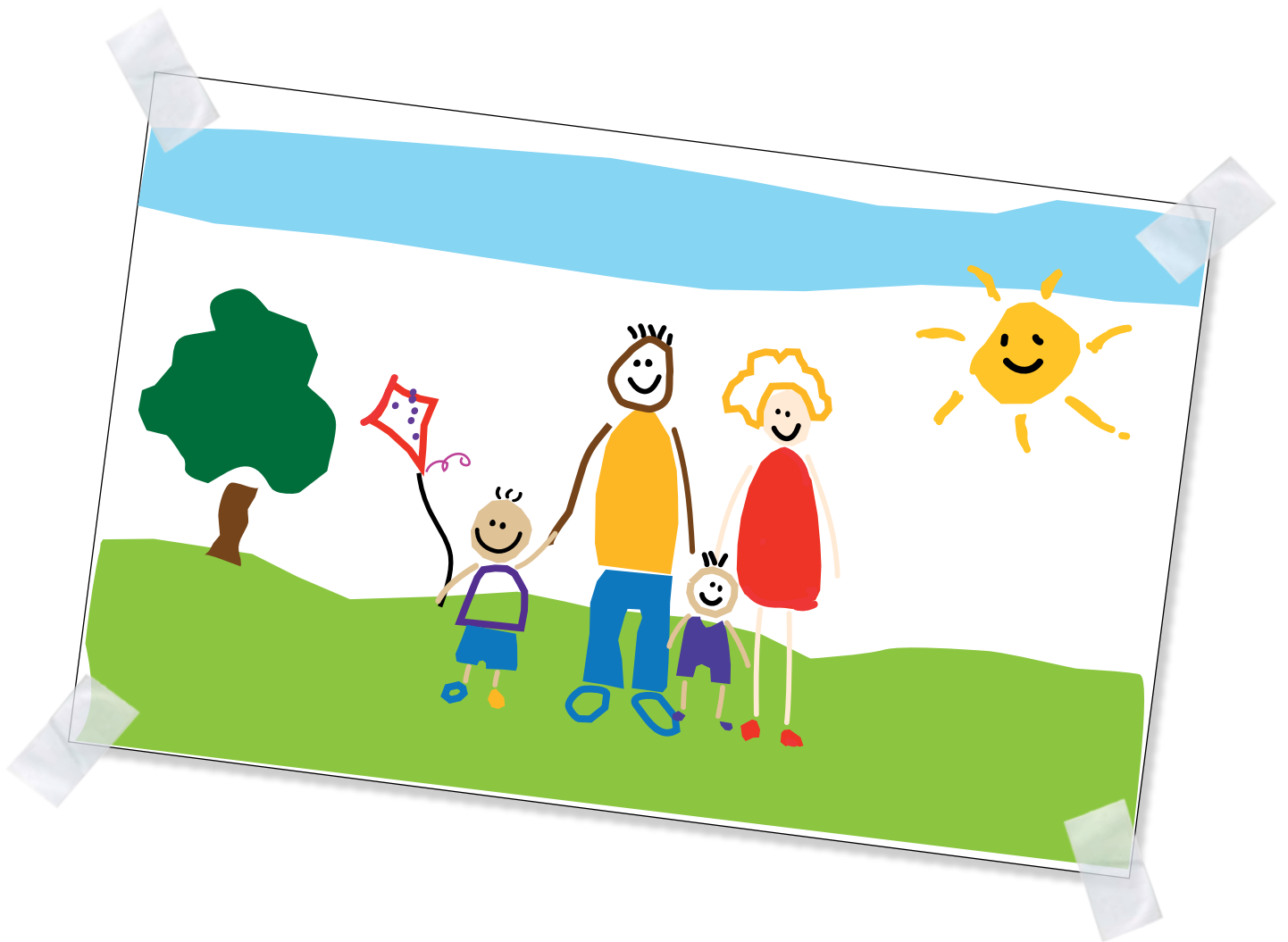


Information about adopting with Barnardo's

Believe in
children



Barnardo's



**'This is his first family picture
of us which he did at school.
We are a family! It means the
world to us.'**

Louisa and Ian, Barnardo's adoptive parents

About Barnardo's

Barnardo's believes in all children and in their potential. We believe in the abused, the vulnerable, the forgotten and the neglected. We will support them, stand up for them and bring out the best in each and every child. We do this because we believe in children.

Barnardo's works directly with more than 100,000 children, young people and their families every year.

Every Barnardo's project is different but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. With the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

Barnardo's fostering and adoption services

Join a team with:

- over 100 years' experience of successfully placing children and young people with families
- over 30 fostering, adoption and short break services across the UK
- placements for children of all ages, including disabled and black and minority ethnic children
- a comprehensive preparation, training and support programme.

Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	4
Barnardo’s adoption services	5
Meeting the needs of children	6
The role of adoptive parents	7
Criteria for applicants	9
Becoming an adopter – an outline of the stages, from enquiry to approval.....	10
Profile of an adoptive parent.....	16



Introduction

Information for prospective adopters

Taking that first step towards anything new is always a daunting prospect, so we would like to thank you for making your enquiry into becoming an adoptive parent with Barnardo's. We will give you the facts to help you decide whether or not to take the next step, and we will offer the help and support you need should you choose to make an application.

As a specialist adoption agency, we focus on the placement of children who have extra needs. The children can be of any age, and can include brothers and sisters needing to be placed together. Some of the children may have physical and/or learning disabilities or they may be black or minority ethnic children who need to be placed with a family sharing a similar racial, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

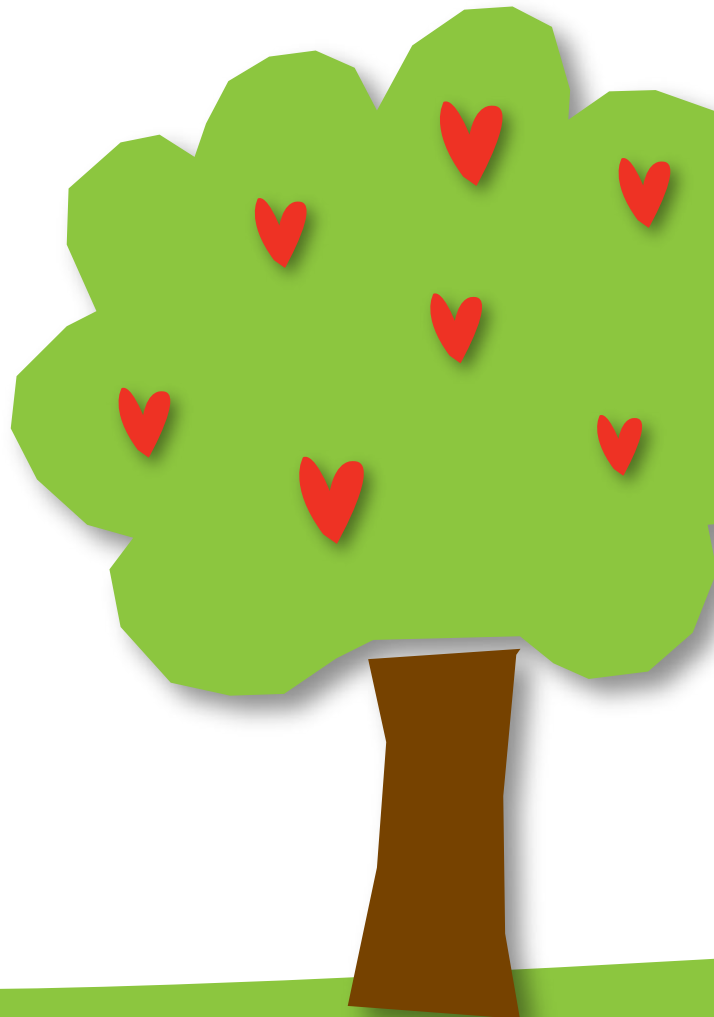
Reading through this brochure will inform you in the initial stages. You will also be given details of information meetings where you will be able to learn more and ask questions of the social worker running them. These are fairly informal meetings. Should you want to take things further, a social worker will visit you at home (this is called a counselling/initial visit) so you can talk about how the service works and exactly what is involved in greater detail. That way you can make the decision that is right for you and for your family.

What is adoption?

Adoption is the assumption of full legal and parental responsibility for a child. It is a commitment for life. Adoption is supported by an adoption order, that is granted through a court and is irrevocable. It is one of the most life transforming experiences that can happen to a child and to adopters.

The purpose of adoption

To provide a child with a loving, stable family throughout childhood and beyond.



Barnardo's adoption services

Barnardo's believes that every child deserves the best start in life and the chance to fulfil their potential. With the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around. Barnardo's has more than 100 years of experience in finding families for children and has been an approved adoption agency since 1947.

Everything we do – whether in the home, school or local community – is influenced by a set of principles and values, which are as important to us today as they were when Barnardo's was founded in 1866.

Philosophy

Every child has the right to be brought up in a family of his or her own, whether biological or an alternative. They have a right to be nurtured and valued whilst experiencing a continuity of commitment and a strong sense of belonging.

Our mission is to:

- assist in placing children who are presently looked after by local authorities into adoptive families
- recruit, assess and prepare families for this purpose
- carefully consider the needs of children on referral and match them with appropriate families
- provide support to families after placement
- help provide a comprehensive adoption support service to all families and children who need it.

We always aim to:

- influence social work attitudes by demonstrating that the adoption of children with extra needs (who were previously looked after by local authorities) is both possible and beneficial
- encourage high standards of practice in the field of adoption of children with extra needs.



Meeting the needs of children

Sibling groups

There is a particular need for us to recruit adoptive parents who can care for sibling groups of children to avoid them being separated.

Children with additional needs

We also need adopters who have experience of working with children with physical and/or learning disabilities, or who are committed to considering adopting a child with either sort of disability.

Black and minority ethnic children

There are many black/mixed parentage children who are unable to live with their birth parents. Many of the children have suffered rejection or neglect and some may have suffered physical or sexual abuse. They therefore need lots of love, understanding and affection.

Black and minority ethnic children who are looked after are further disadvantaged if their own cultural background is not promoted and nurtured. All children have a right to enjoy their own culture, practice their own religion and speak their own language. Therefore these children are usually best placed in families which reflect their own ethnic origin. This will help to prepare them to live in a multicultural society and help them to grow up with a positive sense of identity.

In order to provide this resource for the diverse needs of children, we need to recruit families from similar ethnic backgrounds and faith traditions (Muslim/Christian/Hindu etc).

Therefore we welcome enquiries from families of Asian, African, African-Caribbean and Eastern European descent and/or where there is at least one family member who is black or of mixed heritage.

Barnardo's provides a service that recognises and values cultural and religious diversity during the recruitment, assessment and training stages, and throughout the ongoing support of adopters and their families.

Terminology:

Black: used as a political term to unite people from an African, Asian, African-Caribbean heritage. This includes people of dual heritage.
Minority ethnic: includes anyone who identifies themselves with a group other than white British.



The role of adoptive parents

Adoptive parents acquire full parental and legal responsibility for a child. This means they become responsible for looking after a child's physical and emotional development, education, social contacts, and support network. However, they also need to ensure the child understands his or her origins and history.

As an adoptive parent you will need to be committed to the following roles and responsibilities:

Origins and history:

- value a child's history and the importance of people from the past
- promote a balanced view of the past for a child
- acknowledge the difficulties in a child's past without judgement
- actively look through and discuss a child's life story material with them
- encourage positive contact with people from the past, now and in the future
- live with difference.

Physical development:

- ensure that a child grows and develops physically to his/her potential through good nutrition and a healthy lifestyle
- keep a child safe from all harm and promote self care skills
- ensure that a child receives medical attention when necessary

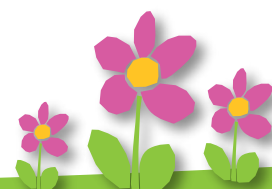
- never use physical punishment to discipline a child.

Emotional development:

- bring up a child with knowledge of his/her adoption
- understand the needs of children who have been looked after
- encourage a child to feel good about themselves
- recognise that behaviour isn't necessarily directed personally at you
- see a child as an individual with a past that does not include you
- value a child as she/he is
- promote a strong sense of personal identity in a child
- spend time with a child one-to-one
- see the world through a child's eyes and respond appropriately
- offer children the opportunity to develop a secure attachment to you
- promote trust through a mature and consistent emotional approach
- nurture a child's cultural, racial and religious identity and his/her sense of awe and wonder.

Education:

- develop close liaison with the school
- take an active interest in a child's school/homework
- encourage a child to value learning
- support a child's attendance at school
- be an advocate for a child, promoting an understanding of the child's individual needs.



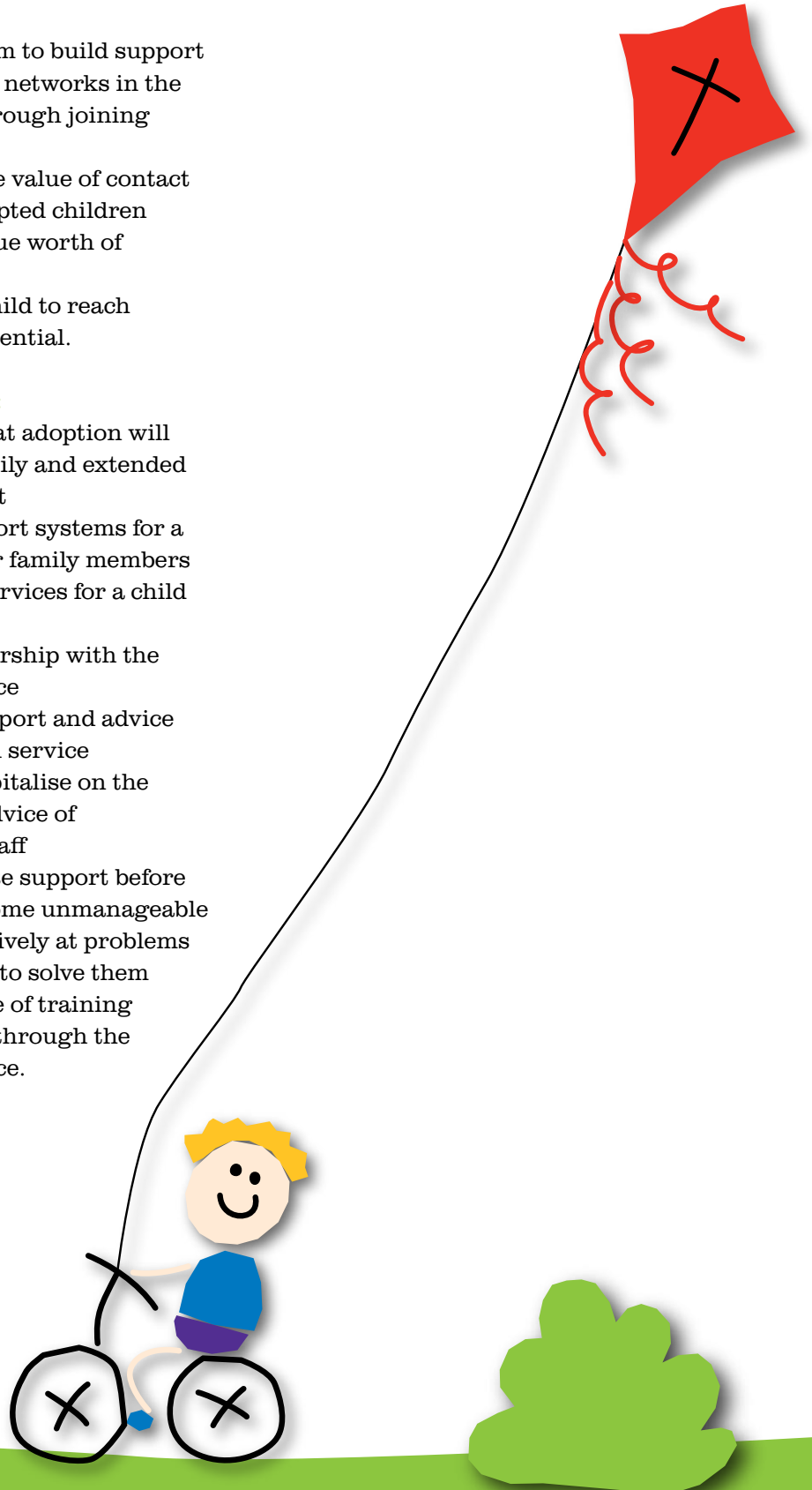
The role of adoptive parents *continued*

Social contacts:

- encourage a child to make and keep friends
- encourage them to build support and friendship networks in the community through joining clubs/groups
- understand the value of contact with other adopted children
- value the unique worth of every child
- encourage a child to reach his/her full potential.

Support network:

- understand that adoption will make your family and extended family different
- establish support systems for a child and other family members
- advocate for services for a child and the family
- work in partnership with the adoption service
- ask for the support and advice of the adoption service
- ask for and capitalise on the support and advice of professional staff
- identify and use support before pressures become unmanageable
- look constructively at problems and at options to solve them
- take advantage of training opportunities through the adoption service.



Criteria for applicants

Age

Prospective adoptive parents must be aged 21 at the time of application.

Room space

Applicants must have sufficient room for the child/children that they plan to adopt.

Age of existing children within the family

There are no limitations regarding the age of your own children. However, the age and needs of your children will help inform all of us as to how old the child or young person placed in your family should be to best fit in.

Stability of relationship

For prospective adoptive parents who are in a relationship, this must be a stable partnership. Guidance is that partners must have been living together for at least two years.

Marital status/gender/sexual orientation

We welcome applications from single people or couples regardless of gender or sexuality.

Financial support

Grants and/or regular financial support can sometimes be available and may be especially helpful to those on low incomes.

Medical fitness

Applicants must be willing to

undergo a full medical assessment by their GP.

Criminal history

All applicants will be police checked at the outset of the assessment. Not all criminal convictions preclude people from being able to adopt. However, **applicants with sexual offences and/or cruelty towards children will not be considered.** Applicants with any history of violence, including domestic violence, might not be considered.

Assessment and training

All prospective adoptive parents must be available for assessment, and must complete the training course.

Fertility treatment

We are not able to consider people who are currently undergoing fertility treatment. You may be advised to wait for a while after completing fertility treatment before making an application.

Smoking

In view of the significant health risks of smoking and passive smoking, applicants who currently smoke will be limiting their potential suitability and we will need to discuss this early in any application. It is extremely unlikely that a young child will be placed within a home where smoking occurs.



Becoming an adopter – an outline of the stages, from enquiry to approval

STEP 1: information meeting

We will invite you to a meeting where an adoption worker will tell you more about what is involved and the kinds of children who need adoptive parents. The meeting will give you an opportunity to ask questions. You may be the only people to attend or there may be other potential adopters there. We know from feedback that it can be beneficial to attend a meeting with others as they may ask questions that you haven't thought of. However, the social worker will encourage you towards getting the answers you need. At this meeting, you will be given an 'expression of interest' form. This is a form for you to fill in if you wish to take the process of adoption further.

STEP 2: completing the expression of interest form

You will be asked:

- Details of your age
- Current/proposed working hours
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- GP's name and address
- The names of six referees who know you and your family well from a personal perspective.

STEP 3: home visit by social worker

A social worker will visit you at home. This is called an initial/counselling

visit. The visit will provide you with further insight into adopting and should help to answer any questions you may have. You will be asked your reasons for considering adoption and you will be advised as to whether we think adopting with Barnardo's is right for you.

If it is agreed that you proceed, you will move to step four.

STEP 4: invitation to apply/ preliminary checks

You will be invited to apply and asked to complete an application form. With this application form you will be sent a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) form. The purpose of this form is to check that you have no criminal convictions which could preclude you from adopting. You don't need to worry about minor offences such as traffic violations. However, all other offences will be carefully looked into and are best discussed at an early stage.

All the stages of the adoption approval process are conducted in strictest confidence. Your records are stored securely and any information is restricted on a need to know basis. All members of Barnardo's staff have signed confidentiality undertakings.

As well as the CRB enquiry, Barnardo's takes up references with other agencies



such as social services, your mortgage providers or your landlord. Your written consent is required before we process these references.

We need to be sure that you are physically up to the challenge of becoming an adopter as well as being mentally prepared. This means that a thorough **medical examination** is a necessary part of your assessment. This will take place early in the assessment process or if you know you have a pre-existing health issue we will ask for this medical before assessment commences. Your own doctor will be asked to carry out your examination and you will be asked to pay the cost of this. Your medical report will then need to be approved by Barnardo's Medical Advisor. The whole process is completely confidential.

STEP 5: preparation

To start the preparation process you are required to attend a course. The course allows you, and other prospective adopters, to thoroughly explore your expectations of adopting, with the help of specialist staff.

Throughout the entire process you will meet families who are at the same stage in the process as you. Often you will end up keeping in touch with these families, which can be a great source of support. At this early stage it is

important to remember that everyone is nervous at first. As you become more certain that becoming an adopter is for you, your confidence will grow. You won't just be listening; you will talk to each other, watch DVDs and think about the different children who need to be adopted. You will also meet people who have already adopted children. Listening to their experiences and asking questions is a vital part of getting to know what it means to be an adoptive parent.

Questions and answers about the preparation course

Q What is the course all about?

A The course will teach you to think more closely about the kinds of children who may need adoptive families and how their feelings and actions will affect you personally. Being honest and open means that we can help you work through vital issues sooner rather than later. At this stage we have found that working in groups helps to promote a better understanding.

Q How many times do we have to attend the course?

A The courses usually run for three to four days and take place several times a year. There will be a combination of weekdays and weekends and sometimes evening sessions.

Q Why do we have to attend the course as well as being assessed?

A A section in the assessment report requires us to describe the preparation course you have attended and how you have responded to it, so it is a compulsory part of the application process. However, we feel that the course will really open your eyes to the challenges that you will meet as an adopter. What is more, we have found that most people actually enjoy the course!

Q So, are you assessing us during the course?

A Yes we are. It is all part of the process of getting to know you. However, it is also a process of self evaluation for you. We make judgements throughout but they only give part of the picture. The social workers you meet through the workshops you attend also discuss their observations at a meeting that takes place at the end of your preparation course. You will be able to make notes of the things you have learnt during your course to refer to later.

STEP 6: the assessment process and report

By now you will have been allocated your own social worker. Your relationship with your social worker is like any other relationship. You will need time to get to know each other. Your social worker will offer unrivalled support. However, they cannot make

adoption work if they do not search for the answers to questions that we consider important. Please remember that there is always a very valid reason for every single question asked.

It is then your social worker's job to get to know you and your family as well as anyone can. As you open up they will discover how you will react to certain situations and difficulties. They will also demonstrate how adoption will impact on your life. At this stage they may recommend that you are not suitable to become an adoptive parent with Barnardo's. We always explain why we have reached this view and it is never personal. It is simply doing the right thing for you and for the children.

Naturally the process will include finding out your life story. You will need to tell us about previous partners and the things that are important to you. It is our responsibility to make sure that the families with whom we place children do not have their own issues to deal with. We never want to take risks with the safety or personal growth of the children we place.

Remember that if you have children living with you at home your social worker will have to get to know them as much as they get to know you. They'll find out about your parenting skills first hand, as well as giving your children an insight into the changes that will happen to your family. We have a preparation pack for children which your social worker will use for this process. It will also help your children to know that they have someone they



can talk to about the ups and downs of welcoming another child into the family. Your children can also provide an invaluable link between you and an adopted child as they often learn things about a new child in the family before the adults do!

Your social worker will take notes during your visits. This is simply because sometimes it is difficult to remember everything that is said. You will also have an opportunity to make a contribution by completing sections of the assessment report yourself. Your social worker will, in turn, be discussing the information gained during your home visits, on a regular basis with their supervisor. Again everything they discuss is highly confidential.

The supervisor ensures that the social worker is being considerate of your feelings and analysing your responses in a fair manner. The supervisor may visit you during or at the end of the assessment so that you both have the opportunity to raise any questions and so that you can also give feedback about the service we have provided to you. We welcome all feedback, whether good or bad!

Your social worker will write a report about you known as the **assessment report or prospective adopter's report (PAR)**. This report assesses the information obtained about you as well as observations made during your home visits. This is all part of the process to enable you to be approved as someone who can legally have a

child living with you. We are trying to assess whether you have a good moral character, and the ability to support and love the child that we may place with you despite the demands they may make on you.

Questions and answers about the assessment process and report

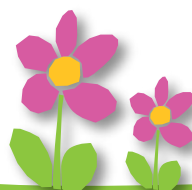
Q So will you be assessing our children?

A We are giving children a chance to speak for themselves about how they feel about big changes in their lives. We believe your children should have this right and we help children to say to their parents anything that may be on their minds. Children sometimes do not want to upset their parents with their worries.

Q How many visits will the social worker make and when will our referees be contacted?

A Your social worker will make as many visits as necessary during your assessment period. Each assessment case is different so the amount of visits needed to get to know you and your family will differ also. Here's what one carer had to say about the assessment process:

'It seemed as if we had been seeing our social worker for ages when she first explained her plans to us. In fact, when she started with us in early March she explained that there were special reasons why we would need all those visits, which ended up being 12 in all. We agreed a kind of





contract of how to do things when the social worker explained how things had to be checked out. Some people in our group only had eight visits but it did not matter to us. The main thing was that we got through the adoption panel.'

Your social worker visits your referees during the assessment but sometimes references are taken up before the assessment starts. Remember it is important that your referees are people who really know you and all about your relationships with others.

Q Do we get to read the assessment report?

A You will be shown your assessment report and will be allowed to read everything apart from the reports from confidential referees. You will be given 10 days in which to return any comments and can ask for changes to be made to the report if there are aspects of your profile which you are unhappy about. Sometimes these observations may have to stand although we can usually come to a comfortable agreement.

STEP 7: adoption panel

If everything has gone well, your social worker will complete your assessment report. You must sign the assessment report at this stage. Your signature is an indication that you are comfortable with the content of the report, rather than your approval.

The report is then sent to a group of 10 people who are known as the **adoption panel**. The panel consists of experienced individuals from a range of professions working with children, such as education, health and social services. Adoption panels can also include an experienced adopter, an adopted person or a parent whose child has been placed for adoption.

They are given time to read your assessment report before they meet to discuss your application. Of course you will also be invited to attend this important meeting, together with your social worker.

After the adoption panel has examined all the information in the assessment report, they may ask you and your social worker more questions for clarification during the meeting. They will then recommend whether you are suitable to adopt. The panel can only recommend your approval. The final decision rests with the Barnardo's decision-maker and this decision has to be made within seven days. Sometimes, the decision-maker will attend the panel meeting but if not, they are sent the assessment report and detailed minutes of the meeting which contain the recommendation made by panel members.

If you are successful, the process of 'matching' you with the right child can begin. Your approval as an adoptive parent will then be reviewed on an annual basis until a child is placed with you.





Profile of an adoptive parent

We will base our evaluation of your suitability to adopt on the evidence you share with us, together with the statutory and other checks we conduct.

There are certain basic qualifications, experiences, skills and abilities which are essential in order to adopt a child through Barnardo's. The following is a checklist of these elements to help you identify where you are now and where you might be able to improve with help from your social worker.

1. Basis and values

- Actively promote the philosophies underpinning Barnardo's basis and values
- Show an awareness of issues of race and discrimination
- Actively promote equality of opportunity
- Have a strong sense of personal identity
- Be tolerant of difference.

2. Qualifications

- Be physically and emotionally fit for the task
- No significant criminal offences or criminal record
- No history of alleged abuse of children, family or partners
- Positive statutory references from police, health and local authorities
- Overall positive personal references
- Home meets basic health and safety requirements.

3. Personal life

- Stability in personal relationships and circumstances
- No recent significant change in personal circumstances
- No recent significant loss in personal relationships
- Application supported by dependants
- Supportive family, friendship and community network
- Support and actively promote the policy on no physical punishment of children and sign the service undertaking on child protection.

4. Experience/knowledge

- Experience or knowledge of caring for children
- Past experience of loss or significant changes/upheaval in personal circumstances, and how you have dealt with this
- A knowledge of child development.

5. Skills/abilities

- Able to form new relationships
- Able to maintain relationships
- Able to command the trust/respect of others
- Demonstrate personal warmth to children and to adults
- Open to new learning
- Value own strengths
- Accept and build on feedback
- Recognise own limitations



- Able to ask for and accept help
- Able to reflect on own experience
- Demonstrate self-discipline.

6. Other important skills

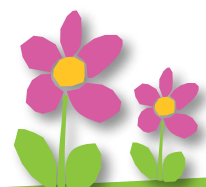
- Reliability and tenacity
- Consistent in approach
- Able to talk about feelings and difficulties
- Able to listen
- Able to 'stand back' from problems
- Able to put a plan into action
- Sensitivity to the feelings of others
- Able to see things from a child's perspective
- Willing and able to discuss issues around sexuality openly
- Acceptance of a child's history and ability to work with it.





**‘This is what our life
would be like without
Barnardo’s.’**

Ann and Colin, Barnardo’s adoptive
parents and foster carers



Barnardo's Family Placement Team

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**Believe in
children**



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