

Welcome

Welcome to Clackmannanshire Council's Adoption Service

Thank you for your interest in adoption. This pack provides you with information about how you can apply to become an adoptive parent and about looking after children that have not been born to you.

There are children of all ages in Clackmannanshire with a wide range of family backgrounds and with particular needs who would like to live with caring individuals, couples or families who can be sensitive to those backgrounds and needs.

Adoptive parents must have the ability to offer a stable, caring home to a child, who for whatever reason, cannot remain within their own family.

All kinds of people can become adoptive parents: single, married, civil partners with or without children, divorced, widowed or co-habiting, but you must be aged over 21.

You do not need to be employed, wealthy or own your own home to become an adoptive parent. Being skilled at looking after children safely and well is what is needed. We are interested in hearing from employed and unemployed individuals from all social and minority ethnic groups.

There are all sorts of different ways to make a positive difference to the life of a child. If you don't think the lifetime commitment of adoption suits your circumstances you might want to receive information about our fostering service. This service provides the opportunity for people to offer various levels of time commitment to supporting children and young people who cannot live with their birth families.

Finding out more about Adoption

The information in this pack relates to the primary purpose of Clackmannanshire Council's adoption service, which is to provide a service to children already looked after and accommodated by the local authority, who cannot return to their parents and whose needs throughout their life will be best met by adoption. The legal process releases the children from local authority care and enables them to become full, permanent members of another family. A crucial role for the service is to recruit, prepare and assess potential adoptive families for these children.

The adoption placement service is divided into two sections:

1. Children from birth to the age of five years
2. Children over the age of five years and young family groups of two, three or four brothers and sisters from birth onwards.



Adoption Criteria

Applications are welcome from people who meet the criteria, regardless of ethnicity, language and religion

Age

Applicants must be over 21 but there is no upper age limit. However the age difference between child and adoptive parent must be within the normal range for children who stay within their birth family, unless the child has exceptional needs that make age a less relevant factor.

Status

Applicants can be single, divorced, widowed or married, civil partners, have children or be childless.

When adoption is sought by two people acting together, they must have lived together for at least three years prior to their enquiry. The law does not require that they are married.

Infertility

Applications cannot be accepted from enquirers who are still undergoing fertility treatment or are on a waiting list for it.

Residence

Applicants must live within Clackmannanshire or surrounding local authorities.

Health

Caring for children is a physically and emotionally demanding task, so applicants need to have a reasonable degree of physical fitness, emotional stability and stamina. It is important that enquirers let us know about any health concerns as soon as possible, so these can be considered by our medical advisor, if necessary. The reply form with this pack invites you to inform us of any health issues at this stage. The most frequently occurring issues concern weight, smoking and the use of anti-depressants. These can have implications for the physical and emotional health and welfare of children and therefore their potential impact must be considered, but they do not necessarily mean you cannot proceed with an application.



Adoption of children from birth to five years

For Clackmannanshire to accept an application to start the process of becoming an adopter, enquirers must meet certain eligibility criteria:

- ▶ They must be over 21 years of age.
- ▶ Where the applicants are a couple they must have lived together for at least three years prior to their initial enquiry.
- ▶ They must not be undergoing infertility treatment or be on a waiting list for it. Basic medical investigation of infertility must have been undertaken. (It is not a requirement that they are childless).

If you meet these criteria and want to be considered for the adoption of children aged five years and under please see the form titled 'The application process'.



Older Children

Adoption of children over the age of five and young family groups

If you do not meet the criteria for adopting a child from birth to the age of two years you can consider becoming adoptive parents to an older child or children. If you do meet the criteria but decide that you would prefer to be considered for a family group or older child, your enquiry and application will also be taken forward by Clackmannanshire's adoption service.

Who are the children?

There are many children in foster care, between the ages of five and 10 years who need a "forever" family. Perhaps a parent has looked after their child through the early years but mental health issue, learning disabilities or drug and alcohol abuse result in the child being neglected. Sometimes it is the addition of a second or third child to a family that tips the balance from adequate to neglectful parenting. Some children will have suffered physical and/or sexual abuse and will need help to overcome the impact of this. Some may have special needs, such as learning disabilities, which will require continuing support from education, health and social work services. Almost all will have experienced significant emotional upset in their lives.

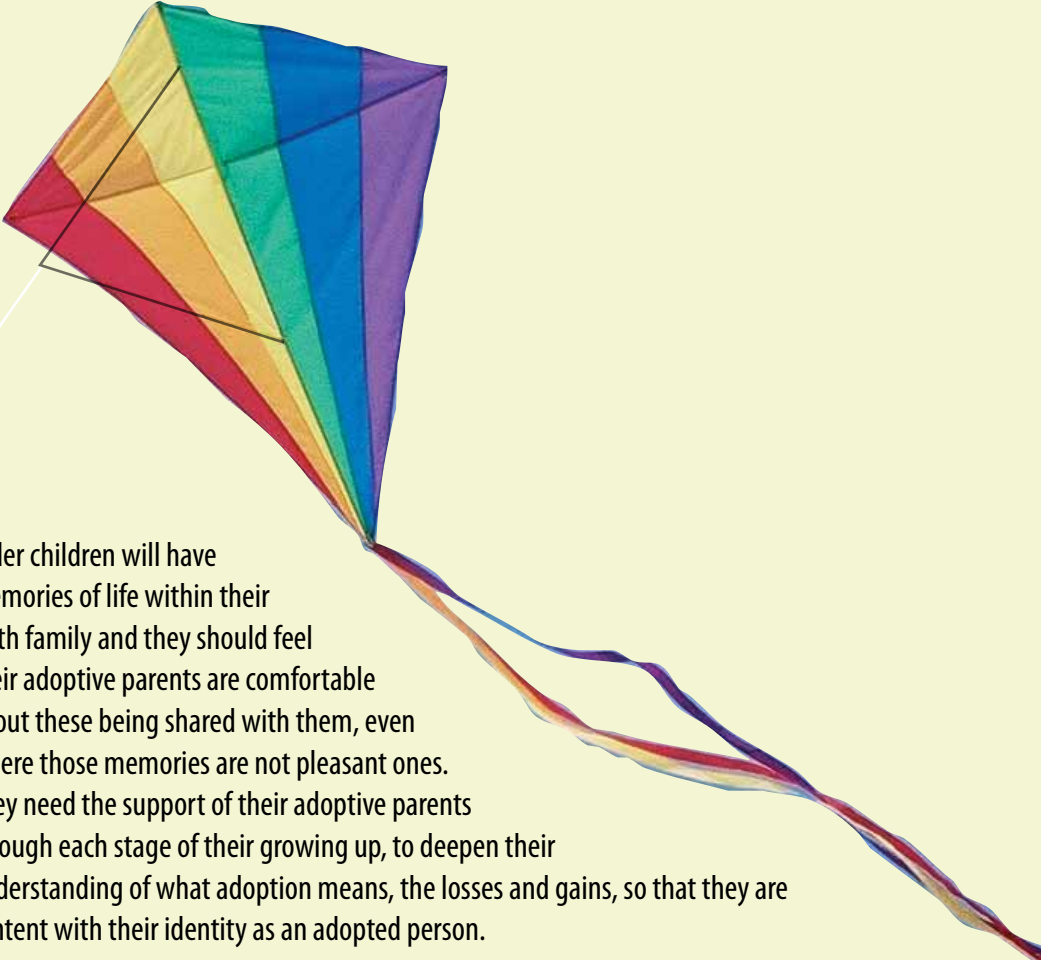
What "extras" do children need from their adoptive families?

Adoption is different from parenting a child born to you. Much is the same, but the "extras" are significant and must be acceptable to you if you are to become an adoptive parent. Adopted people may have two families, and for them to develop that very important sense of identity that we all need to become well adjusted adults, they need to know from an early age about the family they were born into. If children are only a few years old when they leave their birth family they may not hold on clearly to their memories of it. Their adopters will have a part to play in helping them learn about and understand their personal "story".

The birth family will always be part of who they are, even if they no longer see anyone from it. The children need to know that their adopters are accepting of this and if, in later years, they want more information about, or perhaps to search for, their birth family, they will have the support of their adoptive family.



Older Children



Older children will have memories of life within their birth family and they should feel their adoptive parents are comfortable about these being shared with them, even where those memories are not pleasant ones. They need the support of their adoptive parents through each stage of their growing up, to deepen their understanding of what adoption means, the losses and gains, so that they are content with their identity as an adopted person.

Other “extras” might include the child having carefully planned, occasional face-to-face contact with a birth relative, or, more usually, exchanging an annual letter and photographs through the social work service. It can be helpful for adopters and birth parents to meet each other. Careful consideration would be given in each case as to whether any of these arrangements would be appropriate.

Who are the adopters?

People consider adoption of children aged five years and over for a variety of reasons. For some it is because they are childless and after years of infertility treatment they do not meet the criteria for baby adoption. Infertility and the loss for a woman of the possibility of experiencing pregnancy can be difficult to accept. People need time to adjust to their situation. Some people may benefit from counseling.

Perhaps a couple or a single person already have two or three children who are now in their upper primary school or lower secondary school years; they feel that they still have the energy and commitment to share with a child who needs a family but would rather not go back to baby years. Maybe the “home grown” children are now young adults and away from home but the desire to parent is still strong and the whole family are behind the idea of another young family benefiting from the care their parents gave them. All sorts of adoptive families are needed for the children looked after and accommodated by the local authority who cannot return to the care of their parents.

The Process

The Application Process

Becoming an adoptive parent requires a commitment that extends throughout a lifetime. The application process gives both you and Clackmannanshire Council adoption service the opportunity to see if adoption is right for you and would meet the needs of a child waiting for a new family.

I've read the information and want to find out more

You are invited to complete the reply form contained in this pack and return it as directed.

Your reply will be acknowledged within seven days of receipt.

A supervising social worker may visit you within the next four weeks to give you more information and to discuss any issues that you may have raised on the reply form. Or you may be invited to an information evening, following which, if you want to continue the process, a supervising social worker will visit you within the following four weeks.

You will then be invited to attend preparation groups.

If it is agreed for to proceed you will be invited to an interview and if appropriate asked to complete the application form. The form requires you to give details of where you live, your family, your work and your health. You will need to provide proof of your identity and names and addresses of at least three referees.

A Disclosure (Scotland) check will then be undertaken on you and other members of the household over the age of 16 years. Applications cannot be progressed where an applicant has a conviction for an offence against children or involving violent assault.



The Process



If you have convictions for other serious offences these will be discussed with you and a decision made about whether we can proceed with your application. A check of local authority records will also be undertaken. You will also be required to have a medical examination by your GP to ensure that neither you nor other adults in the household has a medical condition that might adversely affect your ability to care for a child.

A supervising social worker will be allocated to you for the purpose of completing the personal assessment and presenting it to the adoption panel within six months of beginning the assessment.

The assessment is necessarily detailed, as there is a need to ensure not only that children will be kept safe and be cared for but also that they will be provided with families who will put the children's interests first, throughout their childhood, and continue to be there for them into adulthood. The assessment is ultimately also used to help make the best match with a child, once you are approved. The assessing social worker will visit you together (if a couple) and separately on a number of occasions to learn about how you and, in many cases, your extended family will be able to meet the needs of children who have had a difficult early childhood. A detailed picture of your life, your relationships, your strengths and abilities will be presented in a report written by your social worker. You will have an opportunity to read this and to contribute to it. Your understanding of the possible challenges and rewards of adoptive parenting should develop through the course of your meetings with your social worker.

Once the report is completed you may also receive a visit from the manager responsible for the adoption service, who will then write a brief report for the adoption panel.

The last stage in the application process is the presentation by your social worker of the written assessment to the adoption panel. You are invited to attend for part of the meeting (see separate leaflet for more information about the panel).

Placement

Inclusion on the register of prospective adoptive parents is not a guarantee of placement. Your profile needs to match the profile of a child or children needing a new family. Some people wait a few months, others over a year before a child is placed. Several children may be considered for you before you are matched for a specific child. The adoption panel will review your situation annually until a child is placed or it is considered that no placement is likely to be made, in which case your names would be removed from the register. This happens rarely and then usually in response to a significant change in the prospective adoptive parent's circumstances.

When a possible child is identified, the match will be considered by the adoption panel and decision will be made by the head of Social Work services based on the panel's recommendation. Where the match is approved plans will be made to introduce the prospective adopters and the child to each other. Social workers will continue to visit the new family to support the attachment and bonding process between child and parents.

Adoption and the law

Adoption is the legal process by which a child becomes a full and permanent member of a new family. The placement of children for adoption can normally only be carried out by approved adoption agencies, such as the local authority

The birth parents, including an unmarried father if he has parental rights and responsibilities, must be asked whether or not they agree to adoption. If they do not agree, the court must decide if there are grounds to dispense with their agreement. The court will hold a hearing for this purpose and the birth parents will have an opportunity to contest the adoption petition. Contested court cases can be lengthy and expensive. If the child has been placed by social work service in the belief that adoption is in the best interests of the child, the service will undertake to meet reasonable legal costs in such cases.

Few children are placed for adoption with their parent's agreement, though not all parents actively contest the legal action. Most children placed with adoptive families will be subject to compulsory measures of care imposed by the children's hearing, to which they will have been referred when their home circumstances were not meeting their needs. The Supervision Order (Section 70 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) imposed by the children's hearing will normally be terminated when the adoption order is granted. Until this point, the children's hearing makes most of the important decisions for children who are subject to supervision orders, including where they will live. When the social work service has matched a child with a prospective adoptive family, a children's hearing will decide whether the child may move into the new family.

Birth parents have the right to attend children's hearings, and also to know where and with whom their child is staying. In certain circumstances these details can be withheld. The children's hearing, while a supervision order is in force, will also decide whether or not a birth parent may have contact with their child.

The granting of an adoption order by the court transfers all parental responsibilities and rights from the birth family to the adoptive parents. It is usual for the child to take the adopter's family name. Once the child has been placed it is the responsibility of the adopters to petition the court for an adoption order, usually employing the services of a solicitor with experience of adoption law. The timing of this will be the subject of discussion with the social worker who will be aware of the particular circumstances of the case.



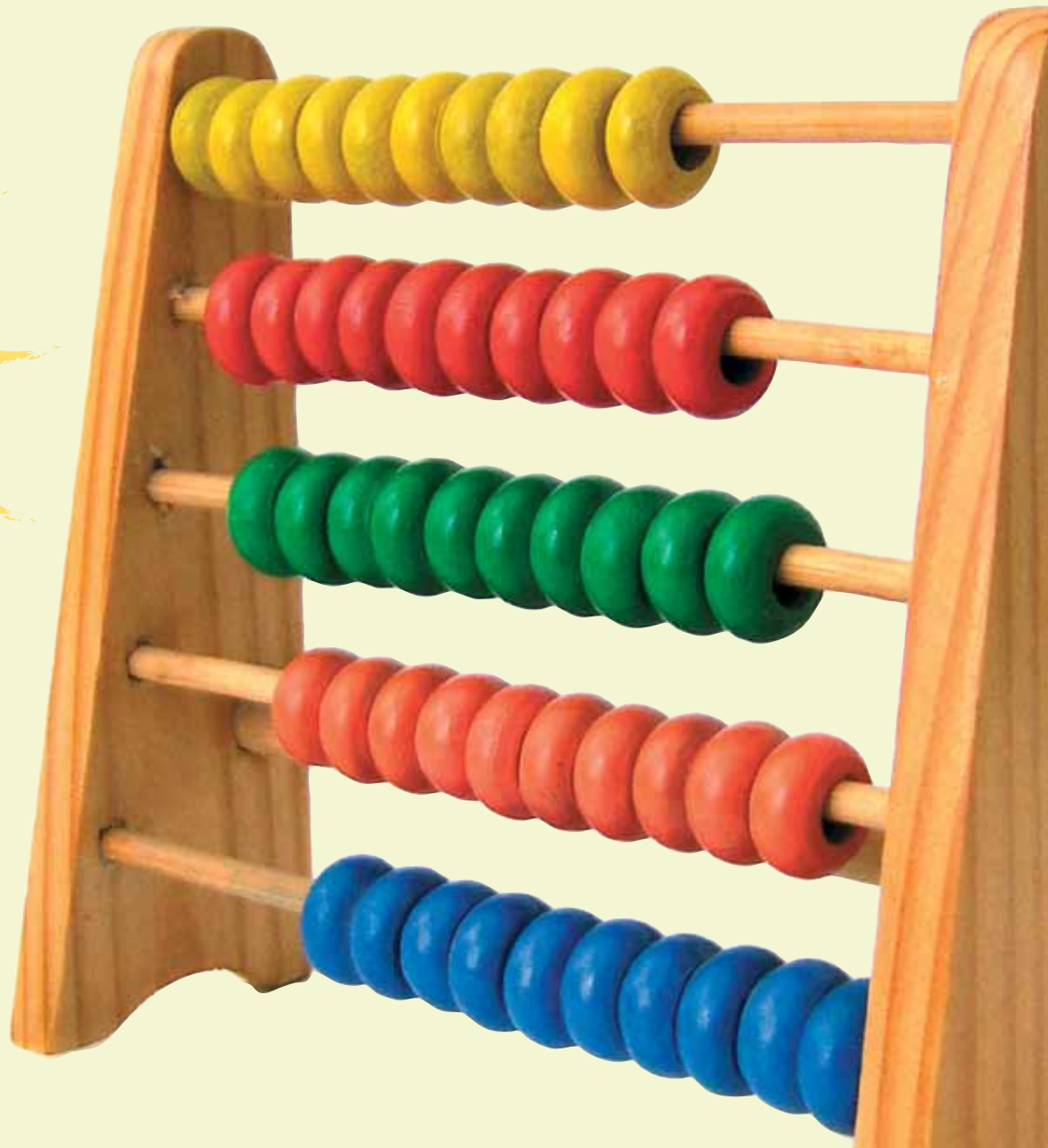
Adoption and finance

It is usual for adopters to assume full financial responsibility for their adoptive child. It is helpful therefore for prospective adopters to consider what arrangements they will make, once a child or children have been placed, to take account of the extra financial commitment and also the time commitment that the child will need from the new family. Adoptive families are eligible for Child Benefit.

In certain circumstances financial help is available in the form of an Approved Adoption Allowance. This is payable in response to the particular needs of the child or sibling group. It is subject to annual review and a financial assessment of the adopters.

The children most likely to be eligible for an allowance are older children, sibling groups, those with special needs, for instance, a disability, which will involve the family in extra expense.

Where an allowance is not payable adopters may be given financial help towards the purchase of needed equipment such as bedroom furniture.



The Steps

The Steps to Becoming an Adoptive Parent

Stage 1

- 1. Telephone us on 01259 450000 or complete the online form at our website. www.clacksweb.org.uk for more information**

We will send you an information pack.

- 2. Return the reply form included in this pack**

In order to give you more information we will invite you to an Information Evening and visit you at home.

- 3. Attend the information evening or receive a home visit**

At the information evening or home visit you will have the opportunity to ask questions and hear more about "the extras" in adoptive parenthood.

- 4. Learning more about adoption parenthood**

This will take place in a series of group sessions.

- 5. Attend application interview**

- 6. Complete the application form**

You should fill this in and return it to us. Once we have received it we will proceed to the next stage of the process.



The Steps

Stage 2

1. Disclosure (Scotland) and medical checks require to be undertaken

Disclosure (Scotland) checks will be carried out on you and other members of your family who are over the age of 16 years. Your family GP will undertake the medical check.

2. Personal assessment

The assessing social worker will undertake a detailed study of you and your family at home. Referees will also be interviewed regarding your suitability to adopt.

3. Panel

The assessment will be presented to the adoption panel. The panel will make a recommendation regarding your approval.

4. Agency decision maker

The head of service will make the decision as to whether or not to accept the adoption panel recommendation. This will then be sent to you in writing within three weeks after the panels recommendation.

5. Making a match

Clackmannanshire have an agreement with Falkirk and Stirling Councils and your details will be shared with them. This allows us to work together to match children and families.



Registration of Interest Form - Adoption

First Applicant:

Last Name or Family Name _____

First Name _____

Mr Mrs Ms Miss Other

Date of Birth _____

Religion _____

Occupation _____

Do you belong to an ethnic minority group?

Yes No If yes please give more details:

Do you require an interpreter? Yes No

If yes, which language?

Second Applicant:

Last Name or Family Name _____

First Name _____

Mr Mrs Ms Miss Other

Date of Birth _____

Religion _____

Occupation _____

Do you belong to an ethnic minority group?

Yes No If yes please give more details:

Do you require an interpreter? Yes No

If yes, which language?

Date of Marriage (if applicable) _____

Address _____

Post Code _____

Telephone number _____

E mail _____

Description of your home

Do you or your partner have a disability, which requires special provision (eg, hearing, mobility)?

Yes No

Your Child(ren)

Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Date of placement (if adopted) _____

Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Date of placement (if adopted) _____

Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Date of placement (if adopted) _____

Have you previously enquired about fostering or adoption or any form of caring for children?

Yes No If yes can you tell us where and when?

Are you currently receiving any medical treatment?

Yes No

If yes can you supply any further information about your condition(s)?

If you have answered yes to the above question, we may require our medical adviser to contact your GP and/or consultant for further information. If this is necessary we will ask you to sign a mandate giving your permission.

Do you or your partner smoke? Yes No

Is there anything else that you wish to bring to our attention, such as previous convictions?

We have read the criteria for Clackmannanshire's Fostering and Adoption Services and consider that we meet the criteria for eligibility.

First Applicant:

Signed _____

Date _____

Second Applicant:

Signed _____

Date _____