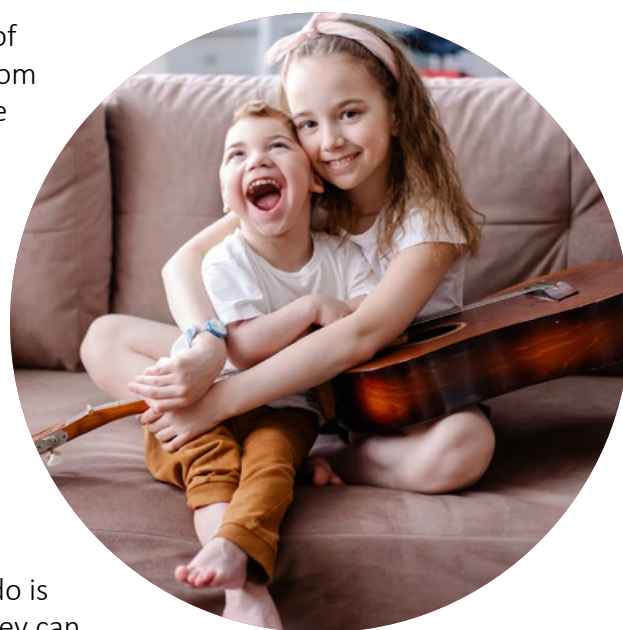
Let us introduce you to just a few of the children we have cared for.

James* and Jess*

James (4) is a very happy young boy, he suffers from a type of cerebral palsy, as well as epilepsy. He needed a lot of help from his carers. Despite his challenges which include being unable to walk or speak, James communicates with a special device as well as with facial expressions and giggles when he is happy, and unhappy sounds and cries when he's not. His carers told us his gorgeous smile can light up a room.

Jess (6) is a friendly, chatty little girl with blonde hair. She is very inquisitive and her favourite word seems to be 'why?' She is also very caring, which you notice when she plays with her favourite dolls, as well as when she is around her brother or her friends at school. Jess hates to see them looking sad and will offer them a cuddle to make them feel better.

Whilst being a little live wire, one of her favourite things to do is to lie next to her brother on a big cushion on the floor, so they can listen to stories and music together.



Bobby*

Bobby (4) is a beautiful energetic little boy with a lovely big smile. He has big brown eyes and brown hair.

Bobby can struggle to communicate about what he wants. He is described by his carers as a pleasure to look after. Even though he can be timid at times, when given encouragement Bobby can be adventurous and feel confident to explore the world around him. He enjoys spending time outside going running in the local field, going on walks, and attending the park.



Ava* and Ollie*

Ava (5) and Ollie (2) are brother and sister.

Ollie is a gorgeous and funny little boy. He is really loving with the people he knows and will sit on his carer's knee and be cuddled. He loves to play with his toys. He really likes to empty things out and then put them back in again. He likes to play with cars and read books, especially books about Thomas The Tank Engine. He is also pretty good at doing jigsaws too.

Ollie loves to go food shopping with his carers. He will sit in the trolley and wave at people. Ollie can be wary around people he isn't familiar with but he loves spending time with the adults and children he knows.

Ava is a beautiful, caring little girl. She is a confident and outgoing little girl who loves to try new things and go to new places. She enjoys walks and going to the river to throw sticks and stones in. Ava also loves rides and is quite a thrill seeker! Last Christmas she went to the pantomime and loved it.

Baby Somers*

Baby Somers is a baby boy who has not yet been born.

Baby Somers will live with Early Permanence (EP) Carers. EP carers are approved adopters who would also be foster carers for him whilst a plan for his future is considered by the courts.

Once the court's decision is made, Baby Somers will either remain with his EP carers and will be adopted by them or, he may be reunited with his birth family.



These wonderful children are just the tip of the iceberg. Once you start on the adoption process, you will hear about other children, and be ready to adopt them all!

Your social worker will guide you through the matching process, and you will be matched with the right child or children for you.

Who can apply to adopt?

People from all walks of life can adopt. The main driver is wanting to provide a safe, stable and loving home to a child.

We need adopters who are flexible and honest people who are able to consider a range of children and who can understand the difficult start these children may have had. They need to be able to adjust their life and expectations to the needs of the child or children.

Adoptive parents need to be able to work alongside a range of other professionals especially in the early stages. It is important that you can get along with people and listen to, and take advice from, people who know the child/children or have professional knowledge which can help you to offer the best ways to meet the child's needs.

People who adopt need to be 21 and over, and can be

- single, married or living together
- from any ethnic or religious background
- from any sexual orientation or gender
- a homeowner or living in rented accommodation – with space for children to live and play
- employed or on benefits – it's important that you can show us that you can afford to support a child.



Things to consider when considering adoption

Smoking

We want our children to be brought up in a family that enjoys health and wellbeing, so we don't place children aged under 5 in a household with someone who smokes or vapes. Smoking for us means cigarettes, e-cigarettes or vaping.

You would also be unable to adopt an older child who has a medical condition which could be affected by smoking, such as chest problems, asthma or any disability.

If you need help to quit, you can find for your nearest stop smoking service at [Nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/find-your-local-stop-smoking-service/](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/find-your-local-stop-smoking-service/)

An adopter who has given up smoking needs to have stopped for at least 12 months before we will match you with a child under 5. If you've stopped smoking (well done!), why not talk to us now and if it's right for you we can get the ball rolling.

Criminal history

Having a criminal record or a caution does not automatically rule you out for adoption- it just depends what the offence was. Be completely honest with us, and we of course will keep your information confidential.

We can't consider an application from anyone who has been convicted or charged with offences against children, sexual offences against adults or significant offences of violence.

Fertility treatment

Many people consider adoption after ending fertility treatment, and we completely welcome hearing from you. However, it's important to let yourself adjust emotionally from treatment, and to think deeply about how adoption is a very different way of becoming a parent.

If you are considering adoption, we would love to talk to you to understand your circumstances and to help you to work out the best approach and timing for you.

Pets

We're a nation of pet lovers and pets can play a very important part in a household. However, we also have to think of the child, so we assess all pets. Usually there's no problem, unless the pet is known to be dangerous.

If you own a lot of pets, we will also need to be sure that there are no health risks, and that you have enough time to care for and prioritise a child.

The steps to becoming an adoptive parent

Being approved as a prospective adopter can take as little as six months. It can seem a little daunting, but rest assured, we'll be right there every step of the way to make sure that you're fully prepared, supported, and fully understand the process.

How it works:

FIRST ENQUIRY

Enquire via phone on **03000 268 268** or our website **www.adoptcoasttocoast.org.uk**. A member of the team will contact you to complete an Expression of Interest form. If you wish to proceed, we will also arrange an Initial Visit.

INITIAL VISIT

We will carry out a home visit to talk through your circumstances, reasons for adoption and the children in our care. You will be asked to complete a Registration of Interest form which will be reviewed along with the information shared to decide if you should progress to stage one.

STAGE ONE TIME FRAME APPROX. TWO MONTHS

If your Registration of Interest is accepted you will start stage one which includes background checks and adoption training.

STAGE TWO TIME FRAME APPROX. FOUR MONTHS

Your social worker will work with you to complete a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR) for consideration by an Adoption Panel. You will also attend some further training in stage two. The final decision on your application is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

MATCHING

Following approval you will be matched with a child or children who could thrive in your family. This process may have started in stage two so you may find the match happens quickly after approval.

ONGOING SUPPORT

We will provide ongoing support. This is unique to the needs of each family but could include training, events, advice and therapeutic support.

Support for new adopters

Here at Adopt Coast to Coast, we also offer tailored packages of support once adopters have been approved. These can vary and may include:

- counselling, advice and information
- a dedicated duty line where you can get advice from a social worker
- training events and workshops on a range of topics including managing post adoption contact and therapeutic parenting
- support groups to meet and chat with other adoptive parents
- stay and play sessions for new families
- an annual fun day and seasonal parties
- a Buddy Scheme to link you up with other adoptive parents
- advice, support and mediation with post adoption birth family contact arrangements
- access to family therapy and psychology services and support to source other relevant support service
- direct work with your children including life story work
- help and advice if relationships in your adoptive family are breaking down
- advocacy and liaison with education and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Buddy Mentoring Scheme

Our Buddy Mentoring Scheme links experienced adopters with prospective adopters to help and support them as they move through their adoption journey.

Our 'Buddies' are volunteer adopters who are keen to share the knowledge and experience of their own adoption with those who are navigating their way through the process. Buddies can:

- lend a friendly listening ear
- have time to chat
- answer questions
- share handy tips from your own experience
- encourage and reassure
- maintain confidentiality in agreed parameters
- encourage the prospective adopter to communicate openly with the agency

If, once you start your enquiry with us, you would like a 'Buddy' to support you, please speak to your allocated social worker.

Real life stories

We know hearing stories from people who have been through the adoption process can really help you to understand how it all works. So here's a few real-life adopters who have kindly shared their story to help you to make your decision.

Steven and Robbie

"It was love at first sight, the best feeling ever!" That's the verdict from second time adopters Steven and Robbie, who adopted both of their children through Early Permanence.

When Steven and Robbie first met, they both knew straight away that the relationship was right – and they also knew they wanted a family of their own. Robbie said: "We talked about children at our first date! So our relationship had the same goals. In 2019 they decided the time was right for them and started the process after attending an information event.

Robbie said: "We were assigned our fabulous social worker – but then along came lockdown! However, Covid didn't stop us building a really good relationship with her, and in some ways, it worked better because we could just jump on Teams and didn't have to book well in advance to speak."

The couple agreed that the crucial thing was to be honest, with themselves and with their social worker: Steven told us: "There are two things you need during this process – honesty and open mindedness. It's not an easy process, but it is worth it. We didn't know what to expect during the process, but it brought us closer as a couple.

"I'd recommend adoption to everyone. The initial phone call is the hardest. There's always an element of doubt, but no one wants to you to fail, they want to help you and want what is best for the child".

The couple had been warned that they would

be unlikely to get a baby – but their matching process didn't quite run to plan: "In our minds we had become fully prepared to welcome a slightly older child, maybe 18 months old, into our family," Robbie said, "We completed the adoption process and just 24 hours after being approved at the Panel meeting, Josh* was born.

"That was a mad time, but the hospital staff were amazing and we also had our families on hand, so we felt a lot more confident about caring for him properly."

The journey was more emotional for the couple because they chose to adopt via Early Permanence, but it didn't put them off and they came back to Adopt Coast to Coast when they were ready to grow their family. Steven explained: "I grew up with a sibling and loved having them around so we really wanted Josh to have someone too. We decided the time was right and we started the process again and were matched with Samantha*, a new-born baby girl.

"Life as a family of four has been easier, you know what to expect having done it a first time. The second time you often do things differently and don't worry about things as much. Samantha is very resilient and doesn't seem to be phased by coughs and colds so we've noticed its different in that way too.

When asked how life has changed since adopting their family, Steven said: "Life is very busy, Josh* is at an age when he's going to football, starting school and Samantha* goes to childcare so it's very busy, but we wouldn't change it".



Sean and Kelly

There are lots of reasons that lead people to the decision to adopt.

In Sean and Kelly's case, their decision came after experiencing fertility issues and going through unsuccessful fertility treatment.

They're now the proud parents of a little girl they adopted just before her first birthday.

"Adoption was always an option," said Sean. "When our fertility treatment didn't work, we decided to look into it.

"We searched online and found Adopt Coast to Coast. We read about other people's experience of adopting with them, which helped us to decide to start the process with them."

"The process was good – more enjoyable than we expected," said Sean. "The hardest part was waiting for checks and references.

"Our social worker at the time was really reassuring and helpful. They never raised expectations and were open and honest throughout the process.

"We also took part in training where we made some really good friends who had similar experiences to us.

"When we were eventually told that we could be parents, it was like a dream come true."

Kelly added: "We had lots of information about our daughter before we met her, so we felt like we really knew her and on our introduction day she took to us quite quickly. By the end of our meeting, we were getting cuddles.

"I'd say if anyone is thinking of adopting, it can be a long process but it's so worth it. If you've got questions or are unsure, make a phone call and find out more. Many of the things we worried about turned out to be nothing in the end."



Pippa and Karim*

Pippa and Karim always wanted to adopt- regardless of whether they would have a biological child or not. Having worked with children for most of her career, Pippa had witnessed what some children go through and the difference a foster carer or adopter can make.

When Pippa was unable to get pregnant, their options were to try IVF or adopt and they chose to try IVF. After having several rounds, they both agreed to try adoption.

They started their process in April and their social worker supported them through the whole process. They attended Panel in the November and were matched with a baby boy within three months.

Pippa told us "When we attended Panel, I was used to doing training sessions and presentations so I felt comfortable about it. Karim on the other hand, was more nervous but it turned out to be a really positive experience.

"Until you go through this process you do not realise that you are going to love this child like any child you would have had biologically, if not more. We now wished we had never gone through IVF. It would not even be an option now. Adoption is what we were meant to do and it's what we're good at."



*Names have been changed to protect identities.

Next steps

Thank you for taking the time to find out more about adopting through Adopt Coast to Coast.

We know choosing to adopt is a big decision and you're bound to have a lot of questions and things to consider before deciding if it's right for you, so why not attend one of our information events.

Monthly online information events

We offer friendly on-line information events or one-to-one appointments, so you can feel comfortable discussing your situation with one of our friendly adoption experts at a time that suits you. There's no pressure from our team and we are happy to answer any questions you may have or talk you through the process.

You can book an information event on our website adoptcoasttocoast.org.uk or call us on **03000 268 268** if you have any questions.

Make an enquiry

If you would like to start the process, complete the enquiry form on our website adoptcoasttocoastenquiry.durham.gov.uk or call us on **03000 268 268**

Keep up to date through our social media follow us at:

 Facebook.com/adoptcoasttocoast

 [Instagram @adoptcoasttocoast](https://Instagram/@adoptcoasttocoast)

Our privacy policy

Adopt Coast to Coast has a privacy policy for adoption which outlines:

- what kind of personal information is collected from you
- why and how it is used
- the conditions under which it is kept
- how long we keep it for
- when we may share it with others
- your rights in relation to your information

To view our Privacy Policy visit www.adoptcoasttocoast.org.uk/legal-information/privacy-notice/





Children & Young People's Services, Durham County Council, Spectrum 8,
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