



GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU  
Bae'r Gorllewin  
Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE



Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Cenedlaethol

National  
Adoption  
Service

# Adoption Information Pack





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# Welcome!

## Thank you for taking the time to read our information pack



Here at Western Bay we are always interested in talking to people who are considering adoption. Whether you are just wanting to find out a little more or are ready to start straight away we hope you find this pack useful.

We have a dedicated team of social workers who bring with them many years of experience in assessing and supporting adoptive parents. They are there to answer any questions you may have and to talk to you about the adoption process.

In this information pack you can find out more about the adoption process and what to expect. We'll answer our 'Frequently Asked Questions' and give you some suggestions as to where to find further information and resources. Adoption is completely individual and personal, and we are always here and happy to have a chat about any queries that aren't covered in this pack.

Because we recognise most families will need adoption support at some point, this pack will also tell you more about the ongoing support and advice we offer to families.

### Contents



- About WBAS
- What is adoption?
- Our children
- Who can adopt?
- The process
- Wales Early Permanence
- Adoption myths and frequently asked questions
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## Who are we?

Our service is made up of 4 parts who all work closely together to ensure we provide all of our families with support through every step. At this stage you are most likely to speak with a member of our Recruitment and Assessment team – the Social Workers in this team are responsible for supporting, assessing and matching our prospective adoptive families. We also have our team of Family Finders – their role is to act on behalf of children for whom adoption is required. You will meet these workers at the point of exploring a match with a child or children.

Our Adoption Support team is rightly so the largest part of our service, and you will likely come across some of the workers in this team during training events during your assessment and once you have children placed with you for adoption. They are here to support you and your family throughout your lifetime. The final component of our service is our Therapy team – who are able to offer advice and support to families who require it throughout their journey.

We aim to provide the very best services for adoption – from point of enquiry onwards. Our aim is to ensure that children are linked and matched with the families who can best meet their needs.

## Why choose WBAS

- Adopter preparation training ✓
- Adopter buddy system ✓
- Coffee mornings ✓
- Playgroups ✓
- Support groups ✓
- Evening workshops ✓
- Youth groups and activities for adopted young people ✓
- Signposting and support for accessing services ✓
- Understanding the Child consultations ✓
- BUSS (Building Underdeveloped Sensory Systems) playgroups ✓
- In-house therapy team ✓
- Dedicated life journey work team ✓
- Contact team ✓
- Theraplay ✓
- Therapeutic parenting courses ✓



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# What is adoption?

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Adoption is a legal way of providing permanent new families for children who cannot be brought up by their own birth families. It is a decision that can only be made by a Judge and is only considered when every other possible alternative has been explored. The reasons for this decision being made are usually because a child cannot be kept safe within their birth family, and/or their birth family are unable to meet their needs.

An adoption order means that the adopted child becomes a full member of the new family and once granted cannot be reversed. The making of an adoption order should not be seen as an 'end' or a 'beginning' but as part of a life cycle for some children that includes birth and adoptive families. It is important that families are open and celebrate adoption being their story from the very beginning. Children should grow up knowing that their family was formed through adoption, and being helped to make sense of their time with their birth and foster families before this. Being adopted should provide the child with a loving, stable, caring family throughout childhood and beyond.

We recognise that if you make a decision to adopt it will be one of the most important in your life. Adoption may not always be easy but it can be extraordinarily rewarding. Once you are approved to adopt you may then have to wait before a child is placed with you, because we take great care to make the right match between a child and his or her future adoptive family. When any child who is placed with you has successfully settled in your family, the Court will make an Adoption Order. At the point of the Adoption Order being granted you will become the child's legal parent and the child's birth certificate will be updated to reflect this.



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## The children

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Our children need adoptive families who can provide what all children need – love, consistency and security – and who also have the ability to meet the additional care and parenting needs of children who have experienced neglect, loss and trauma in their early lives.

All of our children have experienced adverse early life experiences, as this is what will have led to a Court intervening and making the decision to find an adoptive family. These adverse early life experiences could take a variety of forms including – neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, parental mental health, parental substance or alcohol use and domestic violence (this list is not exhaustive).

Every child is an individual but all children who are placed for adoption have one thing in common: they need consistent time and attention, from families who will care for them and help them thrive throughout their childhoods and who will continue to support them in their adult lives. The children we place for adoption can be any age, often between 1 and 8 years old (but occasionally younger, or older). We are especially keen to hear from people who feel able to consider adopting an 'older child' (by which we mean over around 3 years of age), children with disabilities or health needs and sibling groups.

## Contact in adoption: Making sense of the past

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Experience has shown that all adopted children, regardless of their ages, benefit from knowing age appropriate information about their birth families. This information can be given to them in all sorts of ways at different stages in their lives, and this is an important part of helping an adopted child to develop a strong sense of identity.

All adopted children will have some form of contact with the most significant members of their birth families as they are growing up.



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Adopted children need to know and understand their history and we no longer live in an age when the facts of adoption are kept secret from children. Photos and a life story book are important to help children to make sense of what happened in the past and to help them remember important people who were involved earlier in their lives. This can be vital in a child's developing sense of identity and help them to integrate the past with the present. Having ongoing contact with birth relatives, once they are placed for adoption, will also play an important role in helping children to make sense of their past.

Contact between a child and their birth family (and others who have been important in their lives) must always be considered when a child is placed for adoption. What is right for an individual child varies and an individual contact plan is made for each child. The child's needs are central to any plan. All adopters have thorough preparation and training and will be offered plenty of support to assist in the contact arrangements proposed by the Local Authority.

Indirect 'letterbox' contact, is an exchange of written information between the adoptive parent and birth family and is handled through a central point, within Western Bay Adoption Service. In this way, the addresses are kept confidential and any inappropriate content can be managed.

Adopters are usually asked to send letters and photographs to the birth family, on at least an annual basis. A letter might include, for example, milestones a child has achieved during the year, their physical health and progress at school. Social workers encourage birth families to reply to adopters to keep them informed of birth family events.

If appropriate, adopters maybe offered a one-off meeting with birth parents, sometimes prior to or after a child is placed with you for adoption. Adopters find this helps when writing subsequent letters to the child's birth family, and when answering children's questions in future, knowing who they are writing to.



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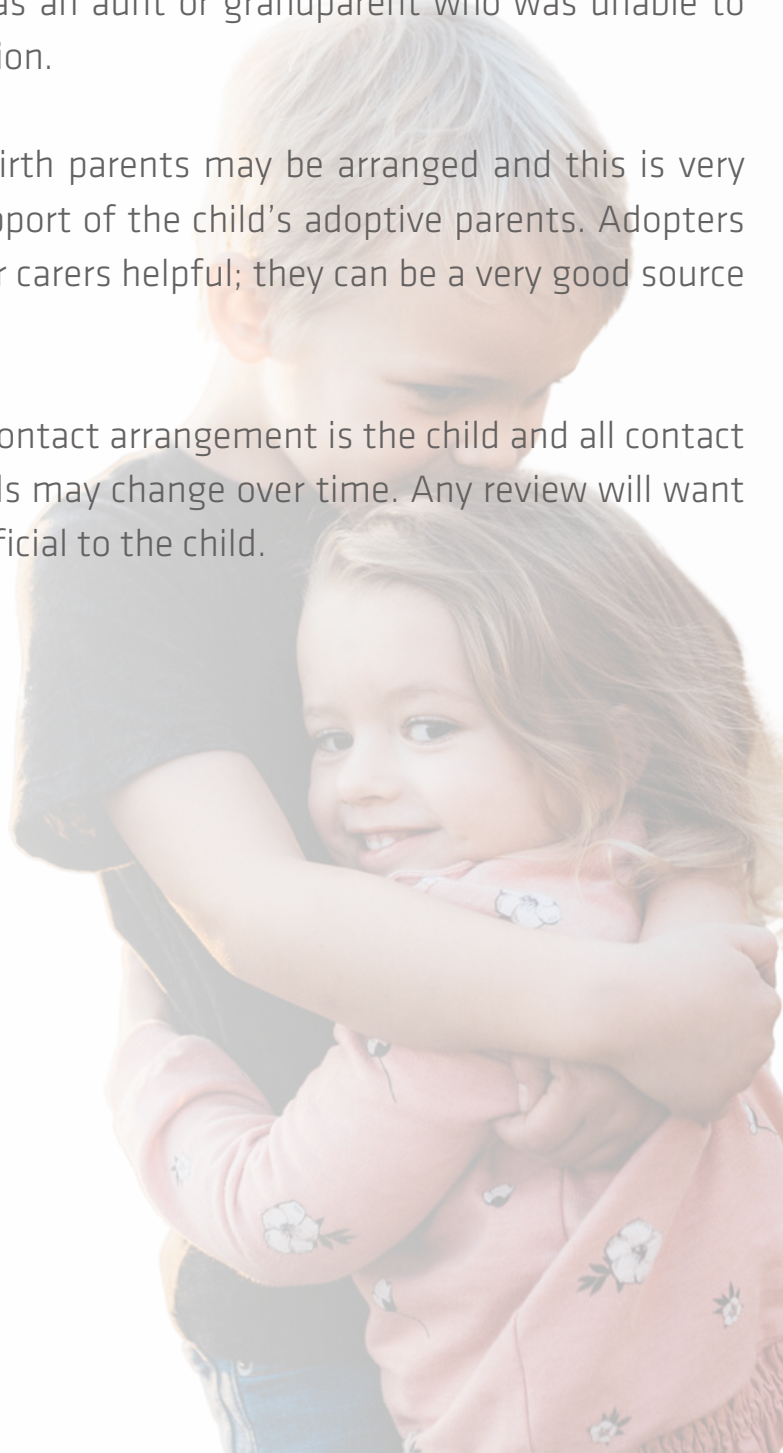


A child's needs can evolve over time, and adopters need to be strong advocates in ensuring the contact plan remains conducive to their child's needs.

It is important for siblings to remain in contact if they have been separated into different families and such contact can be valuable for both families. Adopters will be asked to support the ongoing sibling relationship through direct and or indirect contact. An older child may sometimes have contact with a relative, such as an aunt or grandparent who was unable to care for the child, but is supportive of the adoption.

For a few children, face to face contact with birth parents may be arranged and this is very carefully managed with the agreement and support of the child's adoptive parents. Adopters also find contact with the child's previous foster carers helpful; they can be a very good source of information and support to the new family.

Remember, the most important person in any contact arrangement is the child and all contact arrangements can be reviewed as a child's needs may change over time. Any review will want to make sure that contact continues to be beneficial to the child.





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## Who can adopt?

There are still many misconceptions out there that cause people to think that they may not be able to adopt. Some of these include believing that you have to be married, in a relationship, own your own home, meet a financial requirement or be under a certain age – but none of these are true. You can adopt if you are single, in a relationship, any gender or sexuality and over 21. The important attributes in adoption are that you are patient, dependable, flexible, energetic and committed to making a difference to a child's life. You will find responses to some of the common myths about adoption at the back of this booklet.

There are however some relevant factors and guidelines to consider;

We recommend a minimum age gap of at least two years between any children already in a family and the adopted child. A smaller age gap with an already adopted child will often be considered if the child being placed is with his or her older birth sibling/s.

If you are adopting as a couple, you will need to have lived together for a minimum of 2 years regardless of the length of your relationship.

We do not advise you starting the adoption preparation and assessment process if there are any significant changes happening in your life; for example if you have recently experienced or are, a house move, a change to employment, a serious illness, or any other major stress in your family. The adoption preparation and assessment process is quite intense and you will need to have the time and emotional space to invest in it.

Children who are placed for adoption will need a lot of time and patience when they first join their new family and many may need additional parental support for longer. For this reason, we expect one adoptive parent to be at home full time for at least the first six months, and ideally the first 12 months after the child has moved in.

There is further information on eligibility to adopt in the Frequently Asked Questions section at the back of this booklet.



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# The process



Make an enquiry



Speak to a experienced  
Social Worker



Initial visit



ROI received



Stage 1 - Checks &  
registration



Family finding  
starts



Adoption Panel



Stage 2 - The  
assessment





## Initial Home visit

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You will be allocated a social worker who will contact you to arrange to visit you at home. During this meeting the social worker will take some details from you in relation to your own personal circumstances to enable us to consider whether you are ready to continue to the next stage of the adoption process. You can also ask the social worker any questions you may have. We try to make these meetings as relaxed as possible, and should any issues come to light the Social Worker will share and discuss these with you during the visit. This is such an incredibly important commitment that we want to make sure you are in the right place and that you feel ready to begin your adoption journey.

## Registration of Interest and Stage One – Anticipated timescale 2 months

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If we think that you are likely to be able to meet the needs of our children and are in the right place to start the adoption process, you will be invited to complete a Registration of Interest form. The Registration of Interest form is your formal application form which provides your consent for us to undertake the necessary checks and references for your adoption assessment. Once this is accepted, Stage One of the process officially starts.

This involves;

- Attending preparation to adopt training (this takes place over 3.5 days)
- Completing independent learning and research (a learning log and guidelines will be provided)
- Building on your experience with children
- Completing adopter workbooks provided to you by your Social Worker
- A full medical examination with your GP
- A range of checks including a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service
- We will contact your current employer, and any previous employers where you have worked with children or vulnerable adults
- We will require you to provide evidence of your financial circumstances, including a mortgage statement and/or proof of rental payments



- We will also obtain written references from at least four people who know you well, including at least two unrelated referees; your Social Worker will meet your referees later on in the process
- In most circumstances, ex-partners with whom you have lived and where children have been involved will be contacted. Also if you have any children with previous partners they may be contacted during the assessment process depending on their age and level of understanding
- If you have children within the home, we will also want to contact their school/childcare and health visitor (if applicable).

There may be additional checks we may request depending on your circumstances, however these will be discussed with you prior to commencing stage one or as the need is identified.

## Stage Two – The Assessment – Anticipated timescale 4 months

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This stage involves an Adoption Social Worker completing a full assessment of your suitability to adopt. This will involve regular meetings with your Social Worker who will need to get to know you, your lifestyle and gather information about your own life experiences and childhood. These meetings will most likely be weekly and around 2 hours in duration, with an average of 8-10 sessions needed. It is vitally important that you are completely open and honest with your Social Worker throughout the assessment process.

Your Social Worker will signpost you to any support groups and training that are relevant. It is an expectation that you will continue your own independent learning as well as attend our programme of training and workshops in order to enhance your understanding of adoptive parenting.

If during your assessment any concerns arise regarding your suitability to adopt we will share these with you and you will be given the opportunity to discuss them and explain your position.

At the end of the assessment period your Social Worker will complete your Prospective Adopters Report which will be considered by the Adoption Panel. You will see and sign off your report, and attend panel with your Social Worker. The panel make a recommendation as to your suitability to adopt. The final decision is then made by the Agency Decision Maker – usually the Head of Children's Services.



## Finding a family

Once approved, you are available to be matched with a child or children in the area covered by Western Bay Adoption Service. We also work with other Local Authorities across Wales and the UK who are seeking families for children in their care. It isn't possible to put a timescale on this part of the process, as it so individual to every single child/ren and family and our priority will always be ensuring the best matches, not the quickest matches.

You will be invited to attend a post-approval training day, which will help you prepare further for being an adoptive parent. Your Social Worker will also undertake post-approval support visits to support you through the process of family finding.

## Wales Early Permanence (WEP)

Wales Early Permanence involves placing a child with people who are dually approved as foster carers and adopters as soon as possible. If the court decides the child should be adopted, they do not have to move. This significantly reduces stress and trauma for the child.

HOWEVER, for you this means you are first and foremost a foster carer until such time a Court grant an order to say the child should be placed for adoption (if they grant such an order). Permanence for the child may end up being back with their family, and you will have to support with this transition.

You will be working with the Local Authority as part of a team and will be looking after a child on behalf of their family until the court decides what is best for them. This will include being able to support contact with the child's family and developing a relationship with them. There is a level of uncertainty that you will have to understand and be able to manage.

*We hold WEP info sessions, so please let us know if interested!*



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# Adoption Myths and Frequently asked Questions

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## *I'm on my own – can I still adopt?*

Absolutely! We welcome applications from single applicants who can demonstrate that they would be able to offer a child the level of parental time and attention that he or she will need and have family and friends who will offer support.

## *We're a same sex couple – will this impact our application?*

Not at all! We welcome applications from couples who have a strong and supportive relationship and can provide the care and attention that a child will need, regardless of their sexuality. We ask that all couples have been living together for at least two years when they apply.

## *I don't live in the Western Bay area – can I still adopt with you?*

We are able to consider applications from people living outside of our geographical area. Please contact us to discuss this – as it may depend on how far outside of our area you reside. If you adopt through Western Bay, you will need to be able and willing to attend our training and events which take place within our region.

## *I smoke – is this a problem?*

Due to medical evidence and guidance about the harmful effects of passive smoking, we do not place children with people who smoke, or in households where another person smokes. You will need to have ceased smoking for a minimum of 12 months before starting an adoption assessment. The same advice and guidance applies to e-cigarettes and vaporisers.



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## *I am still undergoing fertility treatment/investigations – Can I still apply?*

If you have been involved in fertility investigations or treatment, this should have ended before making an application to adopt. Because of the emotional nature of both, we recommend you take as much time as you require to fully come to terms with your situation and the ending of any treatment before embarking on your adoption journey. Depending on your situation, we may suggest you wait at least six months after concluding your fertility treatment. We appreciate everyone's circumstances can differ, and one of our social worker's will be happy to discuss this with you further.

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

We do place children aged under two years, however they are likely to be babies/toddlers whose future development is uncertain due to their early life experiences and birth family background. Due to their young age, we have less to consider in terms of how they are developing and may go on to develop. This may be because their mothers have misused alcohol and/or drugs during pregnancy or because one or both of their birth parents suffer from poor mental health or a personality disorder. For some of our children the identity of their birth fathers is not known. You need to be prepared to accept a high level of future uncertainty when adopting a very young child. You will learn more about the impact of trauma and early life experiences during your adopter training to help you make an informed decision.

## *I have a disability – can I apply to adopt?*

Yes. Your social worker will want to explore this with you during your initial visit to identify if any additional consents may be required as part of your medical assessment (for example, if you are or have been under the care of any specialists). All applicants have a full medical assessment, which looks at all aspects of your physical, mental and emotional health. We will explore with you how your disability may impact your day to day life and whether there are any limitations on your ability to meet certain children's needs. It will be important to establish what support you may need following the placement of a child, and to explore this during an assessment.



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## *What if I haven't got a clean criminal record?*

We look at every applicant's individual circumstances. You are automatically unable to adopt if you have a record of offences against children, or significant offences of violence or of a sexual nature. It is important that from the start of your enquiry you are honest about any criminal record, offences or cautions that you have had, including those that happened some time ago. The circumstances that led to you offending and the length of time that has since elapsed will both influence our decision.

## *I have some health problems – will this be an issue?*

There are very few medical issues that will prevent you from being able to adopt, however these will need to be considered and explored. Please talk to your social worker during your initial visit about any health needs you may have and record these in the paperwork you will be provided ahead of your medical examination with your GP. Within an adoption assessment, we will want to consider how you will manage your health needs alongside caring for a child and what this may look like.



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## Next Steps...

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Whether you are considering adoption but still not quite decided, or if you feel ready to take the next steps please contact us to request an initial visit, or to discuss your interest with a member of the team. We can be contacted via the following methods;



*Give us a call on 0300 365 2222*



*Email us at [enquiries@westernbayadoption.org](mailto:enquiries@westernbayadoption.org)*



*Contact us via our website [westernbayadoption.org](http://westernbayadoption.org)*

We are always here to answer any questions you may have and will be happy to talk with you about anything you are unsure of.

## Some suggested resources to further your adoption learning:

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### *Websites:*

- [westernbayadoption.org](http://westernbayadoption.org)
- [adoptcymru.com](http://adoptcymru.com)
- [adoptionuk.org](http://adoptionuk.org)
- [newfamilysocial.org.uk](http://newfamilysocial.org.uk)



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## *Podcasts:*

- Truth be Told: Adoption Stories – National Adoption Service for Wales
- The Adoption – BBC Radio 4
- The Adoption and Fostering Podcast – Al Coates and Scott Casson – Renne
- You Can Adopt podcast series – You can adopt
- Adoption, fostering and tea – New Family Social

## *Books:*

- Therapeutic Parenting in a Nutshell - Sarah Naish
- The quick guide to therapeutic parenting – Sarah Naish
- No Matter What – Sally Donovan





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# Thanks for Reading!

*Don't forget to give  
our social media  
channels a follow*

