Foster to adopt with Southwark
The early permanence scheme
Sometimes children are unable to live with their birth families because their families are unable to keep them safe and provide for their most basic needs.

Adoption provides a legal means for another family to permanently take on the responsibility of caring for and raising a child. But adoption is much more than a legal process, adoption is about making a real difference to a child’s life.

Southwark’s early permanence scheme (sometimes known as foster to adopt or concurrency), is focused on planning around the child to minimise delay in being adopted. The scheme allows children to be placed with carers, who are approved as both foster carers and adopters, whilst the court is considering plans for the child. If the court then agrees that adoption should be the plan, and the match is agreed at an Adoption Panel, the placement will become an adoptive one.

**Could you provide a loving home to a child in our care?**

Adopting a child through this method or any other is life changing and a life long commitment. We hope that this information will help you to understand the adoption journey and help you to decide whether adoption through the early permanence scheme is right for you.

If you are considering adoption please come and talk to us at one of our informal information sessions visit www.southwark.gov.uk/adoption for dates and times, or call 020 7525 4497.
Adopting in Southwark

Southwark has one of the highest numbers of looked after children in the country. Some of these children will be fostered, some will return home and some will move on to live with a new family through adoption.

We are looking for adopters from a wide range of backgrounds and we welcome all ethnicities, ages (must be over 21), sexual orientation, single people, couples or married people to adopt the many Southwark children in need of a stable home. What is most important is your ability to care for a child, provide stability and a loving home for children in our care. On our website you can view some of our adoptive parents talk about their experiences and motivations for adopting with Southwark.

Adopters Charter
For more information on what adopters and prospective adopters can expect from adoption agencies go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-adopters-charter

www.southwark.gov.uk/adoption
Your adoption journey - talk to us

The first part of your journey is to find out more about adoption. Contact the adoption team for further information and advice and come along to an informal drop in session.

**Drop-in sessions**

We hold weekly information sessions in cafés around Southwark. Why not come along to one of our drop in sessions to talk about adoption. Please ring or text 07946 447 654 to make an appointment.

**Information meetings**

At these informal sessions, you will find out more about the process of adopting with us and speak to social workers and adoptive parents who have already adopted with us. You will also learn more about Southwark children in need of adoptive parent/s, the adoption journey and support that is available for you.

We always suggest that if you have any big plans such as moving house, travelling or embarking on future studies that you do these before you register your interest.

**Initial home visit**

When you make an initial enquiry we will offer you an appointment for a social worker to visit you in your home. You will be able to discuss your interest in the early permanence scheme with your social worker at this visit. This meeting provides an opportunity to ask any questions that you may have. Adopting a child is a huge commitment and we understand that you will need time to explore this before making a decision. During this meeting the social worker will take some details from you to enable us to advise whether you are ready to continue the adoption process.

The social worker will discuss your details with an adoption manager and decide if it is appropriate to proceed at this time. Sometimes we ask people to come back later, for example if you have only just finished fertility treatment.
We may want you to have a break at any point in the process, to help you come to terms with not having birth children, or if you have recently suffered a bereavement.

You can contact as many adoption agencies/authorities as you wish, however you can only register your interest with the one that you would like to proceed with.

**Registration of interest**

After the home visit, and if the adoption team agree that the Southwark early permanence scheme is right for you, we will ask you to complete a registration of interest form, which is a formal application with your consent to undertake the necessary references and online checks of all adults living in your home.

When you complete your Registration of Interest form, you are giving permission for checks to be carried out in the following areas:

- A criminal background check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). This will show any previous criminal convictions and if you have been barred from working with children. Minor convictions may not be considered a barrier to adoption
- Local Authority
- Probation service
- Your GP (you will need to pay for an adoption medical)
- Your current and past employer
- Personal referees, who will be asked to provide a written and face to face reference
- Family member referees
- Reference from a previous partner if you have had a significant relationship such as parented children together
- Evidence that housing/mortgage payments are up to date
- School checks if you have children of school age
It may also be necessary to take up other references depending on your circumstances.

This sounds like a long and thorough list, but our first responsibility is to ensure that the children in our care are safe. The children are already vulnerable so we must ensure they are adopted by the most suitable family.
Learn with us – up to two months

Stage one
Once we have accepted your Registration of Interest we will arrange for a dedicated social worker to meet with you and agree a prospective adopter stage one plan. You will be expected to do extra learning to prepare you for taking part in this scheme but we will help you all we can. You will attend an additional two days of preparation training with our partner agency Coram. This covers the pre-assessment process which is normally expected to be completed in two months. However, this may change either by the agency where it considers it has good reason, or at your request. The plan is an agreement that is drawn up between Southwark Council adoption service and you the prospective adopter, setting out shared responsibilities and expectations.

Learning and development
As an adoptive parent you will be caring for a child who has come to you with their own history and experiences. We offer a series of training to prepare our prospective adopters as fully as possible. This includes:

- E-learning courses
- Ongoing training which will give you the opportunity to explore parenting an adopted child and will offer guidance and practical advice on issues that are found in adoption
- Preparation groups that look at a range of issues including child development, separation and loss, managing challenging behaviour, contact with birth family, the effects of abuse and neglect, and the law relating to adoption
- Links with other early permanence adopters
- Link with experienced foster carer
- Learning with our partner agencies
- Support groups.

www.southwark.gov.uk/adoption
We have devised a workbook to assist you through this learning and development stage. This will include information to help you understand more about becoming an adopter and how you will begin to parent a child. We will ask you to complete this workbook during the stage one period. We provide a list of recommended reading that we ask you to chose from, depending on your learning needs.

Importantly preparation groups and training workshops provide an opportunity to meet with other prospective adopters. Many of our adopters make supportive links with other members of the group and maintain these links when children are placed. Single applicants are welcome to attend with a friend or family member who will be part of their support network.

Throughout stage one of the process you will have the support of an adoption social worker to enable you to make an informed decision as to whether adoption is right for you. If you do decide to proceed to assessment we will ask you to put this in writing to us and we will give you our pre-assessment decision.

You are able to take a break here if you wish, for up to six months, without having to restart the process. Please discuss with your social worker.

If we decide not to proceed with you to stage two we will provide a clear explanation of the reasons why.
Assess with us – up to four months

Stage two
This stage of the process involves an assessment of your suitability to adopt. Your social worker will be gathering information about you as well as building your understanding of the needs of the children who may be placed with you. This is an opportunity to learn a great deal more about adoption. Your social worker will recommend reading material and will inform you about further training and workshops.

The extra element will be added to your Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) to show that you are aware of the process you will be undertaking.

We aim to complete the assessment within four months. You will be able to read the finished assessment before we present it at the adoption panel. The checks that we undertake, including references, remain confidential to the adoption team.

The adoption panel will be constituted in order to approve applicants as foster carers as well as adopters. You can also consider children who are not part of the early permanence scheme as you are approved as mainstream adopters too.

You will be approved as a foster carer for the named child only, but you can be considered as adopters for other children, whose plan is adoption.
Panel

The adoption panel recommends whether your application should be approved or declined. We encourage you to attend panel to meet the panel members and answer any queries they may have. We understand that this may be a daunting experience for prospective adopters, so you will have full support from your social worker, who will be attending panel with you.

The panel is independently chaired and is made up of agency and independent workers such as a medical adviser, adopters, adoptees, education specialists and social workers. The panel also provides legal and professional adoption advice.

If the panel recommends your approval as an adopter the final decision will be made shortly after by the Agency Decision Maker. You will then receive a letter confirming your approval as adopter/s.

If the panel recommends against approval there is a system for reviewing this decision. You will be given the choice of making further representation to us asking to review the decision. Applicants can also request an independent review of the agency’s decision by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) to make a recommendation to Southwark.
**Adopt with us**

**Matching**

During your assessment your social worker will be exploring your strengths and limitations and forming an understanding of you and your parenting capacity. This will be very important when looking for a child to match you with.

We understand that children who have experienced trauma can be challenging at times and it is important for us to consider whether you are able to manage the particular challenges that the child is displaying or may possibly display in the future.

When you are approached about a child your social worker will give you the Child’s Permanence Report (CPR). This report will contain detailed information about the child, their background, health, development and needs. When the match between yourself and a child or siblings is being considered, we will discuss the support you might need and the medical, educational, and therapeutic resources that are available to you. If we are considering matching you with an unborn or young baby there may not be a completed CPR yet, however we will provide you with as much information about the child’s background, health and other needs as we have at the time.

There is a fostering phase, whilst the courts are deciding the most appropriate plan for the child, whilst assessing birth family members. There is an expectation that this is completed within reasonable timescales for the child. However there can be delays due to complexities in some cases so it will be hard to predict from the start. If the court decides that the child is to be adopted, we would match you at another panel with that child.

Once your match has been approved your social worker and the child’s social worker will offer you support and regular visits to review and support you and your child through the early stages of adapting as a new family.
**Adoption order**

After ten weeks of caring for the child as an adoptive placement, if you feel ready and everyone agrees, you can apply to the courts to make a formal adoption.

When the day arrives for the adoption hearing and the adoption order is made, the law will recognise you and your partner as the legal parent/s of your child. You will have full parental responsibility for your child.

**Expectations**

We will expect that one of you is able to take at least one year off work to look after a baby; this means that you do need to be financially secure and have good support networks. The law has changed since April 2015 and will allow foster to adopt carers to begin their adoption leave at the beginning of a foster placement. We will also expect that you are able to leave work at short notice because in some cases babies will be placed very quickly after birth.

You will also need to be able to manage contact with the child’s family, three to five times a week, for up to one year.

You will need a high degree of flexibility in order to work with the local authority to plan for children in conjunction with the court process.

In return we will offer the chance to do training with an experienced baby foster carer, two days training with Coram’s concurrency service, a dedicated social worker and to attend a peer support group.

As a Southwark Foster carer approved by Southwark Council living in Southwark, while fostering a Southwark child can claim 100% relief on their council tax this year.
Frequently asked questions

What is adoption?
Adoption is a legal process. The completion of that process is the granting of an adoption order by the courts. The effect of this is to transfer all the responsibilities held by the child’s birth parents to the new adoptive parents. The adopters become the child’s legal parents. The Adoption and Children Act 2002, and regulations and guidance 2013 cover the adoption process in England.

Who can adopt?
People of all backgrounds are able to adopt but must meet the following criteria:

- You must be over 21 years old
- You or your partner is domiciled in the British Islands and have been habitually resident in the British Islands for at least a year before you apply for an adoption order
- Neither you nor an adult member of your household has been convicted or cautioned in respect to specific offences.

There will be other matters to consider as we will need to assess whether you are able to meet the needs of children who have suffered neglect, trauma and loss. However, we are happy to discuss this in more detail and to help you decide whether adoption is right for you.

Why do children need to be adopted?
The main reason is that the children’s birth parents were not able to care for them in a safe and consistent way. Many of our children have been born to parents with alcohol and drug problems. Some have been born to parents with learning disabilities or mental health issues. For many adopted children early experiences of care have been insensitive, inconsistent or unresponsive.
Children can also be resilient and we have found that with caring and responsive parenting, children are able to thrive in their new adoptive homes. Our Southwark adopters tell us that seeing their children grow into healthy and happy individuals is an extremely rewarding and enriching experience.

**Can I afford to adopt?**

You don’t need to earn a huge salary or live in a big house. However you do need to show you have the means to support a child throughout their childhood and beyond. You must also show that you have the ability to manage your own finances. Financial help including regular payments may be available depending on the child’s needs. A social worker will be able to discuss this with you.

**Are there people who can never adopt?**

Adoption agencies are required to undertake references and checks on all prospective adopters. If there are significant concerns and we feel that we are unable to accept your registration of interest (ROI) we will explain our reasons why.

**What do the children need from their new families?**

Time, patience, energy, fun and above all commitment to see things through even when it gets tough. As an adoptive parent you will need to be flexible to adapt to what your child can manage. If you already have birth children this will be a different type of parenting. If you imagined yourself having a baby, this will be a different experience. You are becoming a family with a child who has a history that will be different to your own. There are different ways in which children react to trauma; they may be distrustful of adults, or overly affectionate. It is important to remember that the children who have suffered may continue to carry the emotional scars from their early experiences into adulthood.

**If we are waiting a long time can we adopt a child from mainstream adoption?**

Yes, your application will be treated like any other adoptive family.
I am having fertility treatment, can I adopt?
Because both processes are time consuming and emotionally intensive we do recommend that you only undertake one process at a time. We would advise that you have between six months to a year between your last fertility treatment and starting the adoption process.

If the child goes back to his or her parents or a family member what will happen to us?
You will be offered independent counselling through our specialist support services to help you come to terms with this. You will still be approved adopters so in time it may be that you would wish to look for a child who is approved to be adopted.

What sort of children are placed via this scheme?
Southwark will only use these placements where we believe it is highly likely the court will agree an adoption plan. For example:

- Where the birth parents have recently had other children placed for adoption and there is no change in the parents behaviour.
- Where there is a serious risk of significant harm to the child.
- Where parents have indicated that they may want their child adopted but have not formally consented (S52(3) of the Adoption and Children Act 200)

What are the advantages of the scheme?
You would be both the foster carer and the potential adopter for the child so, if the court decides adoption is the right plan for the child, you would become their adoptive parent. As a foster carer you would be expected to provide contact between the child and a member/s of the birth family, whilst the court decides what is in the best interests of the child, for the future. It may be that other family members will want to offer the child a permanent home. During the time when evidence is gathered and solutions explored the child is place with you so that they will not have to experience moves between foster carers.
If a child does go back to his or her birth family this will obviously be very distressing for a carer but in time they may be able to think about how they offered that child a positive and secure start in life.

**Should children be told they are adopted?**

Yes. The general rule is the earlier the better. How a child is told depends on the child’s level of understanding and the type of information you have about the child’s background. The aim is to create a situation in which the child does not remember a time when they did not know they were adopted. This helps to make adoption become an ordinary part of their life. We will provide you with a life story book and a later life letter for the child which you can use whenever you need to discuss their background with them. We also offer advice and training workshops on life story work with children.

**How much are adoptive parents told about the child’s background?**

We will share as much information as possible with you at the beginning of a placement including information about the child’s history, background and family. You will meet the medical adviser as soon as possible in the process.

You have an advantage in that you will have met with members of the birth family so you will be able to tell the child, in an appropriate way, all about them. This contact with the birth family is encouraged in most cases, however in some cases that are deemed high risk, there will be no contact.

**An enriching experience**

Although it is important to think about all of these things, most adopters say that adoption has enriched their lives in ways they could never have imagined.
Useful contacts

Here are some contacts that may be useful to you, either while you are thinking about adoption, or after having adopted a child.

The National Gateway for Adoption – First4Adoption
Helpline 0300 22 0022
Monday to Friday 10am to 6pm
www.first4adoption.org.uk
Provides useful advice and information for prospective adopters.

Coram BAAF
Coram Campus
1 Brunswick Square
London WC1N 1AZ
020 7520 0300
mail@corambaaf.org.uk
www.corambaaf.org.uk

Adoption UK
46 The Green, South Bar Street, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9AB
01295 752 240
0844 848 7900
www.adoptionuk.org
Helpline is open from 10am to 4pm.
Adoption UK is a national voluntary self help group supporting families before, during and after adoption.
‘Children Who Wait’ is a publication that features children who are in need of adoptive families.
New Family Social  
www.newfamilysocial.org.uk
UK charity and network for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) adoptive and foster families, working with adoption agencies, to widen the pool of adopters for children.

Post Adoption Centre  
5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RZ  
020 7284 0555  
www.pac.org.uk
The advice line 0870 777 2197 is open from 10am to 1pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, and during Thursday evenings between 5.30pm to 7.30pm.
This centre offers a confidential specialist advice service, counselling and family work for anyone who has been involved in adoption.

The Intercountry Adoption Centre  
First Floor, 71-73 High Street, Barnet, Herts EN5 5UR  
020 8447 4753 / 020 8449 2562  
www.icacentre.org.uk

The South London Adoption Consortium (SLAC)  
www.thesouthlondonadoptionconsortium.org.uk
Talk to us

For more information on adopting with us please call 0800 952 0707 or 020 7525 4497. Text 07946 447 654. Call the adoption duty service 020 7525 4491 between 9am and 5pm.

If you want to come and meet us, you can attend one of our adoption information events. Visit www.southwark.gov.uk/ adoption for dates and times.

We look forward to hearing from you.
Get the facts on adoption

- Visit www.southwark.gov.uk/adoption
- Call free 0300 222 5939
- Email adoption@southwark.gov.uk