



Adoption in Northamptonshire

Your complete guide to
becoming an adoptive parent
with Northamptonshire
County Council



Northamptonshire
County Council

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“ Adopting a child isn’t a decision to be taken lightly, but our adopters tell us it’s the most rewarding thing they’ve ever done. It is so positive for everyone involved, and can bring so much to your life. I would encourage anyone thinking about adoption to get in touch. ”

Director of Children’s Services

Welcome

Here at Northamptonshire County Council, we believe all children and young people deserve a secure, stable and loving family who will support them into adulthood. Of the 170,000 children and young people who live in our county, most of them have a happy, healthy and loving family, but sadly some are not so fortunate.

That’s why we need people like you to work with us to provide these children with the love and support they need – they’ve got so much to give, and your care, skills and experiences could make such a difference in their lives. Could you open your home to a child and give them the life they deserve?

This pack tells you about adopting a child with Northamptonshire County Council. From the adoption journey you’ll follow, to our children’s wishes and the reasons to adopt with us, we hope it answers your questions and that you’ll continue your journey with us.

If there’s anything you’d like to find out more about, then please don’t hesitate to get in touch with us.



**A chance to be a family.
Start your adoption story with us.**

Visit us:
www.couldyouadoptme.co.uk

Call us:
0300 126 1008

Email us:
a&f@northamptonshire.gov.uk

What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their birth parents for a variety of reasons. It's a permanent arrangement, so a child who is adopted will no longer have any legal ties with their birth parents and will become a full member of their new family.



Who are our children?

Children who need adopting are looked after by Northamptonshire County Council. This means we have responsibility to look after them until they are legally adopted. They may have been removed from their birth parents' care for many different reasons, and are likely to be living with foster families.

The children are of all different ages with different backgrounds and include:

- Babies
- Toddlers
- Siblings
- School age children
- Babies and children from different ethnic backgrounds
- Babies and children with complex health needs
- Babies and children with disabilities

We need adopters from all different backgrounds with their own life experiences to love and care for our children.

Many of our children will have suffered neglect and abuse within their birth families. Your role as an adoptive parent is to provide the support and love they need to build a positive future and give them the life they should have with a loving family.

“ I wish one day that someone will come for me. I wish that my life will turn out right for me in the end. ”
Josh (10)

Can you adopt?

There is no such thing as an ideal adopter, so please don't rule yourself out. Adoptive parents come from all backgrounds, cultures and walks of life and they all bring their own skills and experiences.

You don't need any special qualifications, but you do need to be passionate about helping others and want to make a lifelong commitment to being an adoptive parent.

Adopting a child can be very challenging, but we have training and support for you to guide you through your parenting journey. You will also experience incredibly rewarding moments of enjoyment and pride which can far outweigh the challenges.

To apply to be an adoptive parent you must be:

- Over 21 years old
- Single, married or in a stable relationship
- Prepared to complete training and to undergo personal checks and a home assessment
- Physically and emotionally fit for the task of adopting a child



These are some commonly-held beliefs about adoption.

- I'm over 40 so I'm too old to adopt
- I'm a single man so I can't adopt
- I'm obese so I can't adopt
- Adoption is for couples who already have children
- The main reason children are put up for adoption is because they've been given up by their birth families
- I'm gay/lesbian so I can't adopt
- I have a criminal record so I can't adopt
- I'm unemployed so I can't adopt
- I'm disabled so I can't adopt
- I can't adopt children from different ethnic backgrounds

Not one of these is true.

Your promise to our children:

- You will love them forever
- You will look after them legally, safely and lovingly
- You will help your child with their education, health and wellbeing
- You will create a child friendly environment
- You will understand their needs
- You will empathise with them
- You will be patient dealing with the highs and lows of raising a child who will be part of your family
- You will have a flexible approach to life

“ I hope mummy and daddy are nice. I dream of them coming to get me. I want a hamster. ”

Brandon (4)

How long does it take to adopt a child?

Our aim is for you to be approved as an adopter within six months from the start of your assessment.

Once you are approved, it won't be long before you can open your home to a child and really start to make a difference to their life.

The process of matching you with a child may take days, weeks or months, but our adoption team pride themselves on finding the right child for the right family.



Why adopt with us?

We pride ourselves on the support we give to our adoptive families. We are there for you every step of the way. Support includes training courses to develop your skills, advice and support from our professional team, and learning from other families who have been through the adoption process.

These aren't the only reasons to adopt with Northamptonshire County Council:

- We have a large number of children in our care who need your skills, love and support to give them the future they deserve. We are committed to providing a safe, secure and loving home for all of them.
- We do not make a profit. Our aim is to provide the right child with the right family and nothing else.
- We don't give up on our children.
- We have a strong and experienced permanent adoption team.
- We have support groups running throughout the county.
- We have an excellent record of placing the right adoptive parents with the right children quickly after they are approved.
- We listen to our children – we see every process through the eyes of a child, they are at the centre of everything we do.
- We can offer you a large range of workshops and courses to support you and help develop your parenting skills.
- We provide an outstanding adoption service with activity days and events.
- We have one of the largest post-adoption support teams in the country, who will support you even after the adoption has been made legal.

Amy experienced terrible hardships early in her life. After six months with her new adopted family she woke on Christmas morning and said: “I'm glad I was born”.



How we support you

Becoming an adoptive family is a rewarding experience but it can, of course, present some challenges. Our adoption support service is there for you to help you through your adoption journey. We will give you the following support:

- A dedicated social worker throughout the process.
- Access to local support groups covering different issues e.g. behaviour, attachment.
- Adoptive family activity days.
- Social and development opportunities for you and your family.
- Training courses.
- Links to national networks and associations, including CoramBAAF www.coram.org.uk
- Advice and support on rights to leave and pay information – if you take time off to adopt a child you should be eligible for statutory adoption leave and pay.
- Life Appreciation Days especially for adopters to learn from many people who have been involved in the child's journey.



“ I would like a computer, long hair, a dog and a mum and dad forever. ”

Chantelle

Training

We provide a range of training across the county and e-learning courses throughout the year so you can develop and grow as an adoptive parent. These courses provide you with the opportunity to increase your skills and meet others who are going through the adoption journey and are all part of our commitment to you.

Our training package covers a wide range of areas to support you including:

- Child development
- Life story work
- Adoption specific issues
- Child psychology
- E-learning module

Post adoption support

Families of adopted children are entitled to an Assessment of Need and may be able to access a range of support services including:

- Referral to other agencies
- The support of a qualified and experienced social worker
- Education — advice and support in addressing problems at school
- Contact issues — mediation and support with contact arrangements
- Managing, maintaining and reviewing contact
- Strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour
- Relationships — help and support in building relationships with your adopted child

“ The post adoption team are wonderful. They are always there when you need them, and offer good advice that's practical. I've found them to be so supportive. ”

Julie, adoptive parent.

Your journey to adoption

It usually takes under six months to go through the assessment and approval process to become an adoptive parent and we try to go at the right speed for you. We will work together with you and support you to make sure that adoption is right for you and your family as well as the child.

Initial Steps

- Attend an information evening to find out more about adoption. Details of our events can be found at www.couldyouadoptme.co.uk
- An adoption social worker will visit you. If this goes ok, you will be able to complete a registration of interest form.
- We will consider your registration of interest and if you are accepted, you will start the adoption process.

Step 1: Checks and Preparation (up to 8 weeks)

- We will carry out some standard background checks and ask you for details of references to learn about you. These are carried out to make sure you are ready to become an adoptive parent.
- A report will be written leading to a joint decision on whether to proceed to the next stage.

Step 2: Assessment (up to 4 months)

- A social worker will come to visit you at your home and get to know you.
- A full family assessment will be carried out.
- Based on this assessment, a Prospective Adopters Report will be presented to an Adoption Panel.

Step 3: Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panel is made up of children's care professionals, adopters and people who have been adopted as a child. The panel makes a recommendation about your suitability to adopt. From this recommendation, a final decision will be made on whether you can adopt a child.

Step 4: Approval and Placement

- If you are approved, our Adoption Team will work closely with you and your family and help you make connections and be matched with children who are waiting for an adoptive family.
- Your social worker will work closely with you through the matching and placement of any children by answering any questions you may have and providing you with the support you need.
- The Adoption Panel will make a recommendation about the suitability of the match which the decision maker will have the final say on.

Step 5: Post Adoption Order

- Once an adoption order has been granted by the court, the child will legally become part of your family.
- Post adoption support from our dedicated team is available for you whenever you need it.

“ The matching process is vital. It can be difficult, and there may be hurdles along the way, but you have to remember that if this was your own child, you would want every check possible to make sure they were going into a loving, safe environment. Don't let it put you off. The adoption team are great, and it is worth it in the end because look what you get – it means you will be a family. “

Ian, adoptive parent

Have you thought about fostering for adoption or concurrency?



We understand that adoption is a lifelong commitment that you have to be certain about. You may decide you want to pursue fostering for adoption or concurrency.

This means children can be placed with their potential adoptive parents on a foster care basis while they are waiting for the court to make a decision about whether they should be adopted, and while we approve the match between the adoptive parents and the child. Once this has been agreed, the foster care placement becomes a permanent adoption placement and an application for an Adoption Order can be made immediately.

What are the advantages of fostering for adoption or concurrency?

- Children are placed with carers who may become their adoptive parents, giving stability at an early stage.
- It reduces the damage caused by terminating temporary foster care relationships which children and parents could have experienced.
- The child's needs are the priority.

Is fostering for adoption or concurrency right for me?

Initially, as a foster carer you are caring for the child under the direct supervision of the local authority so you need to consider whether this is something you would be comfortable with. You would need to think about the possibility of the court not agreeing the adoption plan and the child leaving your care.

It is important for you to consider what support you might need, what access you have to support and how you typically deal with stressful, upsetting or painful situations.

There will be specific issues to be thought about in fostering for adoption or concurrency placements and you should try to identify what this might mean for you and your family, and then discuss this with family members and close friends.



Contact the team

Online

Email the Adoption Team:
a&f@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Email the Post Adoption Team:
PostAdoption@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Call us

0300 126 1008

Write to us

Adoption Team / Post Adoption Team

Northamptonshire County Council
St John's Centre
St John's Road
Tiffield
Northampton
NN12 8AA

" I'm happy living here and so is my tummy. "

Josh (8) after being placed with his new family



The A-Z of adoption

These are some of the terms and phrases you may encounter during your adoption journey.

Adoption Act 2014	The Adoption Act 2014 was written to improve and modernise the adoption process and ensure that the needs of the child come first.
Adoption financial support	Adopters do not get paid. In certain circumstances, financial support packages are agreed but generally adopters do not receive any fee or payment. However adopters are entitled to claim Child Benefit and other credits the same as other families.
Adoption order	When an adoption order is granted, the adoptive parent takes over full legal responsibility for the child from both the birth parents and Northamptonshire County Council. You will then have the legal right to make all decisions about the child and their future. The court who made the Adoption Order will give a Celebration Hearing where you and your child will get to meet the magistrate or Judge. Photographs of this event can be positive for the adopted child as they grow up.
Agency Decision Maker	A senior person within the Adoption Team who makes the final decision on Adoption Panel recommendations.
Approved	To become an adopter, families need to be approved by Northamptonshire County Council. Find out more about the approval process on our adoption timeline page at: www.couldyouadoptme.co.uk

Care Order and Placement Order	If a court rules that it is not safe for a child to live at home and they need to be placed for adoption, a Care Order and Placement Order can be made. The child is 'looked after' by Northamptonshire County Council who becomes the child's 'corporate parent'. The council becomes responsible for deciding who the child lives with and has contact with until the Adoption Order is granted. The child will go to live with foster carers, who have been approved by Northamptonshire County Council.
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	The CAMHS service helps support the emotional and psychological health of children and young people. Find out more about CAMHS: www.nhft.nhs.uk/main.cfm?type=CONTENTCAMHS
Childcare experience	Any experience of dealing with children and young people could be useful if you are considering adoption. Your childcare experience may have been as a babysitter or looking after relatives or working in the childcare sector.
Corporate parent	When Northamptonshire County Council takes over a legal responsibility of a child in our care, they are referred to as a corporate parent.
Emergency foster care	Emergency foster care is when a child needs to be placed with a foster carer at very short notice, for example if their birth parent is taken ill, or abuse has been uncovered and the child is deemed as being at risk of further abuse.
Interim care order	An interim (or temporary) care order gives the council time to find out more about a child's welfare to help a court make the right decision about their future. An Interim care order lasts for eight weeks but the court is able to extend this. Social workers have 26 weeks to process a case through court.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)	Independent Reviewing Officers make an important contribution to the goal of significantly improving outcomes for looked after children. Their primary focus is to ensure the child's wishes and feelings are given full consideration. IRO's follow a child's progress through care and out to an adoptive family.
Letterbox contact	Letterbox contact is where secure and confidential indirect contact is kept with a child's birth parents. This is usually in the form of letters. They are passed on through a Letterbox Coordinator. They seek to assure that details of the adoptive family are kept confidential. It is extremely rare for there to be continued direct contact between the birth parent and the child.
Life appreciation days	When a match has been identified a life appreciation day will be arranged where professionals involved will meet with the adopters to talk about the child's journey so far. They can be very moving experiences and very helpful to the adopters when making decisions about the child and their future needs.
Life story work	Life story work gathers information about a child and their birth family and background. They may want to talk about this with you throughout their childhood to help them come to terms with what has happened to them and to give them information about their birth family.
Looked after children (LAC)	When a child is in the care of Northamptonshire County Council, they are described as looked after. We will then build the future that is in their best interest. This could be fostering, adoption or returning to their birth family.
Panel	The Adoption Panel is a group of independent, experienced professionals who recommend whether a potential adopter is approved.
Permanent long term fostering	In some situations, it is better for the child if they are permanently fostered rather than being adopted. A child will remain with the foster carers until they reach adulthood, but their legal responsibility remains with the council.

Personal Education Plan (PEP)	Each child or young person in care receives a Personal Education Plan (PEP). This will help set educational and behavioural targets and will make sure that parents, schools and social workers remain in touch.
Placement Order	A Placement Order gives Northamptonshire County Council permission to place a child for adoption.
Police checks	If you want to be approved as an adopter, Northamptonshire County Council must legally carry out a police check on you. This is called DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service - previously Criminal Records Bureau) and will establish if there is anything on your record that means you would not be able to adopt.
Post-adoption support	Northamptonshire County Council prides itself on the support it provides even after children have been adopted.
Special guardianship	Special guardianship provides permanence for children when adoption or fostering is not the best option. The special guardian is the child's permanent carer and can exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of others on most issues.
Support networks	Your support networks are anybody who could provide you with help and support. This could be friends, family or people in the community or religious groups.

Anna's story

Anna and her husband Peter, both in their early 30s, have adopted three siblings.

"Adoption had always been an option for us. I had a friend at primary school who had been adopted and I saw the value of it and knew it would be something I'd like to do.

Taking on a sibling group

"We started the application process and attended an initial preparation training class. We learnt about the number of sibling groups that are split up and the negative impact that has on them. We agreed our house was big enough and we felt we had enough emotional capacity to deal with siblings.

"By adopting, we have kept them together and we're giving them the childhood they deserve. They support each other and by going through the process together, they have adjusted well, attached well and continue to thrive together.

Help and support

"From the point when we expressed an interest in adopting our children, we were assigned a social worker and the assessment process began. Thanks to having an experienced social worker – with a superb sense of humour – we actually enjoyed the assessment!

"We went to all the training sessions to prepare us as much as possible. We'd also been put in contact with the children's foster carers and school teachers who shared information about the children with us that brought them alive – their personalities, their likes, their dislikes and their challenges.

"I now attend the local Adoption Support Group once a month and have developed relationships with other adopters through this. We share our experiences and try and make sense of behaviours we're experiencing from the children.

A life-changing experience

"The transition from being two career-driven individuals to parents has been frightening as well as fantastic. The journey has been emotional and the enormity of being responsible for three children has been overwhelming at times. We've changed as a couple, as well as individually. And we have so much more fun and smiles now! We have already made memories that will last a life time. We have set up traditions that we all share.

"We have three very happy children and we wouldn't change it for the world."



Start your adoption story with us.

Visit:

www.couldyouadoptme.co.uk

Call:

0300 126 1008

E-mail:

a&f@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Join us at our next event – see our website for details

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