



Planning and Preparing for Introductions

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The process of planning and undertaking adoption matches can be very stressful and emotional. Wondering if it will go well and whether you have asked the right questions. This guide should give you some ideas of what to expect and questions to ask.



ACTIVITY DAYS

Many authorities offer adoption activity days. These are social events which allow approved adopters and children awaiting adoption to meet in a casual event including play, arts, crafts and games. Some are occurring on line and arrangements are made to hold actual events maintaining safety. Guests will receive further information about the special, preventative measures that will be in place to protect public health. (For more information www.coramadoption.co.uk).



THE MATCH

Once you are approved as adopters you will hopefully be matched to a child. The child's social worker is likely to have had a range of families to consider and chosen you. They will have balanced a range of circumstances such as where you live, your skills, your family make up, the support you have around you and your ethnicity, gender and other background.

The match will be considered and recommended by adoption panel, of the placing authority, where the child was born/brought into care. The recommendation is presented to the Agency Decision Maker, usually a senior manager within the authority, who will make the final decision.



LIFE APPRECIATION DAY

A Life Appreciation Day is a guided journey of the child's life. It is a meeting arranged with the aim to increase the understanding of the child.

The event is held in the child's local authority area, brings together individuals who have significant knowledge and experience of the child with the purpose of sharing this with prospective adopters. Evidence suggests that this increases the chance of a shared understanding and potentially better outcomes for the adoption including its long term stability.

The day will collate a chronological life story for the child, provide a permanency planning opportunity and highlight the connection between the fact, events and the emotional story of a child's life. The life appreciation day will also consider issues of contact – past, present and for the future.

The day will give the adopters some context to the child's early life and understanding of the birth parents' circumstances, including drug or alcohol use and health issues etc.



BUMP INTO MEETINGS

Bump into meetings are a relatively recent process which is used in some agencies. These meetings provide an opportunity for the adopter to see the child, in an informal way before the introduction meetings. They are usually short around 5-15 minutes long. They usually take place in parks or other public space. If the child is under two no explanation is perhaps needed for the child, but the child's social worker will attend and acts as if they have literally 'bumped into' the adopters as people they know. So the child is not told they are potential adopters at that time. Older children may work out what the situation is however, even though they haven't been told.

These meetings are held in a location convenient to child. It is best not to take any birth children or those presently adopted to these meetings.



INTRODUCTION BOOK/VIDEO

You are likely to be asked to produce something to introduce yourself to the child. This will be encouraged even for very young children. You can be as creative as you wish but the general things to include would be a titled:

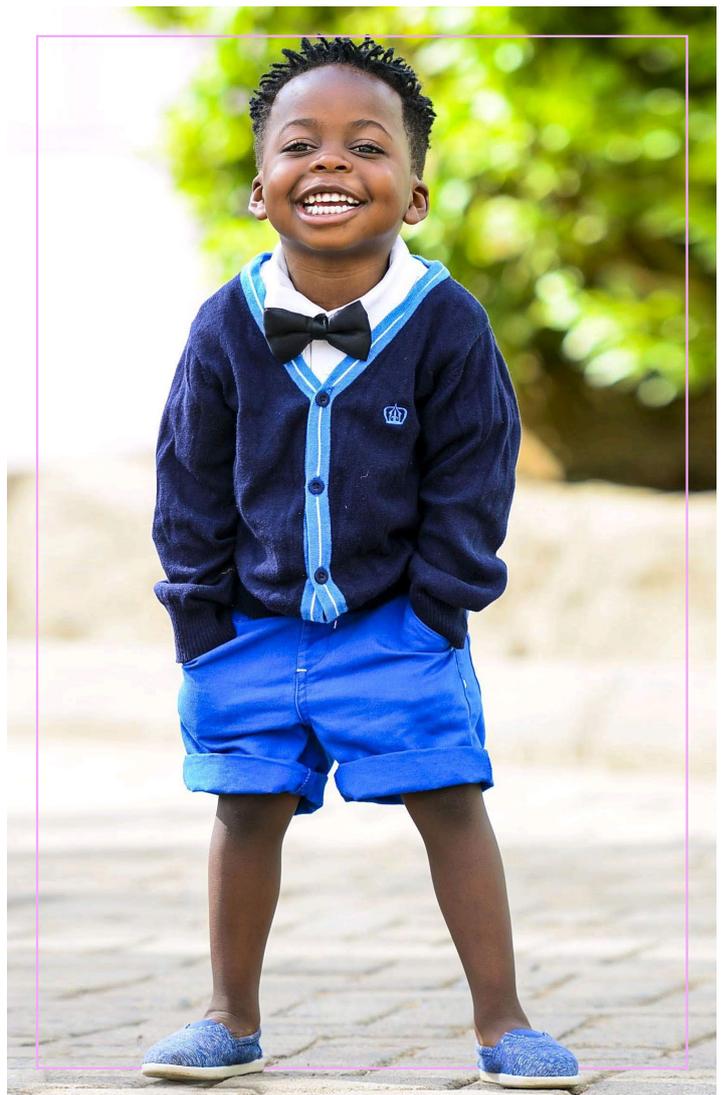
- Picture of each person in the household,
- Pictures of pets
- A photo of the house and the child's bedroom
- A photo of each room
- Local parks and some families do pictures of the sort of activities a child can expect.

It is nice to also provide a video that can be played to the child. You may wish to/ be asked to sleep with a soft toy, blanket or similar to use with a young baby or child to help familiarise them with how you smell.



INTRODUCTORY TOY

It's good to include a toy/soft toy in rooms shown in the book which can then be left with the child in advance of meetings, along with the book.





INTRODUCTIONS

From this stage introductions are arranged. Introductions are the processes of prospective adopters and foster carers, when they first meet the child planned to become a part of the family. As an adopter you will find this an exciting as well as a very stressful time. This is to be expected.

There are various people critical to the process of introductions. The adopters, foster carers, placing authority (child's) social worker, fostering social worker, and the assessing or adoption social worker. This group, sometimes alongside, the Independent Reviewing Officer, who oversees the implementation of plans for the child while in care, will set out the process of introduction and transition to your family.

It is sensible to take a list of questions about the child, their routine and what the agency are recommending about contact arrangements with birth family. Make sure you have read all the paperwork available to you prior to the meeting, and collated any questions. Are there gaps in the information you have been given? The introductions are the best time and opportunity to get as much detail about the child. Particularly as you may find it more challenging once the child has been placed. You will also rely on this detail to talk to the child at a later date when they ask about their earlier life. Ask for all information that can be shared with you, including health and developmental assessments etc.



DURING THE PERIOD ASK, WILL YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO MEET BIRTH FAMILY?

Adult adopted children identify the importance of their adopters having met their birth parents and them later being able to ask and talk about them, or indeed to have ongoing contact with them, where practical. So while it is a challenging prospect it is beneficial for your child if you can meet birth family.

It is important that you feel confident about the process and you can have an input into the planning process, especially if you feel there are changes that would be beneficial for the child. You will feel under scrutiny but try to understand that all the professionals involved want introductions to work and for the child to flourish with you. Therefore try to get over any self-consciousness.

Most foster carers will make an effort to reduce your stress as much as they can, but remember they will also be dealing with their own emotional turmoil, as they are losing a child they love and have cared for. This will be hard even though they will feel supportive of him/her having a 'forever family'.

It's helpful to be mindful of this and perhaps take them a small gift or card to recognise the contribution they have made to your child/ren's life. However challenging you may find this process, you will end it with a child, and should try to be understanding. Clearly if there were significant issues you should raise them as soon as they occur with your social worker.

Introductions will generally start with a short meeting in the child's foster home, an informal meeting to get to know the child, the foster carers and start to plan the timetable.

Over the next few days you will spend time with the child and foster carer in their home. The foster carers will be crucial continuing the day to day tasks the child is used to, sharing details of routines, needs, likes, dislikes, behaviour and gradually the direct care of the child will be transferred to you as their carers.

The foster carers will increasingly reduce their direct care. The child needs to see that

the foster carer has confidence in handing over the intimate care tasks such as bathing and changing nappies to you. This sends the message to the child whatever their age that you are safe and able to care for them.

This can be a difficult situation as it can feel artificial and uncomfortable to carry out care tasks in someone else's house, especially someone you hardly know. But this transition needs to take place to prepare the child to move to their permanent home. As the introductions progress it is likely that you will be able to take the child out as a family. You will also be guided to decide when to introduce your other children if you have them to the new family member.

All local authorities have a slightly different approach when it comes to the length and specifics about the introduction period. The duration will also depend on the child's age and how they react to the changes. While there may be a temptation to try to speed them up this may be counterproductive, especially if it leaves insufficient time for the child to adjust to their new family. It could make it harder for them when s/he moves in.

Introductions for younger children are around a week with older children longer but most likely within 2/3 weeks.

You may need to spend time away from home if the child is based a significant distance from you. The child's local authority will arrange accommodation in most cases.



MID-WAY REVIEW MEETING

There will be a midway meeting held when everyone can consider how things are going, this will allow all present to air any concerns they may have and see what is working for all parties. This also provides an opportunity to review whether the introductions are progressing at the appropriate speed. Your social worker will be in touch regularly to check how things are going and to offer advice and support.

It is wise not to underestimate the toll that the process will take on you physically and emotionally. You will be exhausted, but it's OK as this is totally normal! Remember to make sure you take some time to relax and re-charge, before the children come home with you for good at the end of introductions.

You may have a reflection day during the introductions, when you will spend a day away from the child. It is also OK to ask for one if you feel you need it. The professionals will understand, it is an intense time.

It is really important to be honest with social workers in the event it is proving challenging.

In amongst all of these challenges, try to have fun. Take the child out when it's agreed. Days out, activities are helpful and also make sure you have some down time built in. It's a good idea to take lots of pictures for discussion with the child when they are older.

Try to relax and enjoy this time as it will pass very quickly!

INTRODUCTION TIPS FOR ADOPTERS FROM OTHER ADOPTERS

- Before introductions, find out the names (and ages) of all the children (and pets) in the house. This is a good way to start a conversation.
- Take biscuits to meetings, and before the first meeting chocolates or sweets for all the children in the home.
- When they are old enough talk to the children a little bit about your life. Pets can be an amazing way to connect.
- After your first meeting with the foster carers to discuss the introduction plan, exchange email addresses, or set up a whatsapp group so you can start sharing information straight away.
- Buy a book and during the planning and other meetings write down everything the Foster Carers and social workers tell you about your child.
- Compile a list of questions in regards to likes, dislikes, development, routines etc.
- If you have a lot of questions why not send them by email before the next meeting?
- During introductions ask as many questions as possible. In the first few days do ask the Foster Carers to show you how they do the routine whilst you observe."
- By the time you are going to matching panel you should have built the beginnings of a great relationship with the Foster Carers.
- Take the child's introduction teddy/toy, photo album and some photos of ourselves etc. so that the Foster Carers could display them in their house.
- Take as many pictures as you can of everyone together, your little one by themselves and you with your little one. Take one of everyone together and give as a present to the Foster Carers at the end of introductions. The foster carers are a key part of your child's journey and you should be talking about to them, and ideally go and see them occasionally.

**We hope that you find this guide helpful.
Good luck in your match and future.**



DIVERSITY ADOPT is an independent source of advice, information and training to anyone considering or currently adoption. Including black, minority ethnic, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and disabled people, as well as others wanting to adopt children and older children.

We have an online course 'Your best start in Adoption', which introduces the RESOURCES system of preparation to Adoption.

During the course we will help you build your skills and confidence in caring for an adopted child, bringing them up to be a confident adult maximising their potential.

For more information visit our website: www.DiversityAdopt.com