



PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER

Your guide to
Adoption & Fostering

www.pactcharity.org

Freephone: (0800) 731 1845

Welcome !

Thank you for requesting information on adoption or fostering with PACT.

This guide is our joint handbook containing information on both of these services and we hope you will find it interesting and informative.

If, having read this information, you feel the time is right to find out more, we will look forward to meeting you at one of our information evening meetings - see dates in the pack. However, don't hang onto any questions you may have in the meantime - contact us!

We are available from 10.00 - 1.00 pm Monday to Friday on Freephone 0800 731 1845 or you can email us on info@pactcharity.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Satwinder Sandhu', written in a cursive style.

Satwinder Sandhu
Adoption & Fostering Director

"We found PACT to be the most professional, responsive, flexible and informed agency we have come across."

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About PACT

Parents And Children Together (PACT) is a registered charity committed to building and strengthening families. We are registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families as a voluntary adoption agency and are regularly inspected by OFSTED (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

Thanks to the caring professionalism, experience and dedication of our teams across the region we have been working with families and children for nearly 100 years.

What are we looking for?

As a voluntary adoption and fostering agency we assess families for their suitability to adopt or foster, but we do not have children to place with them ourselves.

Local authorities are responsible for Looked After Children and, as such, will contact PACT seeking families when they have been unsuccessful in finding a match within their own approved families. We are particularly looking for families who would be able to care for children fitting one of the following groups;

- Older (for adoption this will be children over 5 years and for fostering the children will be 8 years plus)
- Children needing to stay with their brothers & sisters (sibling groups)
- Children of black or minority ethnic backgrounds
- Children with a significant physical disability.

Whilst these profiles may sometimes change we are unable to accept families wishing to care for children outside of one of these groups.

What is Adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for a child when living with their own family is not possible. It is a legal process by which all parental responsibility is transferred to the adoptive parent(s), as if the child had been born to them. There are 5 thousand children across the UK waiting to be adopted. Due to their backgrounds and experiences, these children need fresh hope for the future.

What is Fostering?

PACT's Long Term Fostering Service is for families who are able to offer permanent homes to older children, typically aged between 8 and 11 years at the time of placement.

Not all children who cannot return to their own families want to be adopted, especially older children or those who continue to have regular contact with relatives. These children live with long-term foster carers until they reach adulthood and are ready to live independently. For many young people today this is often not until they are in their early 20s.

What is 'Dual Approval' ?

You want to care for children but you are unsure if you want to adopt a child or foster a child. Usually you have to make a decision because there are different procedures to follow. However, PACT has changed all that! We will guide you through one process so that once approved you can consider children who need adoption or fostering.

Eligibility

The first thing to say is that you don't have to be married, own your own home or have a full time job. Here's some more information...

Age

You have to be a minimum of 21 years old.

Although there isn't a legal upper age limit, caring for children is demanding and you need to be able to demonstrate the energy, emotional and physical health to care for a child throughout childhood and beyond.

Catchment Area

You will need to live within the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Exceptions to this will be made for black or mixed race families or those offering placement to children with extra-ordinary needs who live on county boundaries. The decision as to whether to accept an application if you live out of area will also depend upon the availability of an assessing social worker.

Marital status

You may be married, in a Civil Partnership, single, separated or divorced. We will need evidence that your relationship is lasting, constant and enduring in nature.

Children

You don't have to have children already. However, we may well ask you to gain direct experience, outside your family, with children of an age that you wish to care for before we accept an application. We would ask you to volunteer for a minimum of three months. We can help you find a suitable setting to gain this useful experience which will be viewed very positively by children's social workers and it will indicate to them your commitment.

If you do have children, the age difference between an adopted or fostered child and any children already in the family should normally be at least 3 years to allow for each child to have their needs fully met. Looked After Children need to be the youngest in the family, given many of their early needs were not well met.

Fertility Treatment and childless couples

If you have been undergoing treatment to conceive, you should have completed any investigations or treatment to assist conception before you apply.

If you have decided to adopt in favour of conceiving naturally, we will ask you to seek counselling before we talk about adoption, to ensure all the issues have been fully explored.

Discipline

Prospective adopters or foster carers must agree not to smack their children, or use any form of corporal punishment and to agree with the Agency on forms of discipline which they would use in caring for a child.

Health

You do need to be medically fit to care for a child throughout childhood and into adulthood.

PACT is looking to place all children, but particularly those under 5, in a smoke free home. PACT is aware of the medical evidence regarding the impact of passive smoking on children. It is likely applicants will be asked when they stopped smoking given the evidence that a majority relapse within the first six month of stopping smoking. After 12 months most people will be permanent non-smokers and only after 10 years of non- smoking will a person be classed as a non-smoker for insurance purposes.

Criminal offences

You will not be able to adopt or foster if you have any criminal offence against children. Other serious criminal offences may also disqualify you. Please ask for advice when you first contact us.

Pets

Many PACT families have animals. However, it is important that they are child-friendly and have an appropriate status within the home. If this cannot be guaranteed you will be asked to consider making alternative arrangements for the animal's long term care.

Religion

PACT sets no criteria about the religious beliefs of applicants. Looked After Children come from a range of religious or non-religious backgrounds and we are seeking families to accommodate this variety.

You do need to have time

You will need to have the time to give to your child - caring for children and young people who have been through trauma and loss means being available for them at any time. It's important that you know what you need, and to take care of yourself, so that when you feel depleted you can give yourself a treat and be ready to start again the next day.

REMEMBER: there is no such thing as a typical adopter or foster carer: we are all different and so are the children who are waiting to be adopted or fostered.

Gathering Information

Now that you're considering adoption or fostering, you will want to find out as much as you can to help decide whether or not to continue.

You will hopefully gain some valuable information from reading this pack. You can also find out more by:-

- Reading some of the books suggested on page 22
- Attending one of your information evenings
- Talking to other people about their experiences
- Contacting your local authority
- Asking us your questions

Information Evenings

PACT holds regular information evenings in Oxford and Reading. These informal events provide you with further details as well as the opportunity to talk to an experienced social worker about your own situation.

You will also be able to hear from a PACT Adopter or Foster Carer (or both!) about their experience of the whole process, from initial contact with the agency to having a child placed. *If you want to attend one of the meetings please return the reply slip enclosed in this pack or contact us on free phone 0800 731 1845.*

Initial Interview

If, after attending one of your information evenings, you feel you would like to proceed to the next stage, we will offer you an initial interview if you meet our eligibility criteria and are interested in the types of children outlined on page 6.

The initial interview, held in PACT's office, will explore your personal circumstances and provide more information about adoption or fostering and answer any personal queries you may have. Following the meeting the Director of Adoption and Fostering will make a decision as to whether PACT can take up your application. If the decision is not to proceed the reasons will be discussed with you and confirmed in writing.

If we offer you an application form this will be sent via e-mail and will require electronic completion.

Preparation Courses

If you then proceed to the next stage you will be invited to attend our Preparation Course. This course is run over one evening and three full days and provides a relaxed and informal atmosphere in which you can learn more about the many aspects of adoption and fostering today.

The course presentations take different formats in recognition of people's different learning styles and are attended by guest speakers. The content of the course includes information on why children are placed away from their birth families, the issues of parenting other people's children and the relevant standards for adoption & fostering. Some of the material is based on feedback from previous participants as to what they consider was most helpful in preparing them to become adoptive and foster parents.

"We have made some lifelong friends as a result of the courses. It is useful to know we have someone to talk to, who fully understands what we are talking about, because they are going through it too."

References

As part of the application process we seek references from a range of people and agencies. PACT is required to make these enquiries/checks to ensure there are no known reasons why you cannot be considered for adoption or fostering, and to gain evidence of the skills you possess that will prepare you for the task of adoption and fostering. It is also important that we gather information as to the areas you will find difficult so that we can be available to support you when you need us.

Local Authority

We will write to your local authority social services' department seeking checks including the child protection register. If you have moved counties in the last 10 years any previous local authorities will also be contacted.

The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)

A criminal records check will be sought from the CRB and if you have lived overseas for any considerable length of time a police check will also be sought from the relevant country/ counties.

Medicals

You will be asked to undertake a medical examination by your G.P and if you have children their doctor will be asked to comment on any health issues they may have. This medical will include questions on your alcohol and social drug intake and any other health related lifestyle factors. PACT's Medical Adviser will then see your medical report and provide their comments on your suitability to adopt or foster.

Work

Employers will be asked to provide a written reference for you. If any of your previous employment was with children, or you have been unemployed for fewer than 6 months, your former employer will also be contacted.

If you are self employed you will be asked to provide a current pay slip or letter from your accountant.

The Children and Family Court Advisory & Support Service (CAFCASS)

If you have been involved in family court proceedings, private law matters etc. CAFCASS will be contacted.

Education

If you have children at school, the head teacher will be asked to provide a written reference about them. If a Nursery is attended a similar request will be made. If your children are educated at home, the local authority will be contacted for a reference.

Health Visitor

If you have pre-school children a reference will be sought from their Health Visitor.

Previous Partners

We will write to any previous partners with whom you have lived, although this will only be done after discussing this matter with you first.

Voluntary

If you are engaged in voluntary work with children you will be asked to provide a named referee from the organization who can comment on your work with children.

Personal

We will ask you to provide the names of three personal references per applicant, one of whom should be a relative. They will be asked to give a written reference and a total of three will be interviewed by your social worker. Other relatives may also be approached, although they will both be asked for a formal written reference.

Children

If you already have children in the family, either from your present or previous relationships, their views on your plans will be sought.

Other

If you have previously applied to adopt or foster a child we will also contact your previous agency for a reference.

Assessment

When you begin the process to adopt or foster a child through PACT you will be assigned your own social worker.

Your social worker will visit you at home and during their assessment will work with you to produce your Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) or Prospective Foster Carer's Report (PFCR).

When completed the reports contain details on your background & experiences, a description of your lifestyle & values and the type of children you could care for, as well as how a child or children might fit in your family.

You will have the opportunity to contribute to the report and at the end will be able to see and comment on the final version.

"Our Social Worker was excellent — supportive, informative and treated us with dignity every step of the way."

Panel

Your report will be presented to the members of PACT's Adoption & Fostering Panel by your social worker. You will be invited to attend this meeting.

The panel will be asked to provide their recommendation as to whether they feel you are suitable to be approved as adopters and/or long term foster carers. This will include advice on the number of children, age range and gender.

Your social worker will inform you of the Panel's recommendation and then PACT's Chief Executive will consider the recommendation and reach a formal decision within 7 working days.

When applications are not accepted, we will (where possible) explain the reason behind this decision. In some cases this may not be possible as some information

How long does approval last?

Adopters

If you are not linked with a child a year after your panel meeting, a written review of this approval will take place. Initially via a letter but this may also include a visit from a social worker to clarify and new circumstances if things have changed. If there is an issue about whether their approval should continue you will be invited to attend the Panel meeting when the matter is referred back to panel for a recommendation.

Foster carers

All new Foster carers are reviewed 6 months after their panel meeting. Thereafter, they approval is reviewed annually unless there is a significant change in their circumstances.

Any adopters or foster carers that have a birth child after they have been approved, but before they are matched with a child, will have their approval status referred to the Panel with a recommendation that their approval cease. If they then wish to be considered again, once their birth child is of an age, a completely new assessment will be required which considers all the changes becoming parents has brought.

Linking

The next stage is the 'linking process', where you will be helped through the process to be matched with a child or children.

After you are approved we circulate a short profile on you to a number of local authorities nationwide to see if they have any children that would be an appropriate match. Local authorities also compile profiles of children on their care and suitable details are sent to you to consider.

If you are approved for adoption your details will be added to the National Adoption Register. This Register also contains details of children awaiting adoption and any 'matches' are shared between the appropriate social workers. In addition, all foster carers and adopters can subscribe to various magazines and newsletters featuring profiles of children. We strongly recommend subscribing to publications such as 'Be My Parent' or 'Children Who Wait' (both have online version available) to help you identify children that you would like to seek further information on.

During this time your social worker will visit you regularly to talk to you about children, go over any available CPRs (The Child's Permanence Report), and help you prepare for the realities of becoming adopters or foster carers. Once a possible link is found you will have the chance to meet some of the people who know the child/ren and ask any additional questions you may have about their background, current needs etc.

Local Authority Panel

If you and the local authority are in agreement to proceed then the potential 'link' will be considered by the child's local authority panel. This panel gives their recommendation, based on the best interests of the child, to their decision maker. The decision maker will then determine whether or not the proposed placement should go ahead.

Introductions

Once the match has been approved you and the child(ren) will then have the chance to get to know each other during a series of 'introductions'. This is a planned schedule in which you will increasingly spend more time with the children until they come to live with you permanently. This introductory period can last from 1 week to 1 month depending on the age of the child their needs, background history, medical situation etc.

Placement

Once you have all got to know each other and feel ready to move on to the next stage, it will then be time for the child(ren) to move in.

Those who have done it say that nothing can prepare you for the excitement (and exhaustion!) you feel at this stage. Your social worker and the child's social worker meet with you regularly in the early stages of placement to provide support and help with any issues that may arise.

Court

PACT adopters will then submit a court application to adopt their child(ren) which is accompanied by a report from their social worker. Before applying for the Adoption Order the law currently states that any children must have lived with their prospective adopters for at least 10 weeks. However, in some cases this can take up to a year to ensure that it is the right decision for the child and everyone concerned to move to this stage.

There will then be a court hearing where the Adoption Order is granted. When the adoption is finalized in court this way the birth parents are no longer legally responsible for the child and you become the child's legal parents.

Contact

It is very important for children who are adopted or fostered to maintain positive links with their family where possible. This could be through 'letterbox' contact or sometimes face to face meetings with important people from the child's life. At all times contact is arranged with your agreement.

Every Child Matters

'Every Child Matters' is a Government initiative to maximize the opportunities available to all children, ensuring they have the care and support available to improved their life chances and reach their potential.

The five core aims of the initiative re:

1. Be Healthy
2. Stay Safe
3. Enjoy & Achieve
4. Make a Positive Contribution *and*
5. Achieve Economic Wellbeing

PACT works with all of our adopters and foster carers to help them achieve these goals and safeguard & promote the welfare of children in their care.

All foster carers are required to maintain records of the care they have provided under each of the five outcomes. For example the indicators for ensuring that children are healthy include: an eye test within the last 12 months, a dental check within the last 6 months etc. PACT provides regular training and support to help foster carers understand this task and how the 'Every Child Matters' framework is used.

Support Services

PACT has an extensive range of support services for adopters, foster carers and their families. These services are provided by an experienced and stable workforce who understand the issue that children who have suffered from trauma and loss bring to their new families. They are able to combine their broad range of skills to create a unique service that is completely tailored to each family's individual needs.

Our support services include:

- Educational Psychologists**
- Play Therapy**
- Homeopathy**
- Medical Herbalist**
- Art Therapy**
- Familial Therapy**
- Couple counselling**
- Life Story work**
- Adoptive Family Links**
- Post Approval Workshops & Training**
- Newsletter & Picnics**
- Support Groups**
- Telephone Duty Support (including out of hours)**
- Father's Group**

"An extremely useful service, very knowledgeable about children with difficult backgrounds."

"I felt understood and empowered."

"It has made a positive, significant difference for us when we were feeling in a very difficult situation."

Financial Information

Adopters

Medicals

Adopters may be charged for the medical checks required as part of the assessment process, this charge is set by the applicant's doctor.

Adoption Allowance

If an adopted child has significant needs that require financial assistance, an adoption allowance may be paid by the placing Local Authority.

Legal Expenses

There is a set fee to lodge a adoption application in the County Court and there may be legal costs involved if the application is complex. The child's local authority may pay for part, or all, of these charges.

Foster Carers

Medicals

Foster Carers do not have to pay for the medical checks required as part of the assessment process.

Fostering Allowance

PACT pays all of our Foster carers a 'professional fostering allowance'. This weekly allowance is made up of two elements;

1. A personal allowance for the young person's care and their persona expenses.
2. A payment, for the foster carer, in recognition of the fact that fostering is a complex and specialized work and as such needs a level of expertise, training and time commitment which are over and above the skills needed for 'ordinary' parenting.

All families will be expected to prepare their home for a child, with an appropriate bed etc., and therefore any significant additional expenses such as this may be considered by the placing local authority.

Recommended Reading

Could you be my parent? Adoption and Fostering Stories

Edited by Leonie Sturge-Moore: BAAF, Published November 2005
ISBN 1 903699 82 7

Attachment Handbook for Foster Care and Adoption

Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek: BAAF June 8, 2006
ISBN: 1903699967

Providing a secure base in Long-Term Foster Care

Mary Beek and Gillian Scholfield: BAAF, 2004

The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child

Nancy Newton Verrier, published by Penguin
ISBN: 0963648004

Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption: Extraordinary yet ordinary

Ed. Stephen Hicks and Janet McDermott: Jessica Kingsley, 1999

Fostering a Child: A guide for people interested in fostering

Henrietta Bond: BAAF, 2004

Adopting a Child: A Guide for People Interested in Adoption. 7th Edition

Lord, J - BAAF, 2006: ISBN 1 903699 93 2

Raising Adopted Children -Revised Edition: Practical Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent

Lois Ruskai Melina: ISBN 0060957174

Race and Ethnicity: A guide to the needs of black, minority ethnic and white children in family placement

Beverly Prevatt Goldstein & Marcia Spencer, BAAF 2000

Next Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurst: Tykes and Teens

Caroline Archer, Jessica Kingsley, 1999.

Attachment, Trauma & Resilience: Therapeutic caring for children

Kate Cairns, BAAF, 2002

Approaching Fatherhood: A Guide for Adoptive Dads and Others

Paul May: BAAF 2005. ISBN: 190 369 9657

A Child's Journey Through Placement

Vera Fahlberg: BAAF, 1994. ISBN: 187 386 8138

PACT's statement of Purpose for Adoption & Fostering

Please contact us for a copy—0118 9387600 or e-mail info@pactcharity.org

Useful Resources



British Association for Adoption & Fostering

020 7421 2600
www.baaf.org.uk



The Fostering Network
020 7261 1884 (12pm - 3pm Wed to Fri)
www.fostering.net



Adoption UK
0844 848 7900 (10am to 4pm)
www.adoptionuk.org



Public Services
www.direct.gov.uk/Parents
Adoption and Fostering information

Every Child Matters
Change For Children

Every Child Matters
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/fostercare

Please note PACT has no control over the content of the websites listed and therefore cannot accept any responsibility for their content.

Contact Us

We are here to provide you with all the information you need and answer your questions honestly and clearly. There will be no obligation on you to continue the process.

Telephone	0800 731 1845. (Freephone) 0118 938 7600
Website	www.pactcharity.org
Address	Parents and Children Together, FREEPOST (SCE6005). Reading, RG1 4ZR <i>(no stamp required)</i>
E-mail	info@pactcharity.org

Feedback

PACT wishes to improve and develop its services and welcomes feedback, verbally or in writing, at all times. PACT is particularly grateful for observations and criticisms by those who consider that our services could be improved, and any suggestions on how improvements might be made at any stage. Positive and constructive observations are welcome. Feedback evaluation forms are used by all services.

If you wish to make a formal complaint about PACT's services, or you are a child or person on behalf of a child, we have set out the framework for this. If you have any queries about this process, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Stage	Procedure	Time for response
Stage 1	Raise the complaint with the person concerned who will try to resolve the issue	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Formal response within 14 days
Stage 2	Make the complaint verbally or in writing to the *Line Manager of the person concerned	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Formal response within 28 days
Stage 3	Send complaint in writing to the Chief Executive. (Or, if the complaint concerns the Chief Executive to the Chair). The complaint will then be looked into and a response provided	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Formal response within 28 days
Stage 4	If the complainant is still not satisfied s/he should write formally to the Chief Executive requesting that an Independent Investigating Officer examine the complaint. The officer's written report should then be sent to the complainant, who will then have the opportunity of responding in writing to a panel of 3 PACT Trustees, none of whom will have had any involvement with the issues raised. The decision of these Trustees will be final	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Independent Investigating Officer will be given 6 weeks to provide a report (reasons for delay will be provided) Decision of Trustees within 28 days
Further	On points of law, complainants should consult a solicitor	

NOTES

- A** Complaints can be started at Stage 1, Stage 2 or Stage 3. If the complaint first reaches the Chief Executive in writing, the complainant may be given the opportunity of consideration being given in Stages 1 or 2.
- B** Please indicate with any complaint if your first language is other than English.
- C** At any stage a complainant may be accompanied by a friend but not a legal representative
- D** Confidentiality agreements for agency work will be maintained.
- E** *If you are unsure who the line manager is please contact PACT's offices 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading, RG1 4QS Telephone 0118 9387600 - **E-mail:** info@pactcharity.org
- F** You can contact Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA – **E-mail:** enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- G** You can contact the office of the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted. 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE on Freephone 0800 5280731 – **website** www.rights4me.org

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