

ADOPTION SUPPORT

Your guide to Adoption Support from Medway

Children adopted from care can have ongoing needs as a result of their early life experiences. You and your child may benefit from support at different times throughout childhood. This leaflet is a guide to the support you may be entitled to, both through government and local provision and how to access it.

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What are Adoption Support Services?

Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Adoption Support Regulations (2005) have been introduced that require local authorities to make a range of adoption support services available to meet the needs of people affected by adoption, including children and adults who are adopted, birth relatives, adoptive families, step parent adopters and inter-country adopters.

The Regulations also make provision for the support of contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth relatives.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) is the Head of Adoption Support and is a key point of contact for anyone who needs advice about adoption support.

In Medway we have a duty adoption social worker available every day who can discuss your particular situation and give advice.

Adoptive Parents

Who can ask for adoption support:

If your adopted son or daughter is under 18 years old, and you live in Medway, you may ask for an assessment of your adoption support needs if:

- Medway dealt with the adoption or
- you adopted through another adoption agency, Local Authority or have adopted from overseas and the adoption order was granted over three years ago.

If you adopted through Medway and live in another Local Authority, we will provide adoption support for three years after the adoption order is granted. Beyond three years, you should approach the Local Authority in which you live to ask for support. We would of course be happy to assist you in making contact with the correct person in your local authority.

Under the Adoption Support Regulations (2005) you are entitled to ask for an Assessment of your Adoption Support Needs. This assessment will explore your family's circumstances to identify your needs. Many requests for advice or support can be dealt with very quickly and families will be signposted to appropriate services. However, there are some children and families with more complex needs who may need a more detailed assessment before a decision is made about how to provide support.

Following assessment, an adoption support plan is written with the details of support that will be offered by Medway's Adoption Support Service or any other provision locally or nationally. You should be aware that there is no automatic entitlement to services but we will do all we can to meet your needs.

To request an Adoption Support Assessment, please contact the team on 01634 335676; adoption@medway.gov.uk and we will be in contact with you to discuss your request. If the situation is urgent, please ring and ask to speak to the duty adoption social worker.

From May 2015, all local authorities will have access to the **Adoption Support Fund**. This is a nationally established fund to which local authorities can apply to fund therapeutic support for families in need. It can only be accessed through an assessment by the local authority who will then apply to the fund for monies, which will be released to the local authority. We will discuss with you what therapeutic support you and your family might need and who would be the best provider of this support before we make an application.

First4adoption have more information on the fund (<http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/being-an-adoptive-parent/adoption-support/adoption-support-fund/>)

What does the government offer adoptive parents:

For you as an adopter:

- Many adopters are entitled to adoption leave and pay when their child is placed with them (www.gov.uk/adoption-pay-leave) The law is changing to make this entitlement more similar to maternity and paternity leave pay, and it will include the right to take time off when you are meeting your child before they move in with you.
- Adopters may have priority for council housing (www.gov.uk/council-housing) If you are living in council housing and claiming housing benefit or universal credit while waiting for a child to move in you can also apply for funding (Discretionary Housing Payments) so that you are not penalised financially while you have an empty spare room.

- You are entitled to a summary of your child's health from his or her local authority's medical adviser before he or she is placed with you and to a life story book to help your child understand his or her early life.

For your child:

- Schools are asked to give all children adopted from care priority access to schools, which means that your child should be able to attend whichever school you think best meets their needs. Guidance to school admission authorities can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admission-of-children-adopted-from-local-authority-care
- Your child will also attract the Pupil Premium – an additional £1900 for state-funded schools to help meet their needs. You will need to let the school know that your child is adopted so that the school can claim the pupil premium. This money will go into the school's budget and will not necessarily be spent directly on your child.
- From September 2014, if your child is 2 years old you can take up the offer of a free early education place. For further information about provision in Medway contact the Medway Family Information Service (www.medwayfisd.com/kb5/medway/enterprise/home.page) or search Family Information Service for your area.

What can Medway offer:

All local authorities provide a range of support services for children adopted from care.

In Medway these services include:

- Counselling, information and advice
- Advocacy with schools and medical services to access services or address problems
- Help with behavioural difficulties which can arise for a variety of reasons and help with enhancing adoptive parenting techniques.
- Help with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family
- Support groups for adopters with speakers on specific topics plus opportunities to meet other adopters
- Social events to enable groups of adopters and adopted children to get together
- Regular training to help adopters to meet the needs of their child, including Safe Base
- Adoption allowances to support adopters parenting large sibling groups, or children with special care needs
- Fortnightly parent and pre-school child group specifically for adoptive parents
- PAC monthly surgeries for counselling on all aspects of adoption
- Regular newsletter to keep you up to date with news

Access to some of these services depends on your circumstances but you can ask for an assessment at any time, no matter how long after the adoption.

When you contact the team to request an assessment, a social worker will visit you to discuss your situation and what you or your child needs. Sometimes if what you require is very straightforward, arrangements can be made for you to receive the agreed support immediately. In other cases, the social worker will need to visit you to discuss your needs in more detail. When the assessment is finished, the social worker will draw up an adoption support plan with details of the services you need and what Medway can provide.

Although we will always try to provide access to whatever specialist therapeutic services we identify as necessary, it is not always financially possible. Since 2015 local authorities have been able to apply to the Adoption Support Fund for funding for specialist assessment and/ or therapeutic intervention; the fund does not provide funding for services which should be accessed via universal services.

In future you may also be able to purchase services from a voluntary adoption agency or adoption support agency through the provision of a “personal budget”.

Contact arrangements

Most contact arrangements are usually arranged before an Adoption Order is made, with a signed agreement outlining the type and frequency of contact and with whom.

There are different types of contact:

- Letterbox Contact –This enables indirect contact to be maintained between adopted children and their birth families through the exchange of written information between you and your child’s birth relatives. This is a confidential service which is managed by the Adoption Support Service in Medway.
- Direct Contact - This is face to face contact between your family and your child’s birth family. We can help in preparing all parties for contact, and with practical arrangements, supervision of contact if required and sometimes help with expenses.

We also offer a mediation service if there are disputes, or if changes in contact need to be agreed.

Financial Support

Prior to placement: It is expected that most families will have planned for and will be able to meet the costs of receiving a child into their family. However Medway may consider contributing to the costs if your child has very specific special needs that will bring additional expense or you are taking a sibling group.

Introductions can be an expensive time and Medway will assist with costs if necessary.

We can provide up to £50 per couple to include accommodation [in motel type hotel accommodation] and food costs per 24 hours during the introductions period.

Alternatively we will pay for rental of a holiday cottage where this is more cost effective.

After placement: Following an Assessment of your Adoption Support Needs, financial support may be agreed depending on the specific needs of your child.

This may be in the form of a lump sum payment or ongoing regular payments. These are often time limited in the early stages of the placement. All ongoing regular payments are reviewed annually to take into account any changes in household income and expenses.

Financial support paid to adoptive families is exempt from tax and is disregarded when calculating eligibility for tax credits and welfare benefits.

Medway Adoption Team applies a means test when making financial payments. The provision of financial support is not an automatic entitlement. The Adoption Social Worker will look at your finances with you and help you to find out if you are entitled to any tax credits or other welfare benefits. We expect that adoptive families will apply for universal state benefits to which they are entitled.

Adopted children and young people

If you are under 18, you are entitled to ask for an Assessment of your Adoption Support Needs. You might wish to do this if you were dissatisfied with contact arrangements for example, have difficulties within your adoptive family or wish to discuss something about your adoption.

If you want access to your birth records, we suggest that you discuss this with your adoptive parents. When you are 18 you will be entitled to see your adoption file.

Adoption Support has a separate Leaflet addressed to children and young people where we explain a bit more about how adoption support could help you. Please write telephone or e-mail the Adoption Team at the address given at the back of this booklet.

Adopted Adults

Looking for birth records for adopted adults living in Medway

If you are just beginning to think about looking for your birth records and don't know where to start, you can talk to us on the telephone and we will be happy to advise you about the steps you need to take.

A duty adoption social worker is available every day on 01634 335676.

If you are a Medway resident and you were adopted before November 1975, and have no information about your birth details or the agency that placed you for adoption, you will need to apply to the General Registrar's Office (GRO) for a copy of your birth record. The GRO holds information on all adoption records and will be able to help you. You will be asked to attend a counselling interview before any details are given to you. This interview will help you to understand more about accessing your birth details and will support you through this process.

You may choose to have your interview with an Adoption Social Worker in Medway and if so we will allocate your case to a worker who will contact you to make an appointment to meet.

Although it is not compulsory, we also offer a counselling interview to adults adopted after November 1975 to ensure that they are best supported through this process.

Anyone adopted after 30th December 2005 must apply to their adoption agency for access to information, including birth records counselling.

There is no legal requirement to undergo counselling although it is recommended.

Please see the list of organisations and addresses at the back of this booklet.

Adopted Adults and Adoption Records

Adopted adults are entitled to have access to their adoption records from the age of 18 years. Like all Adoption Agencies, Medway is legally required to keep adoption records for 100 years.

If you are 18 or over, were adopted through Medway and still live in the area, and you want to know more about the circumstances of your adoption, the Adoption Team will be able to help and advise you. If you were adopted through Medway and now live outside the area, we will direct you to the appropriate local authority who can help you.

Your adoption record may contain sensitive information about the circumstances of your adoption. Hearing about your past may provoke emotions that make you feel anxious, excited or scared. We will support you when you read information from your records and take things at your pace. Our role is to support and advise you and discuss the right course of action for you.

If you want to access your records, you need to contact the Adoption Team at the address at the back of this booklet, giving your adoptive name, date of birth, and your birth name if you know it. We will need proof of your identity before we access confidential records. We can then access your records from the appropriate authority.

Intermediary Service

Adopted adults may wish to make contact with their birth relatives. Research shows that approaches to adopted people and birth relatives are much more successful if made through an intermediary. Reunions can be very emotionally demanding. We are available if you would like to discuss your feelings or concerns.

We will support you while you try to trace your birth relatives and can sometimes help more directly with searching. If you have traced a birth relative and would like help in approaching them we are able to offer you an intermediary service.

If you do not wish any contact to be made with you by a birth relative, you may register a 'qualified' or 'absolute' veto with the agency that dealt with your adoption. You may also register a wish for 'no contact' on the General Registrar's Adoption Contact Register. Counselling support is available from the Adoption Team.

Birth Relatives

Who can ask for Adoption Support

Medway Adoption Team works with birth parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles who have been separated from their relatives through adoption.

What kind of Support is available?

- Birth Parent Support Service
- Support with contact arrangements
- Adoption support needs assessment
- Intermediary Services

Birth Parent Support Service

The Birth Parent Support Service is an independent service intended to give support to birth parents when the plan for their child is adoption. It will support parents practically and emotionally through the process of adoption.

For more details of this service and whether it could help you, contact bpss@family-action.org.uk or look at the Family Action website for more general information www.family-action.org.uk/bpss

Contact arrangements with children placed for adoption by Medway

All contact arrangements should be agreed before your child is adopted and the frequency and type of contact and who is involved will be confirmed in writing.

There are two types of contact arrangements:

Indirect Letterbox contact-

Birth and adoptive families share information about the child by post. If you have a written agreement for a Letterbox exchange with an adopted child and/or their adopters and need help in writing a letter you can contact the Adoption Team for guidance. If you have not received your expected contact item, you can contact the Team who will follow this up on your behalf.

If any mail cannot be forwarded for any reason (if you or the adopted family have moved) it will be held confidentially on a letterbox file in Medway. Please ensure that you keep us informed of any change of address.

Direct Contact –

You meet your child and their new family from time to time. We can provide places to meet, supervisors who will help the meeting go well and financial help with travelling expenses if you need it.

If you have an agreement for direct contact with an adopted child which involves the Adoption Team, we will contact you to make the necessary arrangements about the date, place and time that the contact is due to take place.

If you want contact with your adopted child

You can contact the Adoption Team and give them the names and dates of birth of the children with whom you would like contact. The Adoption Team will look at information in the child's/children's adoption files before making contact with the adoptive parents at their last known address.

The welfare and the wishes of the child and their adoptive family will be the prime consideration. It may not be possible to make contact with the adoptive family if they have moved or do not reply to letters or phone calls.

Adoptive families are only obliged to maintain contact with birth family members through the Local Authority if the court made a Contact Order when the Adoption Order was granted. If the adoptive family does not agree to contact, you can send letters, cards and photographs which will be kept on the child's file. The child will receive these if he or she decides to access their birth records after the age of 18.

Adoption Support Needs Assessment

If you are a birth relative of a child who has been placed for adoption, you can ask for an Assessment of your Adoption Support Needs to consider any contact arrangements that you have with the adopted child or any needs for individual counselling.

We have an agreement with the Post Adoption Centre in London who provide counselling and support to birth family members locally in Medway and we will let you have the details of who to contact to make an appointment.

Tracing Adopted Adults

Medway Adoption Team will support you through the process of tracing your relative who was adopted but cannot usually do the tracing for you. We will work with any other Adoption Support Agency, Adoption Agency, Local Authority or the General Registrar's Office to assist you in your search.

We will provide you with information about the contact register, which enables you to register your details, making links with your adopted relative possible.

Intermediary Service

If your adopted son or daughter has been traced, we are able to offer you an intermediary service to help you in approaching them, if the adoption took place before 12th November 1975. The intermediary will be a Social Worker from the Adoption Support Team who will be able to obtain information about your son's or daughter's adoption and will act as an independent third person to help you make contact with them.

Research shows that approaches to adopted people and birth relatives, are much more successful if made through an intermediary. Reunions can be very emotionally demanding. We offer a service if you would like to discuss your feelings or concerns.

What can you do if you are not happy with our service?

Please contact the Adoption Support Team and we will send you a Leaflet explaining the process of what you need to do to complain

Useful Organisations:

Please contact the Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) and Adoption Support Team at:

**Medway Adoption Team
Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
Kent ME4 4TR**

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01634 335676

adoption@medway.gov.uk

There are a number of organisations that can give advice and guidance on all aspects of adoption support. The list below is not exhaustive

Adoption UK

www.adoptionuk.org.uk

BAAF	www.baaf.org.uk
First4Adoption	www.first4adoption.org.uk
PAC-UK	www.pac-uk.org
General Register Office	www.gro.gov.uk
After Adoption	www.afteradoption.org.uk
Adoption Search and Reunion	www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk