

Adopting a Kingston Child



This fact sheet is for anyone interested in adopting a child through the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. It gives general information about adoption and the adoption process, the agency's expectations of prospective adopters and how to obtain further information from us or other adoption agencies. It should help you decide if adoption is right for you and if the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames is the right adoption agency for you to use.

The Adoption Team

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, in its role as an adoption agency, provides a service for the children in our care who, for various reasons, are unable to live with their birth parents and need new permanent families.

We are part of the South West London Adoption Consortium, which includes the neighbouring Boroughs of Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Action for Children, a voluntary adoption agency. These five agencies combine resources to provide many of our adoption services. While our primary aim is to place Kingston children with adopters that we have assessed and approved, children from the Consortium boroughs are sometimes placed with our adopters.

The children

The most recent legislation, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, put the needs of children above everything else. The welfare of the child is always most important when an adoption agency or the courts are making any decisions about them. Decisions on matters such as placement for adoption, contact and adoption support will be driven by the child's needs.



All children needing new families have experienced loss, separation and trauma. To varying degrees, their early experiences will have affected their physical, emotional and cognitive growth and development. Many are insecure and have very low self esteem. Indeed, it is now recognised that even newborn babies who have been separated from their birth mothers are traumatized by this experience and need extra care and emotional support as they grow. Understandably therefore, adopted children not only need love and stability, they also need a higher level of nurturing, reassurance and patience than securely attached birth children.

Nationally there are few babies in need of adoptive homes and although birth parents may request adoption for their child, this is now quite rare. Most of the children in the care of Kingston council have been removed from their birth families because of serious concerns about their care. Many have suffered early neglect; some have experienced some form of abuse and are subject to Court Orders. Each year a relatively small number of these children need adoptive families.

Court proceedings are usually complex and protracted and children may remain in temporary foster care for a year or more, before permission to place the child with adoptive parents is granted. As a consequence, although we occasionally place babies and younger children, the average age in Britain for children being placed with adopters is around four years old. We have children with special needs, those whose future development is uncertain and children of mixed heritage. We also need adopters who can consider school age children and, because we try to keep brothers and sisters together, those who can consider adopting sibling groups.

Kingston Adoption Team's priority with regard to recruitment of potential adopters varies and is dependent on the needs of the children we are involved with at any given time.

Currently we need prospective adopters who could consider:

- Children from black and minority ethnic groups and with different cultural and religious backgrounds. These children require an adoptive family who can reflect or promote and respect their heritage
- Sibling groups - we always consider children's individual needs and look at the quality of the sibling relationship. If appropriate we will always try to place brothers and sisters together in the same family. The ages and needs of siblings can be very different and the new family will have to cope with several stages of child development at once – quite a challenging task
- Young children, below school age, where there is some developmental delay and where there may be some health concerns. The birth parents of some of our children have misused drugs or alcohol and/or have serious mental health problems, which may affect the child
- Older, school age children - some of these children have experienced years of neglect and/or abuse and now need the security of a permanent adoptive home
- Children with a disability - children with a range of learning and physical disabilities need adoptive families. This group can include for example, children with cerebral palsy or children who have been subject to injury or foetal alcohol syndrome
- Relinquished babies or children. Occasionally, birth parents have felt unable to care for their child and feel an adoptive family would provide the best possible care and security.

All the children placed for adoption have an arrangement for contact with their birth families. For most children this would be indirect contact (i.e letters and possibly

photographs once or twice a year) through our Letter Box Service. This preserves the confidentiality of the adoptive placement. Occasionally, and if it is felt to be in the child's best interest, the plan may include some form of face-to-face contact with a member of the birth family. This could be a birth parent, grandparent or sibling and such arrangements are carefully monitored, reviewed and when appropriate, supervised.

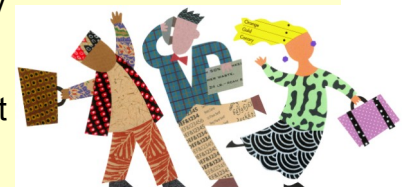
All adopted children need to have age-appropriate information about their birth family in order to understand their background and why they moved from their birth family into their adoptive family. Children placed with adopters will have a Life Story Book and a Later Life Letter that will help you to explain their history at appropriate stages of development. They need adoptive parents who have an honest, open and sensitive attitude to their birth family. In most instances, either during the introductory period or in the initial stages of placement, a one-off supervised meeting between a child's birth family and the prospective adopters is arranged.

N.B. As all of the children we place for adoption originate from the Royal Borough of Kingston, we need adopters who live outside of this area. This avoids various problems that would arise if the birth and adoptive families live in the same neighbourhood. Ideally prospective adopters should live no more than an hour's drive away.

Who can adopt?

We welcome enquiries from people of varying backgrounds, ethnicities and different sexual orientation. A couple, either married, in a civil partnership or in a stable, long-term relationship, may apply to adopt jointly, and individuals may apply to adopt alone.

There is no upper age limit, but by law applicants must be at least 21 years of age,



Currently, we are particularly keen to hear from those of black, mixed heritage, and other ethnic minority groups, and those who would consider:

- ü **older children**
- ü **brothers and sisters**
- ü **children with special needs or uncertain development**

As previously mentioned, we recruit adopters outside of Kingston Borough, but usually no more than an hour's drive away. Occasionally we recruit from a wider geographical area to meet the placement needs of specific children.

If you are a Kingston resident you are welcome to attend our Information Meeting. We can also offer you an Adoption Counselling Interview and we can advise about approaching other adoption agencies.

A prospective adopter **must** meet the following legal eligibility criteria:

- Habitual residency or domicile – if you are in a couple then one of you must have their permanent home in the British Isles (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) or both of you must have been living in the British Isles for at least one year, ending with the date of the application to the Court (not the adoption agency) for an Adoption Order. If you are planning to adopt alone, the same residency requirements apply.
- Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau check - if you or a member of your household has committed, or been cautioned for, certain offences at the age of 18 or over—for example, an offence against a child or a violent offence—you may not be considered as being suitable to adopt a child.

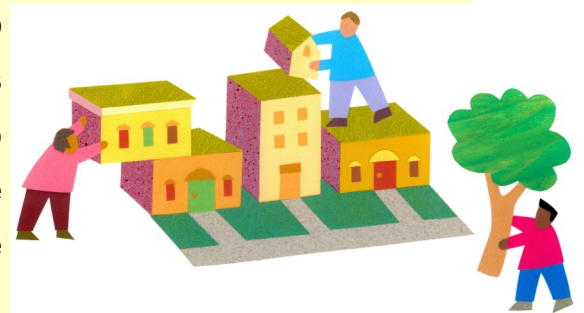
If you have any doubt about whether you meet these conditions, you could seek legal advice.

Other criteria

- Single applicants are welcome, and for joint applications, the agency must consider the stability and permanence of the relationship of all couples who wish to adopt. This applies whether the couple are married, have entered into a civil partnership or are of the same or of different sex and are living together in an enduring relationship. The strength and quality of the relationship is more important than length of time together, but we would need to feel that it is an enduring one
- It is unusual to consider prospective adopters who have not undergone medical investigation into their infertility or inability to have a birth child. Our experience

suggests that it is important for all prospective adopters to have either completed treatment some months prior to considering adoption or have made a decision not to proceed with assisted conception

- Prospective adopters who have chosen not to have a family of their own by birth will be considered, but their circumstances will need to be explored thoroughly during the adoption process
- Prospective adopters with birth children or adopted children will be considered but research suggests that where children are already part of a family, placing a child of a similar age does not lead to a successful placement. Because of the extra needs of adopted children, we recommend an age gap of at least three or four years and that the child placed for adoption should be younger than any children already in the family
- The health of prospective adopters is considered during the assessment process. A couple or individual wishing to adopt a child must meet the eligibility criteria in this area and all applicants undergo a full medical as part of an adoption assessment
- The financial circumstances of applicants are also considered as part of an adoption assessment. It is expected that prospective adopters would be able to provide for any child placed, although in some circumstances some financial support may be available.(See financial section below)



- We are unlikely to consider applicants who smoke for children under the age of two because of the known dangers of smoke inhalation to young and vulnerable children. In all placements, health factors relating to the child will be given special attention and the particular risks that might arise if placed with smokers must be considered. The views of our medical adviser will always be sought. This policy is based on the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Practice Note 30 "*Smoking and Children.*"

Financial support

- Some children may be eligible for financial adoption support. In Kingston, children deemed eligible are: older children, sibling groups of two or more children; children from Black and minority ethnic groups (because of the difficulty in identifying placements), and young children with identified special needs
- In exceptional circumstances, other children may be deemed to attract adoption financial support, following consideration of the assessment of their adoption support needs at Adoption Panel.

N.B. The allowance is based on the child's needs and special circumstances, not on the prospective adopter's financial status, and it is subject to an annual means test.



The adoption process

Children in our care have all had a difficult start, and we now have a duty to ensure that we find the best possible adoptive parents for them. There are undoubtedly extra elements and challenges involved in being an adoptive parent and for your sake, as well as the child's, we need to be certain that you are aware of these differences and that you are fully informed. A Criminal Records Bureau and other statutory checks and references also have to be processed. With this in mind, the selection, preparation and assessment process has to be very thorough, so becoming an adoptive parent takes time and commitment from you. From making an initial enquiry with us to being approved is likely to take about 12 months.

As a first step, if you are still interested in adopting a Kingston child, please fill out the online Adoption Enquiry Form or contact the Adoption Duty Officer on 020 8547 5004. The Duty Worker will take further details from you, complete an **Initial Enquiry Form**, give you more information and answer any of your queries.

The process will then continue as follows:

- If, after speaking to a member of the Adoption Team and reading through all the information you wish to find out more about adopting through Kingston, you will be invited to attend the **Adoption Information Evening**. These sessions are run jointly with the adoption workers from the London Borough of Sutton and are currently held twice a year. This meeting will give you an opportunity to find out more about adoption from agency staff and also to hear from adoptive families about their experience of the adoption process and parenting an adopted child. Those who attend will be better able to decide if adoption is for them
- Prospective applicants who wish to be considered further can request an interview and if you appear to meet our current recruitment criteria you will be offered an individual **Adoption Counselling Interview**. This interview will usually be held in your home and it gives you the chance to ask any further questions and gives us the opportunity of learning more about your circumstances in order to make a preliminary assessment about your suitability to adopt. (Kingston residents can also attend the Information Meeting and will be offered an interview but we would not be able to continue with your application)
- If you wish to progress further and if we feel that you have the qualities needed to parent some of the children currently in our care and requiring adoptive placements, you will be asked to complete a formal **Application Form**. If we decide not to proceed with your application, you will be informed in writing and advised of the options open to you
- While your application form is being processed you will be invited to attend an **Adoption Preparation Group**. These sessions are currently organised at least three times a year by the various members of the South West London Adoption Consortium, and depending on timing, you could be invited to attend any of these. Kingston and Sutton will jointly facilitate some of these groups, and this takes place over five days – usually two Saturdays and three weekdays. Applicants are expected to

attend all sessions. Merton and Richmond organise the other groups and although the content is the same, the format and frequency of meetings will be slightly different

- Once you have completed the preparation course, the Adoption Worker begins the **home study assessment**. Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks are initiated and we will begin to take up personal, financial and status references and other checks and ask you to undergo a full medical
- The preparation and home study period is a very thorough and lengthy one, usually taking about eight months. At times the process may feel very intrusive, but it is essential for the welfare and safety of the child that a consistent and thorough assessment is conducted. A comprehensive assessment should ensure that adopters have the capacity to meet the needs of any child placed with them, have a good understanding of the impact of the experiences the child has had prior to coming into the care system, and are able to respond to the lifelong commitment and issues associated with adoption
- At the end of this assessment period the social worker will complete the **Prospective Adopter's Report**. Applicants, who are given a copy of the completed report, will have had the opportunity of contributing to this throughout the assessment process, and are invited to add their own comments before it is presented to the Adoption Panel.



The Adoption Panel

The Prospective Adopters Report is presented to the **Adoption Panel** - a group of professionals, including a medical and legal adviser, and others with an interest in, or with personal experience of adoption. Collectively, they make a recommendation about your suitability to adopt, or they could defer if they feel more information is required, or if certain issues need further exploration. You will be invited to attend the Panel meeting, along with your Adoption Worker, in order to support your application. The Panel's recommendation for your approval has to be ratified by the Adoption Agency Decision Maker within seven days and you will then be formally notified, in writing.

The Royal Borough of Kingston's Adoption Panel meets monthly. When assessing prospective adopters for approval, its key functions are:

- To ensure all the relevant information has been collected
- To ensure all key steps have been taken by the agency
- To consider all the information about each application
- To provide the agency with a recommendation about suitability to adopt



The Panel also can give advice to social workers undertaking home study assessments.

The three main Panel duties in connection with placing a child with approved prospective adopters are:

- To consider the proposed adoption plans for a child
- To consider the suitability of prospective adopters to adopt a child
- To consider the placement of a child with particular prospective adopters: The 'Matching' Panel

All panel recommendations go to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker for a decision to be made. If the Decision Maker decides not to accept the Panel's recommendation, they will discuss this with another senior person in the agency who is not a member of Panel, and record the outcome.

If the Agency Decision Maker decides against approving you as suitable to adopt a child, he or she must write to you giving the reasons. You then have 40 working days to decide whether to accept the decision, to make representations to the agency or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for fresh consideration by one of its panels.

Placing a child

After your approval as a prospective adopter, your adoption worker will remain in contact with you and discuss any children from Kingston, and occasionally from within our consortium, who are waiting for a new family and may be considered as a suitable 'match'.

If, after three months, there are no suitable children within Kingston or the Consortium, your details will be submitted to the Adoption Register, and you could then be considered for a child living in any area of England and Wales.

Whether you are being considered for a Kingston child or a child from any other agency, your adoption worker will support and advise you throughout the process. Your Prospective Adopters Report will be sent to the child's social worker and information about the child, the Child's Permanence Report, will be shared with you. If you and the child's social worker wish to proceed further, a meeting will be arranged so that you can have further discussions directly with the child's social worker.



The social worker may be visiting several prospective adopters and will choose the adopter(s) who are be the most likely to meet the child's needs. If you are selected at this stage you will have the opportunity of talking to the medical adviser and meeting the child's foster carer before making a final decision. You would not meet the child at this stage, but will see photographs and usually a DVD. If you wish to progress with this placement, the Child's Permanence Report, the Prospective Adopters Report, the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan will be presented to the Adoption Panel, and you will again be invited to attend, The Adoption Panel will make the recommendation about the suitability of this 'match' and again this recommendation must be ratified by the Agency Decision Maker within seven days.

There are various meetings and introductions which are very carefully planned and reviewed before the child moves to their new home. The child's social worker and the adoption worker will continue to visit you and statutory reviews will be held at regular intervals to discuss the child's progress. These continue until the child is formally adopted.

The Adoption

Your application to the court to adopt cannot be considered until the child has lived with you for at least 10 weeks. The timing of this is discussed and agreed at the child's statutory reviews. A comprehensive report (an Annex A) will be prepared by the social workers for submission to the court. A date for the Final Hearing will be set at the Direction Hearing. Once the Adoption Order has been granted, you become the legal parent of the child/ren. Following this, a second Celebratory Hearing is arranged and everyone is invited to attend, including the child/ren and the social workers.

Adoption Support Services

Working with our Consortium partners, the Adoption Team provides a comprehensive and continually developing range of adoption support services for children, adoptive parents, birth relatives and anyone who has been affected by adoption. This includes counselling, information and advice, support groups, training courses and workshops.

We also hold regular groups for adoptive families, teenagers and children and organise an annual adoption party for adopted children and their families.

We administer a confidential Letter Box Service to facilitate indirect contact between birth families and adoptive parents on behalf of their children and we also facilitate, support and supervise direct contact arrangements.

Further Information can be found in our fact sheet: *Adoption Support in the Royal Borough of Kingston*.



What now?

If you wish to learn more about adopting through Kingston and would like to attend an **Adoption Information Meeting** please complete our online Adoption Enquiry Form or contact us by telephone, email or letter.

Further reading

Adopting a Child, a book published by BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) provides essential information and an up-to-date list of adoption agencies. This can be obtained from www.baaf.org.uk or call 020 74212604 (Publications).

Specific information about the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and general information about adoption can be found at the Department for Education website: www.education.gov.uk

Contact us:

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Guildhall 2, High Street
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Telephone: 020 8547 5004

Email: adoption@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames operates an equal opportunities policy in relation to its employees and all its services.

We undertake a monitoring exercise on all prospective adoptive parents who approach Kingston about adoption, to ensure that the service is administered fairly. This is why details are asked for concerning gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and any disabilities when an initial enquiry is made to Kingston.

If you would like to make a comment or complaint about our service you may do so through our website or by telephoning Children's Services on 020 8547 5004 or emailing learningandchildren@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Kingston
Children & Young People's Trust
Making a Difference Together

