

Chester West & Chester Council



A Child's guide
to Adoption

The title is rendered in a playful, bubbly font. 'A Child's guide' is in orange and 'to Adoption' is in blue. The letters have a white drop shadow, making them stand out against the colorful, abstract background of paint splatters and overlapping circles.

Cheshire West
and Chester



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Guidance for Social Workers

This Children's Guide to Adoption is designed to be flexible so that it can be used in different ways as appropriate to children of different ages and different levels of understanding.

- It is purposely loose leaf with no page numbers. Social workers and/or foster carers can choose the sections relevant to different children dependent on their age and also their individual circumstances. These can be put together in a folder and added to as a child grows or circumstances change. For example, younger children may not need a particular section until it becomes relevant to them
- Some sections can be photocopied for more extensive use if plans change, for example the timetable for children or the questions they want to ask
- For young children parts will have to be read to them and the emphasis may be on those parts of the guide that provide the opportunity for them to be involved e.g. through drawing. An acknowledgement of their feelings may be more important than their understanding of the concept of adoption. Older children may be happy to go through this by themselves
- Makaton or signing may be needed for children with specific disabilities. The guide can be read to children with a visual impairment or transcribed into Braille. It can also be translated into other languages
- Where there is uncertainty about a child's level of understanding this guide may have to be used in conjunction with other resources to enable the expression of feelings and emotions.
- Please contact the Adoption Team on 01606 275688 to discuss other useful tools to assist ascertaining children's wishes and feelings and resources available.



This booklet will help you understand what adoption is all about and answer some of the questions you may have

You can read this with your foster carers or your social worker and ask them about anything that you don't understand or tell them about how you feel.

So much is happening
it can be a
little scary





What is adoption?

We were all babies once and we all have a family or a person that we were born to.

We call this our 'birth family' and this might include mum, dad, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins.

Sometimes the families that children are born into cannot look after them. Some parents find it difficult to manage to look after children properly. Some parents hurt their children in different ways and it is important that children do not get hurt.

Some birth families might understand that they can't look after their child properly and agree that it would be better for their child not to live with them.

Some birth families don't want their children to stop living with them even though they can't look after them properly or keep them safe. Then the social workers and a judge may decide that it is better for the child not to live with them.



What is a social worker?

A Social Worker is someone whose job it is to help people when they have problems

Sometimes they have to help families. If they are worried about the children or think that the family needs help they may find a foster family for the child to live with, just like the family you are living with now, till they decide what is best for the child or children.





What's a judge?

A judge works in a court where all sorts of decisions are made. We often think of courts as places where people go who might have done something wrong. A judge may decide what to do with them. Many of the courts that we see on television are that kind of court. But courts can also help to solve problems, particularly in families, and they can make decisions about children, to make sure that they are looked after and safe.

One of the decisions made in a court, by a judge, is whether or not you should live with your birth family. If it is decided that a child cannot live with his or her birth family, it is sometimes agreed that the child should have a chance to belong to a new family and this is what adoption is. Adoption means that you will go to live with a family that will look after you and to whom you will belong. They will become your parents and any children in the family will become your brother or your sister.

This doesn't mean that you have to forget about your birth family. You will have your own special Life Story Book with photographs and memories to look at. Sometimes, it is okay for children to keep in touch with some members of their birth family, if that's what they want. This might mean that they can send letters or it might mean they can see them now and again.

Sometimes it is better that children and birth families don't stay in touch, because they find it upsetting or it won't help them. The social worker will have to decide what is best for you but you can tell them about how you feel about keeping in touch. If the social worker is worried about you seeing your family, even if it is what you want, they will explain to you why they think it shouldn't happen.

Even if it is decided that you should not stay in touch with your birth family, you can always ask questions about them. Birth parents can still love their child even if they can't look after them properly or keep them safe.



What about my brothers and sisters?

If you have brothers and sisters it may be that they came to live with foster carers with you.

Although the social workers try very hard to keep brothers and sisters together that is not always possible. If you had to go to a different foster family than your brothers or sisters your social worker will have tried to keep you in touch with one another.

If you cannot go to the same new family the social worker will try to make sure that you can stay in touch with one another, though again, that is not always possible.





Where do adopters come from?

There are some families who would like to have a child to live with them and belong to them. Some of these families might not have had any children born to them; some may have children; some may have grown up children; some may have adopted before. Before they can have a child to live with them, a lot of time is spent by social workers getting to know them and making sure that they can look after children properly and keep them safe.

Social workers will try to find the right family for you. Your social worker will talk to you about how they are looking for a family and you can talk to them about what is important for you about a family. When they think that they have found the right family for you, your social worker will tell you all about them and maybe show you some pictures. They will then arrange for the family to come and visit you so you can start to get to know them and they can start to get to know you. You will have the chance to spend some time with them, perhaps having some days out and doing things together, so that you can get to know them more and more.

Your social worker will visit you and see how you are getting on and how you feel about what's happening. When you and everyone else feel that you know each other enough and are happy to take the next step, you will go and live with them. If you don't feel happy about the new family, or you feel confused or worried, you should tell your social worker or your foster carer. Sometimes children feel a bit muddled with all that is going on and talking to someone makes you feel better. It is important that you try and say what you feel.





Once I go and live with them, am I adopted?

No. Not straight away. Your social worker will visit you in your new family and talk to you about how you are settling in and see if you have any worries.

When you have lived with your new family for a while and everyone feels that it is right to take the next step, your new parents will ask a court if they can adopt you.

A judge at the court will set a date when you and your new family and your social worker can go and meet him or her, to talk about how things have been going. If everything seems fine, the judge makes something called an Adoption Order and that is when you legally become a part of your new family.

That means that you belong to them and they belong to you, but it still doesn't mean that you have to forget about your birth family or that they have to forget about you. You can ask questions and talk about them with your new family.





Will I still go to the same school?

It really depends on how far away from your school that your new family lives.

You may have to change schools, but everyone will try to help you, to make sure that you settle in well.

Can I still see my friends?

Again, it depends on where your new family lives.

But they will do all they can to help you to stay in touch with your friends and to help you to make new ones.





What if I don't feel happy about what is happening?

Sometimes children, when they are first told about being adopted, can feel a bit sad or a bit worried.

You might feel like that. You might feel quite happy and settled with your foster carers and don't want to move. Or you might feel you are losing your birth family. If you feel unhappy you should, firstly, talk to your social worker. You can also talk to your foster carers or to your Children's Guardian. If you feel unhappy after you have moved to your new family you might feel able to talk to them about how you feel. You can also talk to the social workers who work in the adoption team, who will be visiting your new family to see how things are going.

If, after talking to people, you still feel unhappy or if you don't feel that you can talk to anyone, you can either:

- Make a complaint to the agency that is making decisions for you, or
- Contact an independent agency, where there are people who don't work for the agency that is making decisions

If you want to make a complaint to the agency you can, if you feel able to. Let your social worker know this and they will explain how to do it (please see Comments, Compliments and Complaints leaflet)

If you want to contact an independent agency all the information is given at the end of this booklet. (please see The Children's Society in Cheshire leaflet)



My thoughts on what is happening...



These next pages are for you, to say any of the things that you want to say. You can say what you think about adoption.

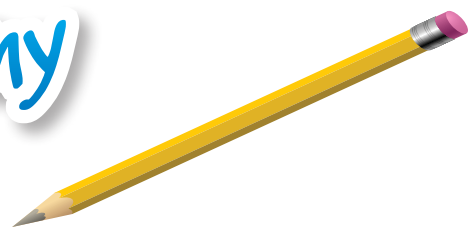
You can write any questions that you have. You can draw pictures. You can say the things that you would like in your new family. You can say the things that you would like your new family to know about you.



This is what I think about
adoption...



Here are some of my
questions...



Your chance to say what you would like...

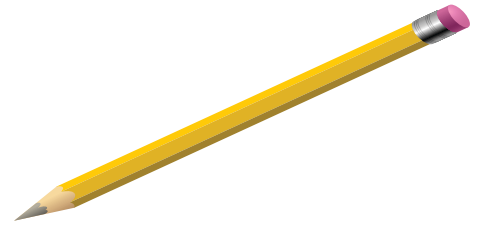


These are the things that I would like in my new family

These are the people that I would like to stay in touch with



About me



I like to go to bed with my:

door open

door closed

I like to sleep with my light

on

off

These are some of the things that I like to do:

These are the things that I don't like doing:

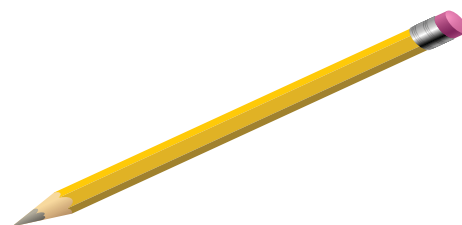
These are some of the things that I like to eat:

These are the foods that I don't like:

Other things that I want them to know:



My timetable



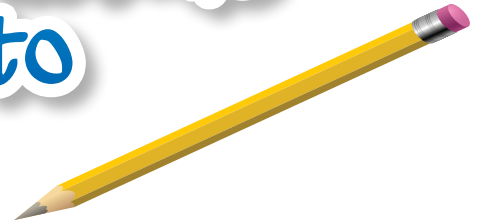
When plans have been made for me I can use this timetable to help me know when things are going to happen

Date	What's happening	How I feel

You can draw a picture or write something



Names and contact details of people I can talk to



My Social Worker:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

If you are not happy about something your social worker has said or done you can contact their boss who is:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Your Social Worker in the Adoption Team:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

If you are not happy about something your social worker in the Adoption Team has said or done you can contact their boss who is:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____





Useful information

The following organisations are independent, which means that they don't work for Cheshire West and Chester Council, the agency that is making the decisions for you. They will help to make sure that your views are heard, if you don't think that you are being listened to.

Voices of the Child in Care

Freephone: 0800 800 5792

E-mail: info@vcc-uk.org

Talk Adoption

Freephone: 0808 808 1234

E-mail: helpline@talkadoption.org.uk

Talk Adoption will listen to you about anything to do with adoption.

Childline

Freephone: 0800 884444

Childline will listen to you about anything and particularly help children who are being hurt



Our responsibility to you

Your social worker works for Cheshire West and Chester Council and this is the agency that has some of the responsibility for making decisions for you.

There are lots of people who work for this agency, all of whom want to help children and young people. Every agency has to have a 'Statement of Purpose', which is a booklet which explains the things that the people who work for Cheshire West and Chester Council adoption team think are important.

Here are some examples:

- They must find a family that is best for you
- They must make sure that your new family will keep you safe and make sure you are well looked after
- They must listen to your wishes and feelings about being adopted
- They will make sure your new family is helped to look after you now and all the time you are growing up.

If you want to know more about how Cheshire West and Chester Council works, ask your social worker to get you some more information.

