

Thinking about adoption if you already have children

Families are made up in many different ways, and adoption is one way to extend your family. Considering adoption if you already have a child or children needs careful planning. The motivation to adopt may be for a number of reasons; you may be facing fertility or medical issues, or simply making a conscious choice to extend your family through adoption. Whatever the reasons, a decision to adopt will impact on the whole family whether your children are younger and still living at home or grown up.

Timing of discussions with your children

An important consideration is how much to tell the children in your family and when. As parents you will want to protect your children from the variable delays and waiting times throughout the adoption process. It is worth delaying deeper discussions about adoption until you have decided that adoption is right for the whole family. Things to consider initially:

- Speak with adoption agencies to make sure you meet the necessary criteria before seeking your children's thoughts.
- It is helpful to talk with your adoption team about the timing of an application and the age and backgrounds of children that you can consider.
- Tentatively explore your children's thoughts about adoption once you feel adoption is a realistic option.
- Once you decide to start the adoption process share information on the progress and challenges with your children to prevent unnecessary worry and be honest in managing their expectations.
- Adoption agencies will sensitively explore your children's thoughts and concerns about adoption and will help you manage sharing information with them.
- The decision to adopt ultimately lies with the adults in the family however strong a child's wish to have a sibling may be. The reality may be very different to everyone's expectations, so it is worthwhile spending time researching and understanding adoption before mentioning this to children.

Age gap between children

Considering the age gap between your children is important. Adopted children will have a range of insecurities when they join your family and adoption agencies will not want to do anything to undermine your existing child or children's security. Research evidence shows that giving each child space is advisable and therefore a wider age gap between the children may be better. Agencies generally prefer the adopted child to be the youngest in the family with a significant age gap of at least 2 years. A larger age gap may make it easier for each of the children to feel that their place in the family is secure, reducing conflicts due to children being at similar developmental stages. Your existing children will perhaps be more mature and better able to support and understand the needs of their new adopted sibling. As children placed for adoption are usually not babies, adoption agencies may prefer that your youngest child is nearer 3 or 4 years of age or older, before you make an application. Any waiting time can usefully be spent researching and finding out more about adoption.

Bedroom space

Due to the needs and vulnerabilities of an adopted child, they may need their own bedroom and may not be able to share with another child. Having a spare bedroom or being able to create the room in your existing property will need thinking about as adoption agencies will want to see this flexibility.

Parenting skills

Adoption agencies will recognise your valuable parenting experience but will want to discuss the differences in parenting an adopted child. Children who experience unmet physical and emotional needs early in life can have their later development adversely affected, perhaps requiring different parenting techniques to your birth child. Those parenting methods that worked previously may not work with children who have had a traumatic past. An adoption agency will support you and your family to understand the impact of early life trauma for children, and help you consider different ways to respond to adopted children's needs and behaviours.

Time out of work and finances

An adoption agency will expect one parent to be able to take time out of work when a child is placed with you, generally between 6-12 months and in some cases longer depending on the needs of the child. You will want to think about what this means financially for you as a family. Due to a child's vulnerabilities and the instability during their early life, having a parent's availability is important and will help a child to build a trusting relationship with you, a new parent. It may take a child time to learn to trust again and the availability of their new parent will help them do this.

Emotional impact for the children in your family

The children already in the family will need lots of support to understand the adoption process and opportunities to share any worries with their parents. Older children can play an invaluable part in helping younger children to settle into a family. However, your existing children, especially the youngest, may feel confused or struggle to accept their new position within the family. They may react to having their previously settled world upset by the arrival of a new child. They may have concerns over sharing their parent's attention and may express this through behaviour, such as aggression, directed towards the new child. At the same time adopted children can find the transition into their new family confusing and combined with the effects of their early life experiences, it may result in behaviour that is difficult for both parents and existing children in the family.

Adoption will change your family in many ways and the process may be challenging and may raise unexpected reactions from children and other family members, as well as being hugely rewarding. As adults you will have carefully considered all the benefits and challenges adoption brings and with careful thought and planning will manage the adoption assessment with the support of the adoption agency for your family's adoption journey.

Next Steps

We hope this information has helped answer some questions you may have. If you feel ready to approach an adoption agency you can find adoption agencies that cover your area through our [agency finder](#). Alternatively call **0300 222 0022** and speak with one of our advisers who will provide you with details of adoption agencies as well as answer any other questions. Agencies are happy to give information and answer questions even if you're not yet sure about adoption, so do contact them if you want to find out more.