

Adoption

Open
your heart...
...to adoption



Thank you for your interest in adoption with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This booklet is designed to give you some general information on adoption. We know that deciding to adopt is a huge decision but it might not be as scary as you think. Our team will be there every step of the way to help support you during and after adopting. The team are made up of people from lots of different backgrounds and are well trained in being sensitive to people's cultural and religious beliefs and life experiences.

Once approved, we have a dedicated team who will be able to offer post adoption support and training to help you build your new life as a family together.

If after reading this booklet, you have more questions or want to discuss your individual circumstances, please give us a call. Our team will be really pleased to hear from you and will help you explore adoption together. You do not need to live in our borough to adopt with us.

0800 279 9850

www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk

1 0800 279 9850



What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for a child when living with their birth family is not possible. The arrangement becomes legally binding when a court makes an Adoption Order, at which point the law will recognise you as the child's legal and only parent. This gives you the same rights and responsibilities as all other parents.

Why do children need adoption?

These days very few children are given up for adoption by their parents at birth. Instead, the majority of children who need new families need them because of concerns about the parenting they have received previously.

Through experiences of neglect or abuse in their early lives, or extended periods within the care system the development of children and young people may have been affected. Often, babies and toddlers who require new families have parents with a background of drug and/or alcohol dependence or mental health problems. This can have consequences for the child's health, or their development that may not be apparent when they are small but emerge in later years. These children need a loving family in the way that all children do. They also need a level of understanding, reassurance, patience and commitment over and above children who have not had such early instability.

What type of person adopts?

People from all sorts of different backgrounds adopt. People sometimes think that they are automatically ruled out from adopting a child just because they are single, divorced, unemployed, disabled, gay or an older person. None of these are reasons to exclude you - it's all about what you can offer, what a child needs, and whether these can fit together to make a family for life. If you are unsure about whether your individual circumstances would be acceptable then we would be happy to discuss this with you.

Is there an age limit?

We do not have an upper age limit on applications to adopt, but would need to consider this in relation to the age of the child you wish to adopt and how it might affect your ability to securely raise the child to adulthood. Your health and fitness is a key factor and for that reason we usually require adopters to be no more than 45 years older than the child in question. Whilst the law states that you must be at least 21 years old to adopt we are usually approached by people who are over 25. If you are under 25, as with all prospective adopters, we would consider your individual circumstances and whether you have had enough opportunity to develop the necessary skills and abilities to adopt a child.



I'm single. Can I adopt?

Yes, many single people adopt. We are interested in the skills and experience that you have to offer - not your marital status. However, like all applicants, you need to think about the support you have available.

I work full time. Can I adopt?

Yes, but you need to be able to take enough time off to give the child time to settle with you in their new home. For a pre-school child we would encourage you to be at home with them for as long as possible. Even if they are school age, it may take some time for them to settle into the school routine. You also need to be available whenever they might need you. Overall, you would need to be able to fit your work requirements around the child's needs, rather than expecting the child to fit into your schedule.

I'm unemployed. Can I adopt?

Yes.

I don't own my home. Can I adopt?

Yes, but whether you own or rent your home you need to be in a secure, settled housing position and have enough space for a child. This usually means a separate bedroom or enough space to provide one in the future.

I live out of London. Can I adopt through Tower Hamlets or should I go to my own local authority/council?

We generally consider applicants who come from the London boroughs and/or within the M25 radius. However, if you are able to meet the needs of school age children, sibling groups, children with disabilities, children from specific ethnic communities or mixed heritage children then we will definitely be interested, even if you live further away.

I'm gay. I'm lesbian. Can I adopt?

Yes. We will assess lesbians and gay men as adopters, whether you are in a relationship or single. We are interested in your skills and experience and what you have to offer the children in our care, not your sexual orientation. Due to recent changes in adoption legislation both partners are now able to adopt.

I'm having fertility treatment at the moment. Can I adopt?

No. We generally only start assessments if at least a year has passed since you completed fertility treatment. It is important to make use of the time between having had fertility treatment and starting on the path to adoption. Some people find counselling helpful. It's very important to talk with your partner (if you have one) and to your family and friends.

Adoption is an intense and time-consuming process which is better tackled one step at a time. Once the assessment is under way, we will ask you to do all you can to avoid the possibility of conceiving a child until after completion of the adoption process.

What are the restrictions about health?

There are few hard and fast rules on matters of health, although everyone who applies has to have a medical. While you don't need to be super fit, we will have concerns about life-threatening illnesses or serious chronic health problems that might restrict your ability to look after children in the long-term. We take advice from our medical adviser in these cases.

There is no ban on people who are overweight, but we will have to consider the impact on your long-term health. Children under the age of 5 years, with asthma or other respiratory problems will not normally be placed within a smoking household.

What if I have a criminal record?

You cannot adopt if you have a criminal record for any offences against children. Other offences will not automatically stop us considering your interest in adoption, but may be a reason for not going further, depending on how serious and how recent. We will undertake checks with police records and any offences including juvenile offences will need to be discussed with you.

What if I have a complicated past? (Like a troubled or unhappy childhood or a broken marriage).

We are not simply looking for people who have had straightforward lives. We will consider your family history sympathetically. We want to know how you have dealt with difficult experiences and what you have learned. Having survived and learned from difficulties or losses is likely to be helpful in adopting children and helping those who have had their own problems.

How do Children's Social Care Services fit in?

Tower Hamlets is a registered adoption agency. Our Permanency and Adoption Support Team includes social workers who recruit, assess and prepare people who would like to adopt. You would be linked with a social worker from this team who would undertake your assessment as an adopter.

The team is also responsible for continuing to support families after children have been placed with them and after the child has been legally adopted. Until they are adopted, children each have their own social worker, normally referred to as the 'Field' social worker. The child's social worker has responsibility for the child (until the child is adopted) and works with the Permanency and Adoption Support Team in finding a family and planning for the future. We also provide information and advice about adoption to any Tower Hamlets resident who requests this.

What kind of help will be available after I adopt?

Children who are adopted often need extra help, and so do their families! This might be necessary immediately or many years after they are adopted. We would work with you to get the right assistance if your child has educational problems, or in getting therapeutic help with their emotional difficulties and behavioural problems. We may also be able to offer a regular financial allowance, payable to you, for your child, in recognition of their particular needs and your circumstances, or a lump sum, one off payment for particular expenses, over and above the normal everyday ones.

Whatever the situation, the need for adoption support will be discussed with you

before your child comes to live with you, and a adoption support plan will be agreed in advance. The plan will be reviewed annually by adoption support workers so that we can offer assistance as and when it is required. We see adoption as a life long comitment for your family and your child, so our adoption support service will be available to you at any time in your lives

How to become a London Borough of Tower Hamlets Adopter

We hope the information in this booklet has been useful in giving you an introduction to adoption.

If you feel that you would like to adopt, please contact the Permanency and Adoption Support Team.

You will be invited to an appointment at our office to meet two adoption social workers for an initial meeting. This is an opportunity for you to learn more about adoption and to have answers to the many questions you will have.

The initial meeting

You'll visit our offices for this meeting where you'll be able to ask more questions about adoption. We'll want to find out some more about you and your reasons for wanting to adopt. It may be that your reasons are linked to personal and sensitive matters to do with your ability to have biological children. We know

that this may be difficult to talk about but we'll need to have some discussion about this before deciding whether you are in a position to proceed further with us.

Attending this meeting doesn't commit you or us to carrying on with your application. Following the meeting we'll give you and ourselves some time to think. If we think there are reasons why you can't adopt, we will let you know what these are in writing. Otherwise you'll be offered a second meeting which we ask to hold in your home. This allows us to see you in your home environment and so to gain a fuller picture of you. It's also an opportunity to go through any points that may have arisen as a result of the first meeting.

After the second meeting, we'll let you know in writing whether we believe that you are in a position to proceed. If we feel that you're not ready, we'll advise you on how you can assist in being considered as an adopter in the future.

The next step in the process will be a preparation group, and you will be asked to complete an application form.

The preparation group will offer you the opportunity to hear more about the assessment process and meet other prospective adopters. This may seem to be a lengthy and complicated process, but the decision to adopt is a serious one with lifelong consequences for all involved, so it can't be taken lightly.



The Assessment

When you've made your application, a social worker will undertake an assessment, sometimes called home study. You will be given a copy of the assessment framework that we follow in advance. The assessment involves a number of visits by your social worker when you will be seen together (and individually) if in a couple.

We know that the process of assessment can feel intrusive, so we aim to be as sensitive as possible about this. It is important to consider your personal and family history, as well as your own experience of being brought up, as these will have an influence on how you will parent a child.

We will also need to make enquiries about your housing and employment and take up three personal references (one of whom is a member of your wider family). Once the report is completed, you will have the opportunity to read it and to make corrections. The report is then taken to the Panel for approval. The Adoption Panel is chaired independently. It is made up of social care representatives, a medical adviser, local councillors and independent people such as previous adopters. The Panel will then make a recommendation on whether to formally approve you as an adopter.

The Timescales

Tower Hamlets aims to complete each stage of the assessment process within the expected timescales contained within the Adoption Minimum Standards. We will:

- Provide you with written information in response to an initial enquiry within five working days.
- Offer you at least one date for a follow up interview or information evening within 2 months of you expressing further interest.
- Present your assessment to the Panel within six months of your application, when Tower Hamlets and you decide to proceed.

We aim for the whole process to take no longer than eight months. However, there may be occasions when this takes longer and in these circumstances we will clearly explain the reasons why.

Priorities and Eligibility

The Adoption Minimum Standards require us to prioritise applications that are more likely to meet the needs of children waiting. If we decide not to proceed with your application for this reason, then you will be informed in writing, and we will advise you on the options open to you.

What else can I do?

Think about the support that you have from family and friends. Think about the change in your life that having a needy child or children will make. Talk to your partner, your family and friends about this. It may be useful to contact Adoption UK – an organisation run by adopters that has many local groups around the country. You may be able to attend a group and hear first hand from other adopters.

There are many useful books for people considering adoption. We have included a suggested reading list at the end of this booklet.

What if I am not happy with the process?

If at any point you are not happy with the process then you can contact the Team Manager of the Permanency and Adoption Support Team on 0800 279 9850, who will do their best to resolve your concerns. If we are unable to resolve it in this way then they will advise you on how you can take it further.

What happens now?

If you have found this information useful and want to be considered as an Adopter, you can contact us with any questions on **0800 279 9850** or email us at adoption@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Recommended further reading

The Adoption Experience

by Anne Morris

Published in association with the Daily Telegraph and Jessica Kingsley

Publishers for Adoption UK

ISBN: 1 85302 7839

Talking Adoption to Your Adopted Child

By Prue Chennells & Margaret Mossison

Published by BAAF

ISBN: 1 873868 55 3

Real Parents, Real Children: Parenting the Adopted Child

By Holly Van Gulden & Y Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb

Crossroads Publishing Co (USA)

ISBN: 0 8245 15145

First Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts

By Caroline Archer

Published by Jessica Kingsley

Publishers for Adoption UK

ISBN: 1 85302 801 0

Next Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts

By Caroline Archer

ISBN: 1 85302 802 9

Understanding the Assessment Process

A 16 page leaflet available from BAAF

Adopting A Child: A Guide for People Interested in Adoption

By Prue Chennells, Chris Hammond & Jenifer Lord

Published by BAAF

ISBN: 1 873868 54 5



Useful contacts

Here are some contacts that may be useful to you, either whilst thinking about adoption, or after having adopted a child.

British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF)

Saffron House

**6 - 10 Kirby Street
London EC1N 8TS
Tel: 020 7421 2600**

BAAF is the leading national organisation, which promotes high standards of practice in adoption and fostering and social work with children and families. BAAF, as well as being a publisher and supplier of books on adoption, also publish Be My Parent, a newsletter featuring children currently in need of adoptive placements and articles of interest to anyone involved in adoption.

Adoption UK

**Manor Farm, Chipping Warden, Banbury,
Oxfordshire OX17 1LH
Tel: 08707 700 450**

Adoption UK is a national voluntary self-help group supporting families before, during and after adoption. Their helpline number is open from 11.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

Post Adoption Centre

**5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue,
London NW5 2RZ
Tel: 020 7284 0555
Advice Line: 020 7485 2931**

This centre offers a confidential specialist advice service, counselling and family work for anyone who has been involved with adoption. This advice line, shown below, is open from 10.00am to 1.00pm, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and on Thursdays from 5.30pm to 7.30pm.

Ofsted

**Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 404040**

Tower Hamlets is regulated and inspected by Ofsted.





Interested?

For more information or an informal chat,
call us on 0800 279 9850.

adoption@towerhamlets.gov.uk
www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk

