

Considering Adoption For Your Baby

Scottish Adoption offers a counselling service to parents who are faced with an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy and who are considering adoption. We provide this service on behalf of the City of Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian Council and occasionally upon request from other Local Authorities.

What does it mean to have my baby adopted?

Adoption is a lifelong decision that will have an impact on you and your child at different stages now and in the future. Although adoption can be a positive choice it is not an easy decision to make and it is important for you to get support and advice in considering your options. An Adoption Order transfers the parental legal rights from you to the adopters and once granted is irreversible.

Before the birth

An adoption social worker will meet with you during your pregnancy to talk about your plans for your baby and to discuss the choices you have. Contact with the agency is voluntary, tailored to your needs and you can withdraw from the service at any time. Many women who consider adoption feel differently after the baby is born and you will not be asked to make any decisions until after the baby's birth. If you decide to keep your baby your social worker can advise you about some of the practical things to consider and help you make contact with other agencies.

When you go into hospital

It is helpful to let the hospital know about your situation beforehand. Whenever possible you will be given a single room in hospital so that you are not sharing with other mothers and babies. If you are well enough to be discharged you can leave the hospital after the birth, or you can stay longer with your child if you prefer. While you are in hospital you can care for your baby or ask him or her to be looked after by nursing staff. You may prefer not to see your baby and your wishes will be respected. We would however advise you to think about seeing your child at some stage. The experience of women who gave up a baby in the past has shown that many later regretted never having seen their baby.

You will be asked to choose a name for your baby and register the birth within twenty-one days. The father's name can only be entered on the certificate if you are married to him, or if he is present with you at the time of registration.

After the birth

Once your baby is born you may know immediately that you want to take him or her home. You can either arrange to take the baby home from hospital or the baby can be looked after by a foster carer for a short while to allow you time to make any practical arrangements.

If you are still thinking about adoption Scottish Adoption in conjunction with your local social work department will make the arrangements for your baby to be looked after by a foster carer. The baby will be looked after on a voluntary basis. You still hold parental responsibility for your child and can take him or her home if you choose.

You will be asked to sign your agreement for your baby to receive medical treatment and your agreement to placement with a foster carer. You will be given the carer's name, address and telephone number and details of how to arrange visits. The placement with the foster carers is to give you more time to think about your choices now the baby is born.

You are welcome to visit your baby in the foster home and to be involved in his or her care. If you do not feel able to visit your social worker will keep you informed of the baby's progress. While your baby is in foster care there will be regular reviews to consider plans for the baby's future. You will be invited to all the review meetings and be involved in all the decisions. You will be given time to recover from the birth, continue counselling and to think through your plans. The review will also keep the needs of your baby to the fore and will try to ensure the timing of plans is right for the baby too.

Your social worker will also meet with you regularly. The counselling process is to help you look at all your choices, not just adoption. When considering the alternatives to adoption you will be asked whether there are any other family members, including the child's father who may be able to bring up the child. Legally adoption has to be considered the best option for the child and therefore all other possibilities have to be explored.

Counselling should also help you reflect upon the lifelong implications of adoption for both you and your child.

Making a decision about adoption

At a Looked After Review you will be asked to confirm that you would like to proceed with the adoption plan and that all other alternatives have been explored and ruled out. If you are having any doubts about adoption it is important to discuss these with your social worker. You are not legally committed to adoption at this stage and you can change your mind and the plans will be slowed or halted.

With your help a full report is prepared with details about the baby, about you and the baby's father, your family circumstances and your reasons for requesting adoption. This report is presented to the Local Authority Adoption Panel and the local authority must agree that it is in the child's best interests to be adopted.

You will be notified of the decision in writing and asked to complete two forms indicating that you understand adoption as a legal process, and that you agree to your child being placed for adoption. This agreement is not your formal consent to adoption, but if you change your mind after you have signed the form the Social Work Department and possibly the court may be involved in deciding what is in your child's best interests.

Your social worker will discuss with you what kind of family you think would be best for your baby. You may have strong views regarding religion, cultural background or the lifestyle and qualities of the adoptive parents. The Adoption Panel for the Local Authority must approve any match between a child and prospective adopters. Ultimately the most important thing about adoptive parents is that they should be best suited to meet your child's needs, as well as being acceptable to you.

You will be given information about the adoptive parents and will have the opportunity to meet them if you wish. It is common practice for there to be an annual information exchange between yourself and the adopters. It is important for adopted children to grow up knowing they are adopted and with information about their birth family.

The Court Process

After the baby has gone to live with the adoptive parents they can make an adoption application to the Sheriff Court. A Reporting Officer will be appointed and will arrange to meet with you. He or she will also meet with the father if he has parental responsibilities. The Reporting Officer is asked to ensure you have received counselling and fully understand what adoption means. It is at this stage you are asked to sign your formal agreement for adoption and if you change your mind afterwards the Court will be asked to decide what is in your child's best interests.

The Court cannot make an adoption order until your child has lived with the prospective adopters for at least 13 weeks and is aged at least 19 weeks.

An Adoption Hearing is arranged a month or two after you have signed your formal agreement. You will be notified of the Hearing and have the right to attend, but you do not have to. If everyone is still in agreement it is likely that the Sheriff will make an Adoption Order which transfers all your parental rights and responsibilities to the adoptive parents. If you have changed your mind it is important that you or your solicitor attend the Court Hearing. The Sheriff would then arrange a further Hearing to ascertain what is best for the child.

The whole process from birth to adoption usually takes several months. It is important for you to maintain contact with your social worker who will keep you updated of your baby's progress and help you through the different legal stages. She or he will be available to support you through what may be a very difficult period in your life.

After Adoption

Choosing adoption for your baby is a major decision and has lifelong repercussions with different feelings resurfacing at different times. Scottish Adoption provides an After Adoption counselling service for birth parents and we can be contacted for support at any time in the future.

If you would like to speak to anyone in the strictest confidence then please give us a call on 0131 553 5060.