



South East Wales Adoption Service

Achieving More Together

Gwasaneth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru

Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd I

For Children - For Families - For Always

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SOUTH EAST WALES ADOPTION SERVICE

Pregnant and thinking about adoption? This leaflet has been written to begin to answer some questions you may have, such as:

- What are the choices?
- Finding out about adoption.
- Information and help.

If you are pregnant and thinking about adoption

If you have just found out that you are pregnant you may be feeling very confused and worried about the future, particularly if your pregnancy was unplanned. It will be a time for you to make some important decisions.



You may be thinking about whether you would be able to look after the baby yourself, perhaps with the help of your partner or family, or whether you wish to terminate your pregnancy or the possibility of adoption.

It may help you to decide if you can discuss your situation with the baby's father or with your own family, but it's also useful to talk to someone who is not directly involved such as a social worker or counsellor and to get some expert advice on your options. Whatever you decide, there are people who can help you work out what to do and how you feel about it. There are some useful organisation contact details at the end of the leaflet.

What is adoption? And what does it mean for me and my child?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for a child who can not live with their birth family. Adoption ends the legal relationship between the child and the birth parents and establishes a new one with the adoptive parents. The arrangements for placing children for adoption must be made by adoption agencies. All local authority social services departments have an adoption agency as well as some voluntary agencies. Although the adoption agency makes the arrangements and places the child with the prospective adopters, only a Court can make an adoption legally binding by making an Adoption Order.

When children are placed for adoption with a new family, as their prospective adopters they spend a number of weeks living together and getting to know each other. After the child has lived with them continually for at least 10 weeks, the new family can then apply to the Court for an Adoption Order. The Adoption Order makes the arrangement permanent. The adoption legally changes the child's parents forever; the child then becomes a full member of the adoptive family as if they had been born to the adopters.

If your child is adopted you will no longer have any legal rights as their parent and you may not be entitled to see them again.

Adoption means changing parents permanently, as this is such an important thing to happen in a child's life the law requires adoption agencies and Courts to put the child's long term welfare first when they make decisions about adoption.

Support for you

When you or someone on your behalf notifies Social Services that you would wish to consider adoption for your child, you will be visited by a social worker to discuss your plans and options. You also become entitled to see an Independent Birth Parent Support Worker. The role of the support Worker is to provide independent advice, guidance, counselling and emotional support to birth parents. The support worker will ensure that you understand the process and your rights and can make sure that your views are heard. You can also have the opportunity to speak to a member of the South East Wales Adoption Service who can give you information on how families are found for children.

Your social worker will have automatically referred you to the service when your child's plan included adoption.



An Independent Birth Parent Support Worker will contact you to offer to arrange a visit. It is up to you whether or not to meet them, but most parents find it useful and helpful. If you decided not to see them now you can change your mind any time in the future.

How is an adoption arranged?

If you decide that adoption is right for you and your baby; your social worker will ask you for some personal information about yourself, your family and your family's health. The social worker will also want to know about the father of your child and if it is possible to talk to him.

Although preparation for adoption can begin before your child is born, nothing will be definitely arranged until after the birth, plans may be made for who will look after the baby following its birth such as temporary foster carers. You will be completely free to change your mind.

Before the adoption agency can arrange an adoption for a child they must have either the parent's formal consent or a special order from a court called a placement order.

Once your child is born, you cannot give consent for your child to be placed for adoption until six weeks after the birth, however if you do not wish to look after the baby yourself you can give consent for your baby to be looked after on a fostering basis until six weeks have passed. During that time you will have the chance to think about whether you would like to see or spend time with your baby.

If you give consent to your child being placed for adoption, the adoption agency will then arrange to find a suitable family and place your child with prospective adopters.

Giving consent for an adoption

There are a number of steps and options that you need to think about before you give your consent to an adoption.

If you decide to 'consent' or 'give your permission' for your child to be adopted, there are a number of things you need to know.

- You cannot give your formal consent until your child is six weeks old.
- You can only give your formal consent to your child being placed for adoption and later adopted if the Local Authority do not have a care order or placement order or have applied for one in respect of your child.
- Both parents must consent for their child to be placed for adoption if they share parental responsibility for the child (see the section on 'Do both parents have to agree and give consent?' later for more details).
- You can withdraw your consent by notifying the adoption agency at any time up until the point where prospective adopters apply for an adoption order.

There are two stages to giving consent for adoption:

1. The first stage is deciding to give consent for the adoption agency to place your child with prospective adopters. You can give consent to placing your child with specific adopters who have already been identified or consent for the agency to place your child with adopters chosen by the agency.
2. The second decision is whether you wish to give your advance consent to the making of an adoption order in the future, at the same time you can say if you do not want to be notified when an application for an order is made.

You should talk through these options with your social worker to decide what the best option is for you and your child.

Can I change my mind?

You can withdraw your consent and ask for your child to be returned anytime by notifying the agency (Social Services), the adoption agency will notify the prospective adopters who must return the child within 14 days, however, if the prospective adopters have already applied to court for an adoption order or the Local Authority have since obtained a placement order, then your child cannot be returned to you without permission of the court. Once the adoption process has got to this advanced stage, it is unlikely the court will allow your child to return unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Although you can withdraw your consent up until a certain point, you must be very sure that when you give consent that you are certain that it is the right thing for you and your child. Changing your mind later once your child has been living with the prospective adopters can be very unsettling for you and your child and distressing for all concerned. For these reasons giving consent is taken seriously and you will be asked to sign consent papers which will be witnessed by an officer of the court (a Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service, CAFCASS officer) who will also want to ensure that you fully understand the implications of adoption.

Do both parents have to agree to adoption and give consent?

Consent to adoption must be given by both parents if they share parental responsibility. All mothers automatically have parental responsibility. The child's father only has parental responsibility in the following circumstances:

- if he was/is married to the mother at the time of the child's birth;
- he is named as the father on the child's birth certificate;

or

- if he has acquired parental responsibility for the child by applying to court.

If the father does not have parental responsibility then only the mother's consent is needed, however if the father later acquires parental responsibility then he can withdraw the consent if he chooses. If the child's father does not agree to an adoption then the court may have to decide whether it thinks adoption or a life with the father would be best for the child.

In all cases, the adoption agency and court will want to know his views on the proposed adoption of his child and if possible to have some information on the father, to be passed on to the adopters for the child's future. We know from adopted people how important information about their birth parents is to them.

Who might adopt my child?

There are many different types of adopters from different backgrounds and with different experiences. Some adopters are married, single or living together and some may already have children. The important thing is about matching the right family to each individual child's needs.

All adoptive families have to be thoroughly checked and assessed. We ask them for all sorts of information about themselves and their background and we try to make sure we understand what kind of upbringing they would offer your child.

We have to be certain that they will be able to meet your child's needs and care for him or her properly. A lot of thought goes into choosing the right family.

How are adoptive families found?

The social workers use a number of ways to find the right family for a child. Some adopters come from the local area and have been assessed by the South East Wales Adoption Service, and some come from other Local Authorities and agencies. In some cases where families cannot be found in the local area, the child is referred to the Wales Adoption Register, who will search for suitable adoptive families for the child. For some children, finding the right family requires featuring them in a special magazine for prospective adopters. If this needs to happen for your child your social worker will speak to you more about this.

Can I be involved in choosing who will adopt my child?

Although you cannot choose the family yourself, you can inform your social worker or Birth Parent support worker if there is anything special you would like us to have in mind when choosing a family for your child. You might for example want your child to have a particular religious or cultural upbringing, or you might be anxious that he/she should not be the only child in the new family, or that they should have the opportunity to develop any special interest such as singing or dancing. We cannot promise to do as you wish, but we will certainly take your wishes into account and do our very best to meet them.

Can I see or keep in touch with my child if he/she is adopted?



Depending on the circumstances, it is usually felt that it is in the best interest of most children to have some form of indirect contact with their birth family members. This is usually in the form of 'letterbox' contact.

Letterbox contact involves the birth family sending a letter and sometimes a photograph to the child once or twice a year. Depending on the child's age the child or the adoptive parent sends a letter in return to the birth family with news on the child's progress. These letters are sent to the South East Wales Adoption Service first who check that they are ok and then send them onto the adopter or birth family.

In some situations, it may be felt in the child's best interest to have face to face contact with their birth family. This could be with birth parents, grandparents, siblings or aunts and uncles etc. This, however, only usually happens where a child is older and there is a good bond to the birth family members.

In most cases, the contact arrangements are made by an agreement between the birth family, the adopters and Social Services. In some cases a 'contact order' can be made in Court to secure the arrangements in the future.

You will need to talk to you social worker or independent worker about your wishes for contact arrangements if your child is adopted.

If my child is adopted will they know about me?

All adopters are encouraged to explain to the child about their adoption, even if they are adopted as babies. To help ensure that your child understands about why they were adopted, the social worker will give the adopters written information and a 'life story' book for your child.

Most children as they are growing up like to hear about their birth parents and birth family and see photographs of them.

You can help your child with this by telling your social worker or independent worker as much as you can about yourself and your family. Information about you and your family's health will also be important for your child's future.

Sharing your personal information can often feel difficult; however the most important thing is that it will help your child in the future. Any information you have is important to your child.

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Adopted children and adults explain that knowing about their birth family is an important part of their identity. They like to know things about their birth parents, such as what they look like, what their hobbies and interests are, favourite colours, food, music and many everyday things, as well as the reason they were unable to live with them.

What your child is told about you in the future, you can contribute to now by sharing your information with the social worker or the independent support worker.

Will my child be given a new name?

In most cases, adopters are encouraged to keep the child's first name but the child's last name (the surname) is changed to the same as the adopters when the adoption order is made. Sometimes if the child is very young, the adopters may decide to change the child's first name as well as the surname. The final decision is with the adopters

What can happen in the future when my child is 18?

Once an adopted child has reached the age of 18 the law allows birth family to ask adoption agencies to contact an adopted person on their behalf. This is known as an intermediary service. Adoption agencies can try to trace an adopted person and then get in touch with them to ask if they would like to have contact with a member of their birth family. Anyone who is related by birth to an adopted person can ask for this service, for example birth parents, grandparents, siblings and aunts or uncles etc. When the adoption agency contacts the adopted person it is always up to the adopted person whether or not they want to accept contact. No contact details or information will be given to the birth relative unless the adopted person gives their permission. In some cases an adoption agency may decide not to make contact with an adopted person if they believe it may put the person at risk or is inappropriate. They would discuss the reasons with you.

When an adopted child reaches 18 they are legally entitled to have access to their original birth certificate which will have on it their original birth name (if it has been changed) and the full name of their birth parent and address at the time of the birth. Some adopted adults use this information to try and find their birth parents, or they can ask an adoption agency to find and contact their birth family on their behalf. However, not all adopted adults wish to trace their birth family, many wait a number of years until later adulthood and some do not wish to trace birth family at all.

There is also a national adoption contact register on which an adopted adult and their birth family can register their wish to get in touch. This only applies to adopted adults over the age of 18. The register will notify each party only if they both register and will depend on you providing an up to date address at all times. The contact details for the register and other similar organisations are at the back of the leaflet.

Coping after the adoption

Birth parents experience deep and often painful feelings at the loss of their child to adoption. Feelings of grief and sadness are natural. Support and counselling is available to all birth parents following an adoption. This counselling can be available at a time when you need it most. Sometimes it is needed immediately following an adoption, sometimes months or years later and sometimes at a number of repeated occasions. You can request independent counselling and support at any time by contacting the South East Wales Adoption Service on 01495 355766.

Summary of the stages towards adoption

Before Social Services can place your child for adoption and before anyone can adopt him or her, there are a number of stages that must happen first. At each stage your views will be taken into consideration.

1st stage – Adoption Report (CAR)

The social worker must write an adoption report about you, your family and your child. This is called the Child's Assessment Report (CAR).

2nd Stage – Adoption Panel

The child's CAR must then be sent to the Local Authority's Adoption Panel. The Adoption Panel are a group of professional and independent people who will meet and read the CAR and then make a recommendation on whether your child should be placed for adoption. This recommendation is passed to the 'decision maker' who is the Assistant Director who makes the Social Services' final decision.

3rd Stage – Giving Consent to Adoption

Before your child can be placed for adoption you will need to give formal signed consent. This will be witnessed by a CAFCASS officer (a court officer). You can not sign your consent until your child is at least 6 weeks old.

4th Stage – Finding adopters for your child

Social Services will begin to arrange for your child to be placed with an adoptive family. If your child is being adopted by the foster carers then the placement will change from a fostering placement to an adoptive placement. The prospective adoptive family that Social Services has found for your child will be presented to the Adoption Panel for recommendation and then approval for the particular placement to go ahead.

5th Stage – The child is placed for adoption

Following introductions and time spent getting to know one another; your child will go to live with the new prospective adoptive family.

6th Stage – Adoption Order

Once your child has lived with the prospective adoptive family for 10 weeks the prospective adopters can apply to the Court for an Adoption Order.

You will be notified when this happens unless you have said you do not want to be.

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The Judge will consider how well your child has settled with his or her new family and then in the vast majority of cases will make an Adoption Order. The Adoption Order is final and makes the adoptive family the new legal parents of the child and removes the legal rights from you.

Useful Contacts

To discuss your situation with an adoption social worker and for further advice, support or information please contact:

South East Wales Adoption Service
Tel: (01495) 355766
adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Organisations which can help if you are still undecided about continuing your pregnancy:

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS),
Austy Manor, Wootton Wawen, Solihull, West Midlands, B95 6BX
Tel: (01564) 793225
www.bpas.org
Information and counselling on unplanned pregnancy.

Brooke Advisory Centres, 421 Highgate Studios,
53-79 Highgate Road, London, NW5 1TL
Tel: 0800 018 5023
www.brooke.org.uk
Free confidential advice for people under 25.



Family Lives
Helpline: 0808 800 2222
E-mail: askus@familylives.org.uk
Website: www.familylives.org.uk/
Free support, information and advice about all aspects of family life

Adoption Organisations:

AFA Cymru
25 Windsor Place Cardiff CF10 3BZ
Telephone No.: 029 20761155
Website: www.afacymru.org/

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Adoption Contact Register

The Adoption Contact Register, Smedley Hydro, Trafalgar Road, Southport, PR8 2HH
Tel: 0870 243 7788
www.gro.gov.uk

Self-Help Organisations

Natural Parents' Network (NPN), 18 Bishops Way,
Stradbroke, Eye, Suffolk IP21 5JR
Tel: 0845 456 5031
www.n-p-n.co.uk

