



Department
for Education

Supporting Families Who Adopt

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The Government is making it easier for more children for whom adoption is the right option to be placed quickly with stable and loving families. Adoptive parents do an incredibly important job and the Government wants to make sure that they, and their children, get the best possible support. Earlier this year our expert working group identified adoption support as one of the most important areas for reform. Surveys of parents show again and again that parents are too often left without the support that they and their families need. The system lets them down.

Treating Adopters Fairly

Adoptive families deserve equal treatment with birth families and with children in local authority care. We have already given children adopted from care the same rights to priority school admissions as looked after children. These children will also be eligible for free early education, from two years old, from September 2014. We will also ensure that from 2015 adoptive parents have the same rights in relation to pay and leave as birth parents. This will include:

- Removing a requirement for 26 weeks service in the job to make adoption leave a day-one right;
- enhancing the rate of adoption pay during the first six weeks after adoption to make adoption pay equal to 90% of the claimant's normal salary;
- allowing time off work for introductions to the child prior to placement.

We will also consider whether any additional provision is necessary for those working adopters who do not meet the qualifying requirements to receive adoption pay.

Being Clear About Parents' Rights

We will put adopters in the driving seat by introducing an "Adoption Passport" from April 2013, to tell them about the support they should expect. This will help adopters to be clear about national entitlements, when they have a right to demand help, and what it is they can ask for.

The Adoption Passport will be a document available through the National Gateway for Adoption, from voluntary adoption agencies and from local authorities. The Adoption Passport will set out the full range of national entitlements, such as:

- the right to adoption pay and leave;
- the right to see the medical assessment of the child they are adopting;
- the right to an assessment (and re-assessment) of their child's support needs by the local authority adoption team;

- the right to priority in school admissions for their child.

Every prospective adopter will be directed to the Adoption Passport when they first contact the National Gateway. We will give additional force to the Passport by placing a legal requirement on local authorities – a “duty to inform” – to tell adopters and prospective adopters about their rights. They will be able to do this through the Passport, adding information about local entitlements (for example support from local adopters’ networks).

Specialist Support When Families Need It

We know that parents sometimes need specialist support that is tailored to their family and child. However, often parents find it difficult to get full and accurate information about their child. They don’t receive an effective assessment of need and they can’t access the right services with the right level of expertise in adoption.

We will put more choice into the hands of adoptive parents by piloting personal budgets for adoption support in a number of local authority areas, and by legislating in the Children and Families Bill to extend these to all areas from 2015. Personal budgets will enable parents to have a freer hand in getting the right support for their family, and could also help to stimulate the market as parents buy the most effective services.

We will address gaps in information, awareness and understanding by:

- commissioning the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to produce clinical guidance on attachment. This will help to increase responsiveness and stimulate referrals where appropriate;
- raising awareness and understanding amongst all those working with adopted children, particularly health professionals, of the behavioural and mental health issues that some adopted children may face. We will do this by placing e-learning materials on the new DH children and young people’s mental health e-portal by 2014;
- making it clear to social workers that information about the child’s health must be shared with prospective adopters. We will set this entitlement out for parents in the Adoption Passport;
- giving prospective adopters more information about the range of behaviour and health issues that some adopted children will face, and how these can be handled, backed up by e-learning materials. This will be available through the National Gateway for Adoption.

We will improve access to services by:

- encouraging local and national commissioners of key services, including CAMHS, to recognise and address the needs of adopted children. Adopted children are already recognised as a key group in the mandate from the Secretary of State for Health to the NHS Commissioning Board. We shall mirror this in revised statutory guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JHWSs). JSNAs and JHWSs, undertaken by health and wellbeing boards, will enable commissioners to plan and commission integrated services that meet the needs of their local community, in particular the most vulnerable groups. We shall also highlight the importance of meeting adopted children's needs in the Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Strategy;
- stimulating provision of high-quality, evidence-based therapeutic support so that more families are able to find the right support locally. We have already invited bids, through the National Prospectus Grant Programme published on 26 October, to increase the availability of therapeutic support services. We expect delivery of these new services to start across the country in 2013. We also plan to extend the successful AdOpt pilots to more local authority areas.

Raising Standards and Improving Practice

Parents should be able to expect the highest standards in the services and support they receive from agencies. That is why we have decided to appoint a new Champion to help drive improvement in social worker decision-making.

We will make sure that adoptive parents have clear information about the performance of local authorities on adoption. We have already introduced adoption scorecards which show how quickly each local authority moves children through the adoption process. We will now begin to collect information on adoption breakdown, to understand how well local authorities are doing in supporting families to stay together.

We will also improve consistency and practice amongst social workers in adoption services through a national professional development programme.

Next Steps

This is a significant package of reforms which will go a long way to improve support for adoptive families. However, we know there is more to be done. We are committed to continuing the process of reform, making sure that the adoption system works for parents and children and that effective help is ready at hand when needed.



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