



Shetland Islands Council



# Becoming an Adopter in Shetland - Information Pack -

# Welcome

This information pack aims to provide some basic information about Adoption in Shetland.

Adoption is a process which allows someone other than the child's birth mother and/or father to become their parents. Adoption is a legal process that removes the parental rights from the birth parents and transfers them to the adoptive parent(s).

Adoption is a way of offering children and young people a home when their own family is unable to look after them. This pack outlines what's involved in adoption and gives a brief summary of the assessment process. The information is intended to allow you to think about the implications for yourself and your family of becoming an adoptive parent. Shetland Islands Council works within the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and the assessment process reflects this.

Family Placement Team

Shetland Island Council

[fosteringandadoptionteam@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringandadoptionteam@shetland.gov.uk)

**01595 744000**

[http://www.shetland.gov.uk/childrens\\_resources/fostering.asp](http://www.shetland.gov.uk/childrens_resources/fostering.asp)

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# Why do children need adoption?

There are children throughout the UK, ranging from babies to teenagers and from a variety of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds that need to be looked after away from home and initially placed in foster care or later with adoptive parents. There are many and varied reasons why children are unable to live with their own families, these may include:

- Illness in the family
- Relationship breakdowns
- Long-term difficulties, such as parents with drug and/or alcohol problems, chaotic lifestyles, mental health difficulties
- Abuse or neglect

An important fact to remember is that the majority of the children who are looked after away from home will have had some difficult experiences and will have suffered trauma and inadequate parenting. Adoptive parents will find these experiences are reflected in the child's behaviour, emotions and abilities to deal with everyday stressors of life. Children who have experienced early life trauma or who have had several different foster placements will have difficulties trusting adults and need consistency, nurture and care to be able to recover from this.

Adoptive carers are approved to look after children who cannot live with their birth parents. Prior to moving to permanent carers the child was likely to have lived with at least one set of foster carers. Attempts to reunite children with their parents will always have been made and will have failed if a child is going to be adopted. For many of these children it is very important that they remain in some form of contact with their birth family even though they cannot live with them. This is likely to be indirect "letterbox" contact but can also be face to face. A child needs to know about its history and family of origin to be able to form a stable identity and work through past trauma.

There are many rewards to adoption but mainly it is about knowing that you have provided a secure, safe, stable, caring and loving home for a child to grow and develop, and help them overcome the effects of their past. The child will become a permanent member of your family, which will mean that the adoptive parent(s) have full parental rights and the child will take the new family's last name. Adoption is a highly challenging process and is a lifelong commitment. Many adoptive families continue to need support which the Family Placement Team is able to offer.

Children that are looking to be adopted tend to be between the ages of 2 and 6 years old, however there are younger children and older children that need adoption. It is likely that the social work and legal process will have taken some time before a child is looking for adoptive parents as initially reunification with the birth family is the main aim. If this is not possible, other options such as kinship care is explored before adoption is considered. It is unlikely that adopters will be able to be placed with a very young baby although we are more and more moving towards a "fostering to adopt approach" to allow early placements. This however carries the potential of the child being returned to their birth family.

What is the need for Adoption in Shetland?

In Shetland there are often very few children that need to be adopted. However adopters from Shetland have the ability to adopt children from the Scottish mainland or other parts of the UK.



# Who can adopt?

All applicants must have a genuine concern for children and the wish to provide a lifelong home for them. Those who find themselves unable to live with their birth families are from different backgrounds and have a variety of needs. To meet these needs different family settings are required therefore there is no such thing as a “typical” adoptive family.

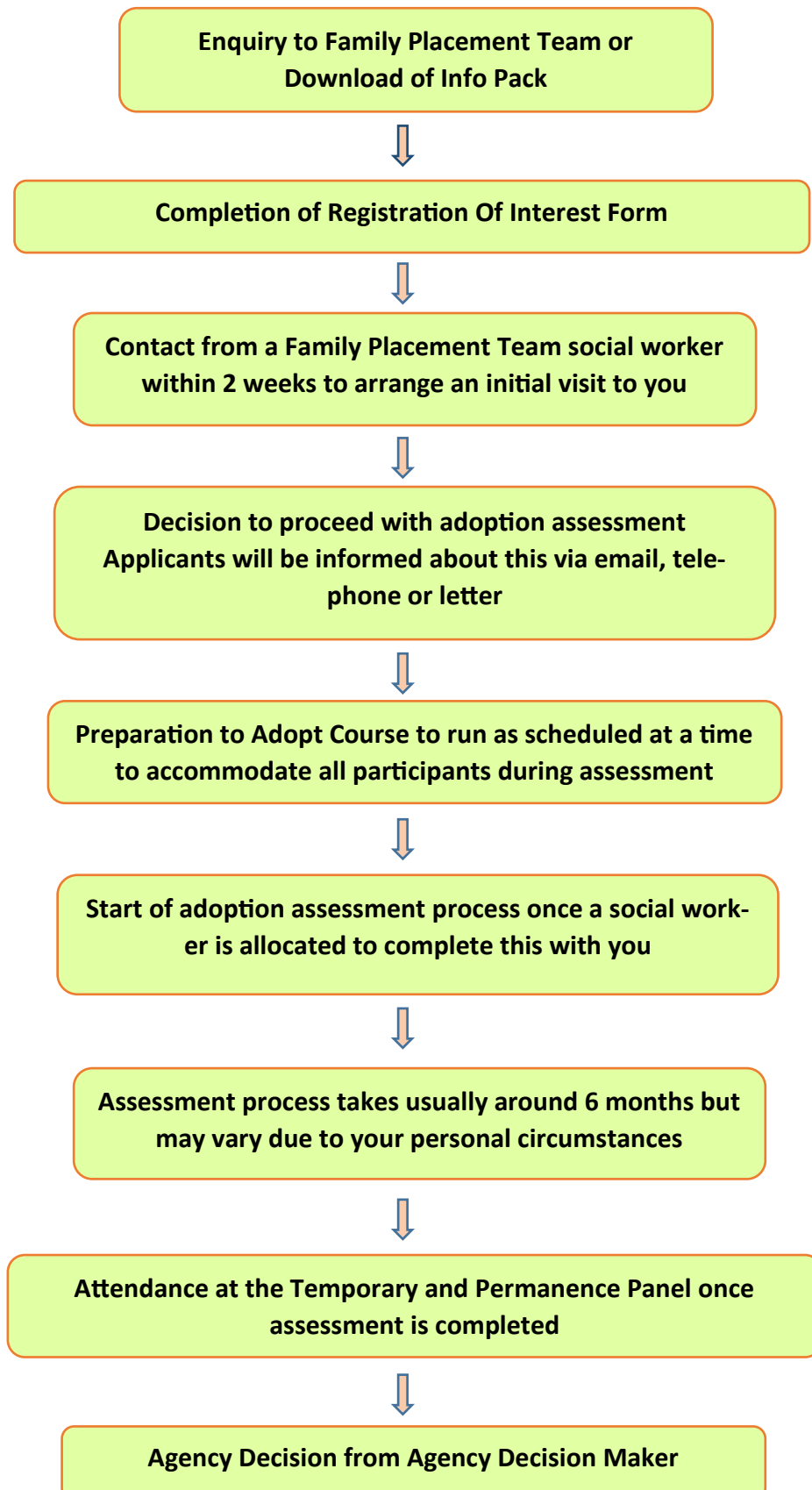
- You must be above the age of 21 years. There is no upper age limit, although if an Adoption Order is applied for in Scotland, the Sheriff must consider whether the age difference between the adopters and the child is normal. Adopters need to have sufficient health and vigour to be able to bring up a child at least until early adulthood, so age is one of the factors to be considered.
- You can be single, in a relationship, cohabiting, married or in a civil partnership. Relationships should be stable and enduring.
- You can come from any cultural or ethnic background, have any sexual orientation or gender
- You may have children of your own, step-children, or no children
- You can be a home owner or tenant, live in a flat or house in any area of Shetland where you are settled
- You may be working full-time or part-time or not be working at all
- You should be in a financially stable position that would allow you to meet the costs of a child living with you
- You should ideally have a strong support network around you that can help and assist you during the process

We also look for a number of qualities in adopters, including:

- The ability to understand and empathise with children who have had difficult experiences in their family home and may have experienced abuse or neglect
- Being able to work with social workers, teachers, health professionals and the child's family during and after the adoption process
- To be open minded, honest, engaged and willing to learn and develop yourself to be able to support the child(ren) in your care
- The ability to stay calm when your child(ren) displays difficult behaviour or emotions
- A caring, nurturing manner and have a high level of emotional awareness and self-reflection
- The ability to make a lifelong commitment to a child that has not been born to you and who will experience challenges in some aspects of life
- Offering a nurturing, warm and caring environment for the adopted child where they can build trust, form lifelong bonds and recover from past trauma

# The Adoption Assessment

## Enquiry and Assessment Process





Adopting a child with difficult early experiences takes commitment, thorough preparation, skills and knowledge. Adoption is a permanent legal process that relinquishes a child's legal connection to their birth family and transfers those rights and inheritance rights to the adoptive family. It is also a long journey with ups and downs and hopefully the lifelong home for a child that had a difficult start in life.

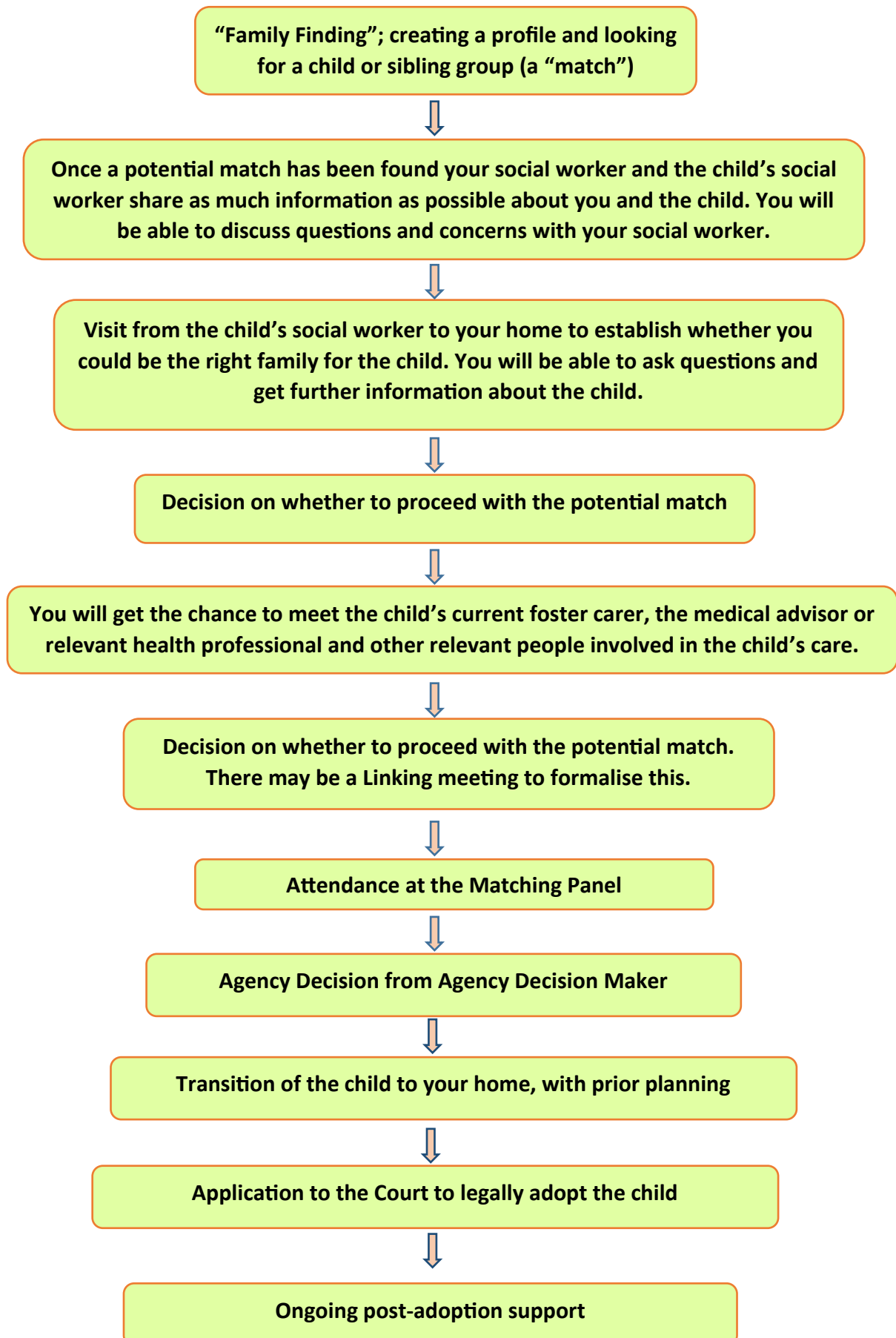
The purpose of the assessment process is therefore to ensure that you will be able to adopt a child and have the right skills, knowledge and preparation to do so. The assessment should take roughly 6 months but this will depend on your personal circumstances. There will be an expectation that you attend a group preparation course prior to your assessment. The assessment process is very thorough and will involve you and your family working closely with the assessing social worker. Topics of discussion include your family history, your current and previous adult relationships, your parenting capacity and your skills and abilities.

As an agency, we must ensure that there is no reason why you cannot be entrusted with the care of someone else's child. There will be a number of checks that will form part of our assessment, including:

- Protection Of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Check
- Local Authority Check (current and previous places you have lived)
- Medical Checks
- Personal References (3 per person)
- Employer Reference
- References from health visitor, school or similar if applicable
- Other adults (such as adult children, previous partners and relevant persons) and children (if applicable)
- Documents (e.g. marriage certificates, household insurance, driving license)

If you decide to go ahead with being assessed as an adoptive parent we need you to be committed to the process and be able and willing to be honest and share all the relevant information with your assessing social worker. The assessment is a partnership work and needs as much input from you as it does from the social worker completing the assessment. You can expect from us that we will be accommodating of your commitments, be open and honest throughout the whole process and beyond, and we will offer training, preparation and ongoing support.

# Adoption process after adoption approval

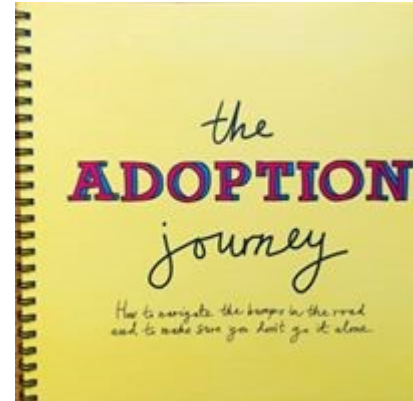


# Recommended Reading and Resources

To better understand the adoption process in Scotland there are the following resources that we would recommend you to read and look at:

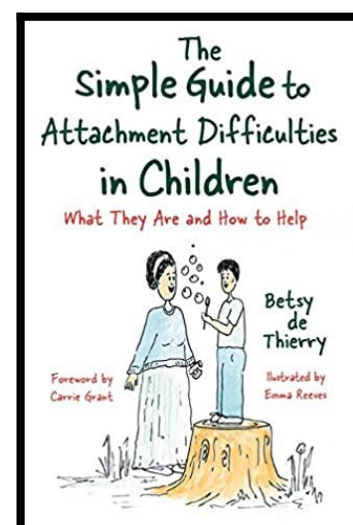
The Adoption Journey Book is downloadable at <http://adoption.scot/>

The website has a number of really good resources for people who are interested in and preparing for adoption.



This is a very informative book on all aspects of adoption in Scotland. It is available to purchase online.

A simple and informative guide to what is one of the most common difficulties that adoptive children experience.



# Frequently asked questions about Adoption

## **I am single—can I still adopt?**

Yes. You will be able to apply to be assessed as an adoptive parent whether you are in a relationship or not.

## **Do I have to have experience working with or looking after children?**

No. If you are not already a parent we will try and assess your parenting capacity in different ways. We will discuss the options with you during the assessment process.

## **Do I need to have a lot of space or own my own home?**

It is important that you have a spare room for the child. However you do not need a big house or need to own it. As long as you have space for the child, are settled in your home and have no imminent plans to move.

## **Do I have to be a certain age to be an adopter?**

You have to be at least 21 years to be able to apply to become an adopter. There is no upper age limit for assessments however depending on what age a child you would like to adopt the placing authority might look for a specific age range of adopters.

## **Do I need to be well off to be able to adopt?**

No. However you do need to be able to cover the basic cost of a child coming to live with you. A financial check will be done during the assessment.

## **I work full-time—can I still adopt?**

Yes. You and/or your partner will need to think about taking adoption leave when the child is placed with you. It is important that one main carer is able to spend ideally a year with the child at home to allow the child to settle and bond with you.

# Frequently asked questions about Adoption

## **Can I adopt if I already have a child?**

Yes. Your child will be part of the assessment and will be involved in the process. If you have a child or children, our practice is to place children below the age of the children already in the family and to make sure there is a gap of at least two years between the youngest child and a child placed for adoption.

## **I want to adopt a baby, is this possible?**

There is the possibility of adopting a baby. However as legal and social work processes take their time, many children are over one year old when they are able to be adopted. It is also more likely that many people want to adopt a very young child and the social worker for the child will have many potential adopters to choose from.

## **What is the difference between adoption and fostering?**

When you adopt a child you legally become the parent to him or her. Fostering can mean you look after someone's child for a short or longer period of time, sometimes permanently. You do however not hold the parental rights and responsibilities, these will be either with the birth parent or the local authority.

# Next steps...

If you are thinking about adoption and would like to find out more information or start the adoption process, you can:

## **Contact the Family Placement Team**

Fosteringandadoptionteam@shetland.gov.uk

01595 744000

Hayfield House

Hayfield Lane

Lerwick

ZE1 0QD

## **Complete the Registration of Interest Form**

You can find the form to download on the website. Please email or post it to us.



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Shetland Fostering and Adoption

**Should you have any feedback in regards to improving our website or this information pack we would be grateful to receive this.**