



**Adoption
Central
England**

Practice Guidance

Relinquished Babies



1. Introduction

- 1.1 Statutory adoption guidance sets out a process to be followed in the case of relinquished children under the age of six weeks. This is based on the supposition that the agency is approached in the early stages of the expectant mother's pregnancy and that her intention to relinquish does not waver. Experience has shown, however, that this does not match the reality, which includes concealed pregnancies and/or late decisions to relinquish a child for adoption. Nor does it recognise that many birth mothers may change their mind about adoption once the child has been born. The balance between the rights of the birth mother to request adoption and the rights of the child to be brought up within his/her birth family is often challenging for social workers.
- 1.2 Nevertheless, it is clear that the Local Authority is under a duty to do whatever it can to ensure that children are brought up within their birth family if at all possible, and that the child's welfare must be paramount in all of its considerations.
- 1.3 The focus of the Local Authority's work with relinquishing birth mothers is based on the principle that adoption is a service for children and not a service for adults. Whilst the circumstances of mothers who have expressed a wish for their baby to be adopted must be carefully and sensitively considered, every effort will be made to explore the possibility of the mother or father caring for the child, or of the child being cared for within the extended birth family. The process to be followed in such circumstances reflects this approach.
- 1.4 ***The responsibility for relinquished children is always retained by the relevant Local Authority as the corporate parent for the child. The role of ACE is to support this process and provide initial counselling for birth parent/s and advice and consultation to the allocated Children's Team.***

2. Responding to a referral

- 2.1 Referrals to Local Authority Children's Teams concerning mothers wishing to relinquish their babies for adoption can be received from hospitals, midwives, other health professionals or directly from the relinquishing mother herself. Upon receiving this referral, a separate referral on the electronic case record should be opened for the birth mother and her child, even if this child is unborn at the time of the referral. If the birth mother is already known to the Local Authority team, and there is an existing referral, all subsequent information should be added to this and a new referral should be opened for the baby.



- 2.2 Upon receipt of a referral it is best practice for a case to be allocated to a named children's social worker for the unborn/baby, bearing in mind the importance of consistency of worker for a mother in these circumstances. Each Local Authority will have their own practices and procedures in terms of allocation but it would be preferable for the social worker to have a level of adoption experience given the sensitive nature of this work. ***This social worker should contact ACE at the earliest opportunity who will identify a social worker to undertake an initial visit alongside the child's social worker, in order to counsel birth parent/s on the implications of adoption for the child, themselves and their wider family.*** Both workers will support each other to guide the family through the process.
- 2.3 Where applicable, a single assessment should be undertaken by the child's social worker that should be entered in a timely manner, onto the electronic social care record for both the child and the mother by the social worker in order to avoid any delay in planning for the child.

3. Pre-birth counselling

- 3.1 As soon as possible following receipt of the referral the allocated social worker and ACE social worker will arrange to jointly meet with the relinquishing mother and/or father and provide them with pre-birth counselling. The focus of this interview will be a general discussion around adoption and its legal and emotional implications and a discussion of available alternatives which should include:
- Staying with either parent, individually or jointly, with close support where possible,
 - Short term foster care, with the aim of returning the child with support,
 - Long term placement within the child's wider family,
 - Placement for adoption.
- 3.2 The social workers will need to get to know the parent/s properly so that they can support them in making plans for the child. Any questions asked by the parent/s need to be answered honestly with plenty of reassurance, particularly if there are other children in the family, that they will not be meeting.
- 3.3 The social worker should also immediately liaise with ACE to refer the birth mother, and (if known) birth father with parental responsibility, for counselling prior to making a referral to CAFCASS to witness consent. This counselling will be undertaken during a joint visit by the Local Authority and ACE social workers.



3.4 Counselling Checklist

Issues to be explored within the counselling should include:

- Gain an understanding of the parent(s) specific needs i.e.:
 - Communication requirements,
 - Literacy skills,
 - Cultural issues,
 - Disabilities,
 - Immigration concerns.
- Gain an understanding of the reasons for requesting the child be placed for adoption and, if not from both parents, information about the father. Explain other options to the parent/s and guardians and advise if there are any other support services that could be offered to allow the child to remain with parent/s or guardians,
- Discuss the knowledge, views of the extended family i.e. siblings, grandparents, and any consequences of them not knowing about the child's birth, especially if the identity of the father remains unknown to the Local Authority,
- Discuss the birth father, if not known or not part of the relinquishing process, in relation to his:
 - Identity,
 - Address,
 - Wishes and feelings,
 - Whether he has parental responsibility or intends to acquire it, his role and potential rights in the process if he has or acquires parental responsibility.
- If the identity of the birth father without parental responsibility is known to the Local Authority it must make a judgement as to whether it is appropriate to counsel and advise him,
- Be aware that the birth father could challenge this judgement and therefore the reasons for the judgement that it is not appropriate, should be carefully discussed and recorded. (AAR14)
- To discuss the meaning of adoption:
 - Lifelong implications,



- Legal consequences of consenting to placement for adoption Section 19 and the advanced consent to the making of an adoption order Section 20 of Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the legal effects of adoption,
- Contact issues, e.g. including the parents and guardians wishes about possible future involvement in the child's life, and wishes and views of the child (if of sufficient understanding),
- The need for information for later life for the child,
- Whether the relinquishing parents wish to be involved in selecting the new parents for the child and/or give their consent to placement with particular adopters,
- Entitlement to adoption support services and the processes for searching for the child when they become 18 years of age,
- Support available to the birth parents and family beyond the child's adoption,
- The rights of the child to obtain information about and search for his or her birth parent(s) once they reach the age of 18,
- The role of CAFCASS in ensuring that consent is given unconditionally and with full understanding i.e. without any conditions attached, including contact,
- Giving the written information.

3.5 Competency

If, during the counselling sessions, (prior to referral to CAFCASS) the social workers consider that the parent is not capable of understanding the giving of consent and the Local Authority decides that the child should be placed for adoption without consent, the Local Authority must initiate care and/or placement proceedings.

3.6 If the parent(s) seems to have characteristics which could impede some level of the understanding of giving consent because of i.e.

- Moderate learning disabilities;
- Mental health issues (not severe);
- Cultural, ethnic or faith issues;
- Consent not being given unconditionally (parents only willing to consent with conditions attached e.g. contact).



Then further information about the parent(s) understanding may need to be sought from another professional person, preferably someone who knows the parent (i.e. adult learning disabilities social worker; approved mental health worker; midwife; health visitor; general practitioner) and consideration given to independent advocacy or whether an interpreter is necessary to ensure understanding where English is not the first language.

- 3.7 Birth parent/s should be involved in discussions around suitable adoptive families. They should have the opportunity to share views on what they would like in a family and if appropriate be shown profiles of possible families.
- 3.8 The mother should be given an explanation of the procedures for placement for adoption, the legal implications of adoption, and the Local Authority should ascertain her wishes and feelings, including her wishes and feelings about the child's religious and cultural upbringing, and issues of contact, and take these into account when considering matching for adoption. ***The social worker should explain to the birth mother that it is possible to place a baby directly with prospective adopters if the birth mother gives written agreement to place under the Fostering for Adoption regulations (see [ACE Fostering for Adoption Guidance](#)).*** The mother should also be made aware that she may be given the opportunity to meet with any prospective adopters identified. Agreement to place will also be needed from a father with parental responsibility. ***It should be made clear that this agreement is not the same as giving formal consent to the child being adopted which can only be given once the child is six weeks old, and must be witnessed by a CAF/CASS officer.*** The birth mother should also be informed, however, that where it is not possible to place directly with prospective adopters, the child will be placed with foster carers until suitable prospective adopters can be identified.
- 3.9 It is usual to include the father of the child in the counselling process. The birth mother should be encouraged to provide the father's name or any information that may assist in him being traced. His consent to adoption will be required if he has parental responsibility. When determining whether to contact a father without parental responsibility when the mother does not wish to disclose his identity, the following criteria must be considered:
- The nature of the child's relationship with the father,
 - The nature and extent of the father's relationship with the mother and any siblings,
 - Whether failure to disclose to the father would constitute a contravention of Article 8 of the Convention (concerning respect for private and family life),

- The child will require background information, including health information regarding his/her father,
 - Whether there are any risk factors to the mother or child in contacting father.
- 3.10 ***Reasons for not involving the father must be discussed with the line manager by the child's social worker and legal advice should also be obtained clearly recorded on the child's electronic social care record.*** Where the father's identity cannot be established or the case is complex, legal advice must be sought as soon as possible to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay for the child.
- 3.11 Every effort must be made to elicit comprehensive family health background information - using CoramBAAF medical forms including consent to share medical information. Information from both parents needs to be obtained where possible and where consent is granted.
- 3.12 If the plan remains one of adoption (approximately half of mothers do change their minds during counselling or in the week after the baby's birth) explain to the parents that the child is likely to remain in placement with Fostering for Adoption carers for at least six weeks in order that counselling can continue and the child's medical assessment can be arranged.
- 3.13 The emphasis upon urgent planning is strong - in some cases it may be feasible with enough preparation for the ACE Adoption Panel to be ready to consider the case immediately and the agency decision maker to endorse this decision immediately. Upon the child's birth, additional counselling must be offered to ensure adoption remains the plan, and if so, whether the child should be placed with particular adopters.

4. Arrangement of a Placement

- 4.1 The child will either be placed with the prospective adopters (if already identified in a Foster for Adopt placement and with the signed agreement of the birth mother and/or father) or with Local Authority foster carers. ***A request should be made to the placements team for a fostering placement and to ACE for a Fostering for Adoption placement simultaneously and as early as possible.*** It is important that such foster carers have experience of caring for children in this situation, and are sensitive to the emotional turmoil of the birth mother in the weeks following birth. Prospective adopters and foster carers should be committed to working closely with social workers and the birth mother to explore the possibility of the child remaining with the birth mother or within the birth family, or moving on to adoption if appropriate.



- 4.2 In the absence of available approved adopters, if the mother has signed consent for the baby to be placed prior to six weeks post-birth, the social worker will make a referral to the fostering team for a fostering placement. Once a foster carer is identified, the social worker should offer the birth parents an opportunity to meet the foster carer if appropriate.
- 4.3 The placement must conform to the Care Planning, Case and Placement Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the appropriate Children Looked After forms should be completed. The mother needs to give consent for the child to be accommodated by signing the placement plan which also gives consent for all necessary medical treatment for the child whilst accommodated. These should be signed by the placing social worker and distributed to all concerned. A copy of the placement plan should also be placed on the child's file.

5. Once the child is born

- 5.1 Following the birth of the baby the mother can decide whether to care for the baby or request segregation from the baby whilst both are in hospital. It is usual for the mother to opt for the latter arrangement. The child's social worker should see the mother separately and privately as soon as possible after birth. The benefits of skin to skin contact in forming early attachments are widely acknowledged and as such the foster carer identified for the baby should be ready to provide this within a very short timeframe if the birth mother does not wish to do so.
- 5.2 The parent/s should be encouraged to see the baby but must not be forced to (alternative arrangements can be made for the parent/s to see the baby). The parent/s do not need to provide anything for the baby but can and may wish to do so. Upon discharge the mother will leave the baby in the hospital. The birth parent/s must be advised of the independent support for birth families - **Family Connexions** - and a referral to this service should be made by the social worker (familyconnexions@aceadoption.com) if parents continue to express a wish to relinquish following birth. This service offers independent advice and support to birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for their child. As such, details of this intervention will not be shared with the child's social worker.
- 5.3 Prior to or on discharge, CoramBAAF medical forms M and B should be presented to the ward for completion by the paediatrician or senior nurse responsible for the child and the mother. These should be presented with the consent form signed by the birth parent. Often mother and baby are placed on



different wards and so different medical professionals may need to complete these forms.

- 5.4 When the child is born, the birth mother should be encouraged and supported to register the birth and name the child. If she is not willing to register the birth, this remains the responsibility of the allocated social worker for the child. If parents are unwilling or feel unable to identify a name for the child, they can give permission for this privilege to pass to identified prospective adopters.
- 5.5 The baby will be placed with either prospective adopters identified under a Fostering to Adopt arrangement, with the signed agreement of the birth mother, or with foster carers. The social worker will counsel the mother to confirm whether she still wishes to place the child for adoption and revisit the discussions detailed in Section 3.
- 5.6 Where the identity of a father without parental responsibility is known to the Local Authority, and they are satisfied that it is safe and appropriate to do so, it must fulfil the same requirements that would apply if he were a father with parental responsibility. The agency must also ascertain if possible whether he wishes to acquire parental responsibility for the child or intends applying for a Child Arrangements Order. The Local Authority is not bound to inform and consult a father without parental responsibility in all circumstances, i.e. if there are significant risks posed by doing so. Legal advice should always be sought before a decision is made about informing and consulting a father without parental responsibility. If a father's identity cannot be established, the agency should seek legal advice.
- 5.7 The social worker must maintain close contact with the birth mother throughout this time. She should be encouraged to consider direct contact with the child and attending relevant meetings if she feels able to do so and measures should be implemented to support this. The mother (and any relevant family members if appropriate) should be informed of the **ACE Letterbox Exchange Service** as a means to maintain indirect contact with adopters in the longer term and be encouraged to sign the necessary agreements to facilitate an exchange of letters if this is something she would wish to do.
- 5.8 At the first statutory review (within 20 working days) all the options for best meeting the child's welfare needs, including for permanence, should be discussed. If there is still felt to be scope for the child to be cared for by birth family members, a further review should be convened within an agreed timescale.
- 5.9 To avoid delay for the child, statutory guidance states that an appropriate permanence plan should be identified no later than at the second (four month)



statutory review. If at this point there still remains a chance that the child will be cared for by birth family members, the review should record the reasons for extending this timescale, and set a further date. ***Once a decision for adoption has been made by the birth parent/s, and shortly after the baby is born, the social worker should contact the ACE Panel Administrator to request an adoption panel date which should fall within 8 weeks of the statutory review the plan for adoption was confirmed.***

- 5.10 The child's social worker will also collect the information required for the Child's Permanence Report and medical report. It is advisable to gain as much information as possible from the earliest possible stage whilst the birth parent is continuing to engage. The report should be discussed with the birth parent/s and their wishes clearly recorded. The report content must be read and signed by the supervising manager who must have the relevant adoption experience. Parents should be approached to sign the ***consent form*** included at the end of this Guidance to allow for the Child's Permanence Report to be shared with prospective adopters.
- 5.11 Following recommendation at adoption panel and confirmation from the agency decision maker that the child should be placed for adoption, the birth parent/s should be advised that if they still wish for plans for adoption to be made, a CAFCASS officer will contact them to witness their formal consent.

6. Involving CAFCASS

- 6.1 Formal witnessing of consent when a child who is not in care proceedings is relinquished for adoption must be undertaken by a CAFCASS practitioner if the parent is in England or Wales. This must take place after the initial period of counselling which lasts at least 6 weeks post-birth.
- 6.2 The father's formal consent to adoption should also be sought unless legal advice has confirmed that this is not appropriate in a particular case.
- 6.3 For babies under 6 weeks old CAFCASS should be given advance notice as soon as possible following baby's birth however will not ordinarily become involved until adoption panel has recommended a plan of adoption and this has been endorsed by the agency decision maker. However, the law permits consent to be witnessed before the adoption panel has met and the 'should be placed for adoption' decision has been made in circumstances where, for example, a parent is anxious to sign Section 19 consent as soon as her child reaches 6 weeks of age, and/or there is a risk parents will no longer be available to sign thereafter or the Local Authority is concerned there is a risk parental engagement may cease and a placement order application may therefore become necessary. The appointed CAFCASS Officer is responsible



for making this judgement. ACE would encourage a referral to be made to CAFCASS at the earliest possible stage in order to prevent any delay.

- 6.4 Where there is parental consent to the child's adoptive placement and/or advance parental consent to the child's adoption, the child's social worker must arrange for a written request to be sent to CAFCASS to appoint an officer to witness the consent.
- 6.5 The role of the appointed CAFCASS Officer is to witness parental consent to the following:

Section 19 Consent to placement for adoption

Section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides for parents or guardians to give their consent to their child being placed for adoption. This consent can be specific to placement with particular adopters, or for placement with any adopters chosen by the agency.

Consent under Section 19 is given in writing on a prescribed form and must be formally witnessed by a CAFCASS practitioner, at the request of the child's social worker, who must ensure consent is given with full understanding and unconditionally.

6.6 Section 20 Advance consent to the making of an adoption order

At the same time as giving this consent, or subsequently, formal consent may also be given under Section 20 to the making of an adoption order. This may be in relation to any adopters chosen by the agency or to adopters specified in the consent.

Consent under Section 20 is given in writing on a prescribed form and must be formally witnessed by a CAFCASS practitioner, at the request of the child's social worker, who must ensure consent is given with full understanding and unconditionally.

6.7 Statement with Section 20 Consent

At any time after giving consent under Section 20 (including when interviewed by the CAFCASS practitioner), the parent or guardian can make a statement that they do not wish to be notified of the subsequent application for an adoption order. If they do not do this, the court will notify them of the prospective adopter's subsequent application for an adoption order.

- 6.8 If this statement is made to the CAFCASS practitioner it should be recorded in writing and forwarded to the child's social worker. This situation could arise where a parent has requested their child be adopted and is clear that they wish to have no further involvement with the plans for the child. If such a



statement is made, Adoption Agency Regulations 12 requires that this is recorded on the child's adoption record and at the same time, a copy is filed within court proceedings.

- 6.9 Refer to www.cafcass.gov.uk for the most up to date version of CAFCASS 'Children Relinquished for Adoption' guidance which includes letter templates.

7. Involving the birth father and extended family members in concealed pregnancies

- 7.1 If the birth mother expressly does not wish for the birth father to be involved, the social worker should urgently seek legal advice and consider the January 2020 Case Law: *Cases A, B and C (Adoption: Notification of Fathers and Relatives) [2020] EWCA Civ 41* which considers appeals concerning three babies where the mothers had concealed the pregnancies from the fathers and relatives.
- 7.2 If, upon being contacted, the birth father expressed a wish for himself or a family member to care for the child this can be arranged with the support of the birth mother. However, if the birth mother is opposed to this, the birth father will need to seek independent legal advice and consider making a court application. In this situation it would not be appropriate to proceed with a Foster for Adoption placement due to the level of uncertainty.
- 7.3 Where the parents wish to conceal from members of their family the pregnancy, the birth of the child or the fact that they are seeking their adoption, the Local Authority will be faced with a conflict between the parents' right to privacy and the child's right to know, and perhaps be raised by their extended family. Where the Local Authority considers that it is likely to be in the child's interests to be given this opportunity, it should encourage the parents to consider the matter from the point of view of the child. Further legal advice should be sought.
- 7.4 Generally, the courts have been reluctant to override a parent's determination for the extended family not to be informed but, as with fathers without parental responsibility, social workers should avoid giving parents any undertaking that the birth or the proposed adoption will be kept secret, unless such an action would pose a risk to the mother of the child or the child themselves, for example in cases involving the risk of honour-based violence. Each case will have to be considered on its own facts.

8. Withdrawal of Consent



- 8.1 The child's parent or guardian is able to withdraw their consent to the child's placement for adoption by writing to the Local Authority at any stage until prospective adopters apply for an adoption order (which can be made after a child has been in placement for 10 weeks).
- 8.2 On receiving the notice of withdrawal of consent the authority is required to immediately review its decision to place the child for adoption. The Local Authority may decide to apply for a placement order, having taken legal advice to ensure that the conditions for this are satisfied. This would prevent the child's removal from their current placement until such a time as the court has considered the case.
- 8.3 Where consent to placement has been given and withdrawn but the child is not yet placed for adoption, then the child must be returned to the parents within seven days unless the authority decides to apply for a placement order.
- 8.4 Where the child is placed for adoption by consent under Section 19 of the Act and that consent is withdrawn, the child must be returned to the agency by the prospective adopters within 14 days, and the agency must return the child to the parents, unless the Local Authority decides to apply for a placement order.
- 8.5 It is an offence for anyone other than the agency (in sections 33 and 34 cases, only a Local Authority) to remove a child where the child:
- Is placed for adoption with the parents' consent under Section 19 of the Act,
 - Is placed for adoption and either the child is less than six weeks of age or the agency has at no time been authorised to place the child for adoption,
 - Is not yet placed for adoption and is being accommodated by the Local Authority and the authority has applied for a placement order and the application has not yet been disposed of,
 - Is not yet placed but the agency is authorised under Section 19 of the Act or would be if consent to placement had not been withdrawn,
 - It is the responsibility of the child's worker and the prospective adopter's adoption officer to ensure that the prospective adopters are fully aware of the implications should consent be withdrawn. This must be explained before the child is placed.

9. Information for the child in later life

- 9.1 The social worker should explain the importance of the child having information about their family of origin in order to develop a clear and positive sense of identity. The birth mother and other members of the birth family



should be encouraged to provide background information and photos. Birth mothers may also write a letter explaining their reasons for relinquishing the child for adoption. They should be made aware that their child will have the right as an adult to access information about their adoption and to trace their birth family.

- 9.2 Life story books and later life letters should be provided to the adoptive family by the child's social worker and there is an expectation that adoptive parents share their child's story with them from an early age. It may be that there is ongoing communication between birth relatives and adopters via the ACE Letterbox scheme.
- 9.3 As adopted adults, individuals are entitled to have the information contained in their Child's Permanence Report (all the information given to their adopter/s), and also information from the adoption agency to enable them to apply for their original birth certificate. The regulatory framework directs that this application is made to the adoption agency. The Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 (AIR) do not provide specifically for intermediary services.



Appendix 1: Consent form for the sharing of information



Dear Parent,

As part of the process of finding the best adoptive family for your child we will share with prospective adopters we believe may be suitable a document that the Social Worker has prepared called the 'Child's Permanence Report'.

This document contains background information about you and your child which will help us to ensure that the family identified is the right match and also that prospective adopters and in turn your child as a young person has as much information as possible in order to understand their situation.

Please indicate your agreement to this by signing below:

Signed.....

Print Name.....

Date.....



Appendix 2: Adoption Information for Birth Parents

Source: CAFCASS publication Good Practice Guidance: Children Relinquished for Adoption (available via cafcass.gov.uk)

What exactly is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a child with new legal parents. It ends the legal relationship between the child and the birth parents and establishes a new one with the adoptive parents. Adoptions are arranged by adoption agencies but are made legally binding by the court making an adoption order. Once granted an adoption order is final and cannot be overturned.

How do I find out more about adoption?

In addition to the information provided by adoption agencies, advice can also be sought from:

- Social workers from the Social Services Department of your Local Authority.
- Hospital social workers who work with maternity clinics.
- Websites like www.education.gov.uk; www.baaf.org.uk; www.adoptionuk.org

How is an adoption arranged?

If you decide that adoption is right for your child or just want some help with considering it further, a social worker or other adoption worker will spend some time with you to help you with your decision. You will be offered counselling and support from a social worker independent of the adoption agency. Preparations for the adoption can begin before your child is born, however, nothing will be definitely arranged until after the birth.

You will be free to change your mind up until the time when you sign consent to placement of your child for adoption, which usually takes place six weeks after the child's birth. Should you decide to proceed with adoption you will, in due course, need to give some personal information about yourself, your family and your family's health, for the adopters to be able to share with the child as he/she grows up. You will be asked to sign to agree that any information you have provided can be shared with the child.

Must the father of the baby give his permission?

If the birth father of the child has parental responsibility (PR) then his permission is necessary for the child to be placed for adoption. If a birth father of a child does not have PR, his permission for the child to be placed for adoption is not necessary. However, it is important to note that the father may wish to apply for PR, and should this be granted, will



need to consent to the adoption. He could choose to withdraw his consent to the adoption, at any stage up until an application for an adoption order has been made. The social worker may need to contact the father, if considered appropriate, as the adoption agency will want some information about the father's health, family and medical history so they can pass it on to the adopters and the child.

The baby's father may not agree with the adoption plan of the birth mother and may want to bring up the child himself or within his own family. If this is the case, and the birth father has PR or is likely to apply for it, the adoption agency and the court will need to know about it. If he and the birth mother are unable to agree the court will have to decide whether it thinks adoption or a life with the father is likely to be best for the child in the long term. If the birth mother is married but the husband isn't the father, the law will still consider the husband the legal father of the child unless he has signed a declaration otherwise. In this case the husband's consent to placement for adoption is necessary, but the adoption agency will also want, if possible, some information on the birth father so they can pass it on to the adopters and the child.

What sort of people will adopt my child?

The social worker will discuss with you the kind of family you want your child to grow up in. The greatest care will be taken to find a family who will give a safe and loving home to your child. You should talk to the social worker about the possibility of meeting the family, if you want to, or about other sorts of contact such as exchanging letters and if agreed, some photographs.

What happens after my baby is born?

Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to sign a form to agree to your child going to foster carers (this is not a consent form for adoption). In most cases the baby will be looked after by a temporary foster carer until you sign consent to placement for adoption when your child is six weeks old; up until this time, you are able to change your mind and your child could be returned to you, provided the Local Authority does not choose to continue the adoption process by applying for a placement order.

Social Services' agreement is required if you wish your baby to be placed for adoption under six weeks of age. You should discuss this with the social worker who has given you independent advice and the child's social worker. You will be asked to sign a written agreement. The social worker will make regular visits to the child to check everything is going well and offer support. You will be kept up-to-date with your child's progress. When your baby is at least six weeks old the social worker will arrange for you to be interviewed by a CAFCASS officer who will make sure that you understand what adoption involves. They will ask you to sign a formal document consenting to your child's placement for adoption,



and you may also give advance consent to an adoption order being made when the adopters apply for it.

You can, if you wish, be involved in the process of helping to decide what kind of family your child should grow up with, and the adoption agency and your social worker will make every effort to find a family that both meets your wishes and the needs of your child. However, the adoption agency and your social worker will always need to place the needs of your child first when choosing a family. Once the child has been placed with adopters and has lived with them for 10 weeks, they can then apply for an adoption order (in some cases the adopters apply for an adoption order many months after the child has gone to live with them).

If you wish to oppose the making of the adoption order once an application has begun, you will need to ask the court for permission to do so. The court may give its permission if it is satisfied that there has been a change of circumstances since you consented to your child being placed for adoption. The agency will provide a report to the court about the child's circumstances, and if the court is satisfied that an adoption order is in the best interests of the child, the adoption order will be granted. You will be notified about the adoption application and when and where it will be heard, unless you request specifically not to be told.

Can I arrange the adoption myself?

There are circumstances in which you can make a private arrangement for the placement of your child but the Local Authority would still need to investigate. This would be a private adoption which is entirely different and beyond the scope of this leaflet. To protect the child, all other adoptions must be arranged by an adoption agency. The courts grant all adoption orders.

What if I change my mind?

A birth mother can change her mind at any time in the first six weeks and ask that her baby be returned to her care. Once you have signed your consent to your child being placed for adoption, your right to change your mind will be limited and may be lost altogether. You will be able to withdraw your consent at any time until the people who want to adopt your child start an adoption application in the court. If you do withdraw your consent and want your child to be returned, you will need to notify the adoption agency. However it will not automatically be the case that your child will be returned to you.

If the adoption agency has not placed your child with prospective adopters and agrees that your child should be returned to you, they will return the child within seven days. If they have already placed the child with prospective adopters and they agree that your child should be returned to you, they will return the child within fourteen days. However, if the



adoption agency considers that your child ought still to be adopted they will have to apply for a placement order, asking the court for permission to place your child for adoption.

When the people who want to adopt your child have made an application to the court for an adoption order you will not be able to ask for your child to be returned. Unless you have said that you do not wish to be informed, you will be told when they make their application but you will have to ask the court for permission to oppose it. You will have to show the court that there has been a change of circumstances since you gave your consent to your child being placed for adoption and that permission to oppose is in your child's best interests.

Will I see my child again?

Once you have given consent to the child being placed with prospective adopters it may be possible to have contact with your child through arrangement with the adoption agency or by getting a court order, but you will not have an automatic right to contact. You will have a right to apply to the court for an order for contact with your child at any time until the adoption order is granted.

Adoption can sometimes involve continuing contact between the birth parents and the adoptive family, either face to face or by letter. The agency will usually try to find a family for your child who are happy with having the sort of contact that you would like, as long as this is also in your child's best interests, although it would not be usual for a very young child to have face to face contact with his/her birth parents on an on-going basis. The contact you have with your child may change over time depending on the child's needs.

Can I keep it a secret?

Adoptive parents are advised to tell children from an early age that they are adopted. As they grow up, most adopted people are curious to know something about their background. Adopted people can obtain their original birth certificate when they are 18 years old (16 in Scotland), and if you were registered as a parent, your name will be on the certificate. Using that information the adopted person could try to trace you. There are adoption contact registers covering England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to facilitate contact between adult adopted people and their birth relatives. Where a birth parent and adopted adult have both registered, the adoption contact registers will inform the other party. The contact register will not share contact details it will be up to the parties to decide if they wish to pursue contact following counselling.

Adopted young people and adults or birth family members may make contact or obtain information from social media sites on the internet. This would be discouraged by adoption agencies because contact for both birth families and adopted adults without preparation



and the support of an adoption agency can be distressing. Advice and support are available free from your Local Authority adoption support service.

Can I contact my child again when they become an adult?

You can request an adoption support agency, Local Authority adoption agency or certain voluntary adoption agencies to act as an intermediary for you once your child becomes an adult. There may be circumstances in which the agency does not accept an application to facilitate contact, and it is important to note that contact would only be re-established if it is what the adopted adult wants.

Making the decision

The decision you make about your baby's future is so important that you should not rush into it. Get all the advice you can before you make up your mind. You need to be sure that you are doing the best for your child so that you will feel comfortable that your decision is the right one for your child.

Will I get support?

You will be encouraged to see a specialist adoption worker to assist you in making your decision but there are also services available for birth parents after their child has been adopted. There are many agencies who provide support groups and workers who know a lot about adoption. You can ask the social worker for details about this and other support services available. Local authorities also provide support to everyone involved in adoption throughout a child's childhood and beyond. They will be there to assist if any difficulties arise in relation to contact with your child or if you have any queries at all.

