

The adoption passport: a support guide for adopters

Children adopted from care can have ongoing needs, and you and your child may benefit from support. This is the support adopters in England may be entitled to:

For your child...

Children adopted from care have priority access to schools, which means that your child should be able to attend whichever school you think best meets their needs (www.gov.uk/schools-admissions). From September 2014, they will also be entitled to free early education from the age of two (tinyurl.com/first4early).

If your child needs extra support, you can ask your local authority to assess their needs for adoption support services (see page 2). If you think your child may have special educational needs you can ask your local authority to assess these needs too.

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 also 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.

Adoption Support Services

Local authorities provide and fund a range of support services for children adopted from care. These support services can include:

- counselling, information and advice
- help with behavioural, attachment and other problems
- money e.g. to help with special care needs, or for former foster parents
- help with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family
- meetings and events to enable groups of adopters and adoptive children to get together
- training to help adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive child
- short breaks for an adopted child with another carer
- help where an adoption breaks down.

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

Support Services Advice

Your local authority will have an Adoption Support Services Adviser to help you access adoption support and other specialist services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The NHS commissions health services to meet the needs of adopted children, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will produce new guidance so that your GP will understand the problems you may face. The Adoption Support Services Adviser's details should be available on the local authority's website.

Every adopter is entitled to an assessment of their adoption support needs, but local authorities do not have to provide support in response to an assessment. Which services you are able to access will depend on your circumstances. Future changes to the law will mean that local authorities must tell adopters about adoption support services and their right to an assessment, and will give those who receive support a choice about how that support is provided, either by a local authority or through a 'personal budget' to purchase services from a voluntary adoption agency or adoption support agency.

If you want advice on adoption support you can also contact one of the many adoption support organisations, such as Adoption UK (www.adoptionuk.org.uk) or the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (www.baaf.org.uk), or read the e learning materials soon to be on the First4Adoption web-site which will explore the effect of children's experiences on their development and the services available to help them.

Which local authority?

The local authority that places the child with you is responsible for assessing your adoption support needs for three years after the adoption. After three years it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live (if different).

Comments and complaints

If you are unhappy with the support provided by your local authority, or with the time taken to carry out an assessment, you can complain under the Local Authority Complaints Procedure. Thereafter if you are not satisfied you may be able to refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (www.lgo.org.uk). You will also soon be able to raise general concerns with the new Champion for adopters, foster carers and special guardians.

FIRST 4 ADOPTION is the dedicated information service for anyone interested in adopting a child in England. It is managed by Coram Children's Legal Centre, Coram and Adoption UK, and supported and funded by the Department for Education.

- Call First4Adoption: 0300 222 0022
- Visit our website: first4adoption.org.uk
- Follow us on Twitter: [@First4Adoption](https://twitter.com/First4Adoption)

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