

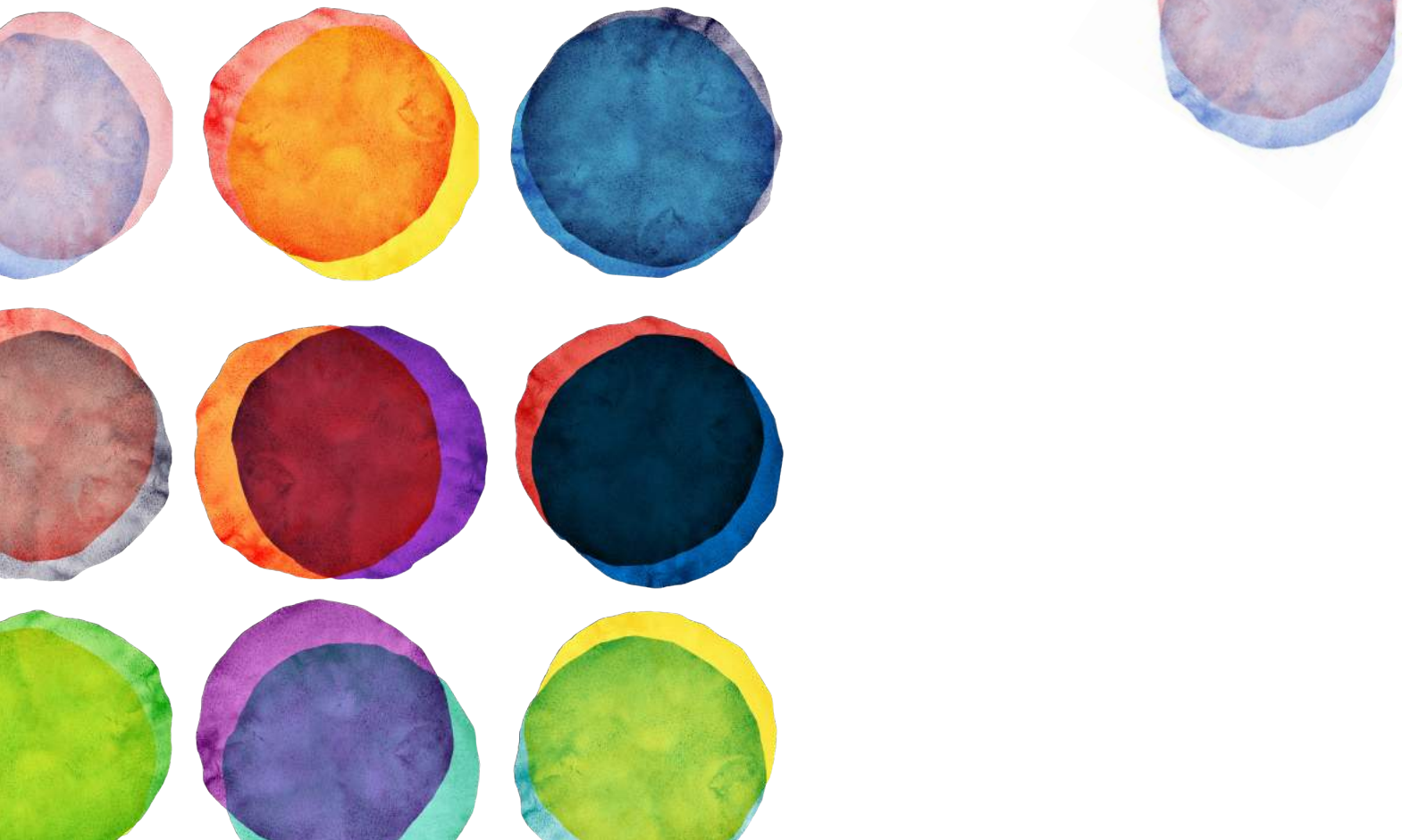
## CHILDREN AND THE LAW: ADOPTION FOR WOMEN PRISONERS

Other **Children and the law** guides:

When social services are involved

Parental responsibility

When families cannot agree



# Introduction

This guide is designed to give you information about adoption from the point of view of the birth mother. It only covers the law in England and Wales. **This guide contains general legal information, it is not legal advice as everyone's situation will be different.**

Losing a child to adoption can be life changing. Sometimes, adoption will be the right decision for you and your child. At other times, a local authority may think it is the right decision for your child for lots of different reasons. Everyone's situation is different. This guide will give you an overview of the different ways a child may be adopted so you understand what is happening or what the options are for your child.



Many women find it upsetting to think about their family while they are in prison. If you are affected by any of the issues discussed in this guide, make sure you speak to someone about it.



You can get legal advice about your circumstances from the Prisoners' Advice Service.



Or you may want to talk to someone about how you are feeling. You can speak to the family engagement worker, a peer mentor, the chaplaincy, the mental health team or the Samaritans.

See the **Useful contacts** page at the end of this guide.

*Special thanks to the women at HMP Send and HMP Bronzefield who provided invaluable feedback on the contents of these guides.*





# Contents

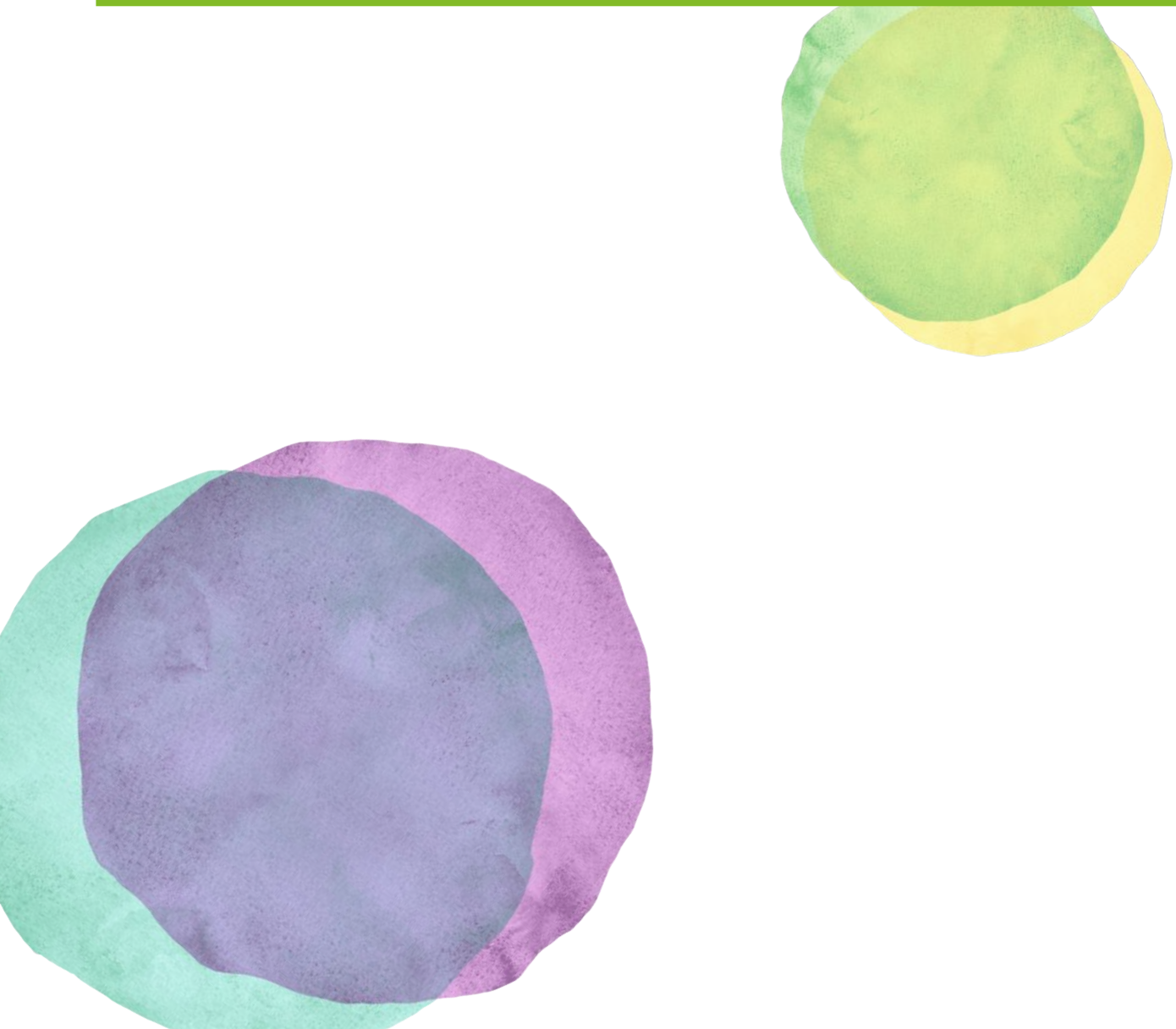
What is adoption?	1
Parental responsibility	2
Routes to adoption	3
Placement for adoption with your consent	5
Who are the possible adoptive parents?	7
The role of adoption agencies	8
Lifestory work	9
Fostering to adopt	9
Placement for adoption without your consent	10
Adoption orders	12
Contact after your child is living with adoptive parents	14
Can a family member adopt your child?	17
Who can help you in the prison	18
Useful contacts	19

# What is adoption?

Adoption is when people take on legal responsibility for a child that is not their own and become the child's legal parents. When the court makes an adoption order, the parental responsibility of any other people, including the child's birth mother, will end.

## KEY FACTS:

The fact that you are in prison does not automatically mean that your children will be adopted. You can see our other guides on [Children and law: when social services are involved](#) and [Children and law: when families can't agree](#) for information about other court orders the family court can make.



# Parental responsibility

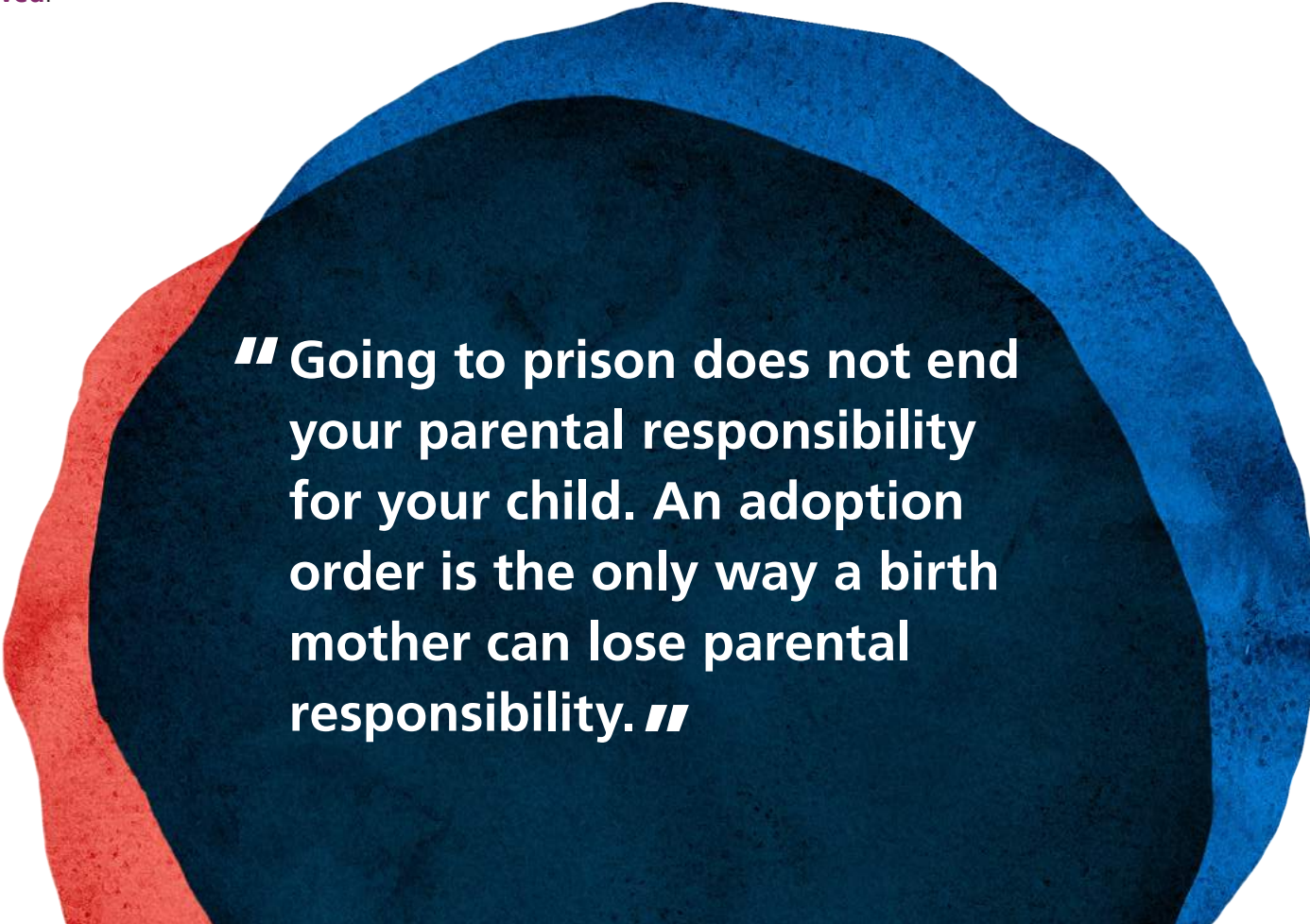
Parental responsibility is the legal term which describes the rights and responsibilities that someone has for a child. Going to prison does not end your parental responsibility for your child. An adoption order is the only way a birth mother can lose parental responsibility.

Other people who may have parental responsibility are:

- your child's father if:
  - you were married to him
  - you have entered into a parental responsibility agreement with him
  - he has been given parental responsibility under a court order or
  - your child was born after 1st December 2003 and he is named as the father on the birth certificate
- anyone who has been given parental responsibility under a court order

Everyone with parental responsibility is usually involved in making important decisions in a child's life including education, health and medical treatment.

Different court orders affect the way someone can exercise their parental responsibility, see our guides, [Children and the law: parental responsibility](#), and [Children and the Law: when social services are involved](#).



**“ Going to prison does not end your parental responsibility for your child. An adoption order is the only way a birth mother can lose parental responsibility. ”**

# Routes to adoption

**The fact that you are in prison does not mean your child will be adopted by someone else.**

Sometimes, a child can be adopted by their step-parents or family members. If you or a family member is considering this, there are other court orders available that may be better for your situation. You should see our other guides for information about the different court orders you can consider. They are **Children and the law: when social services are involved** and **Children and the law: when families cannot agree**.

## Where to find the law

The law relating to adoption is set out in the **Children Act 1989**, the **Adoption and Children Act 2002** and Part 14 of the **Family Procedure Rules 2010**

There are always legal steps that must happen before a child is adopted. You will know if these steps are being taken because the local authority must tell you.

## What is the local authority?

The **local authority** is the term that professionals use to describe social services.

This guide will use the term **local authority** because this is the term that would be used by the Family Court.

**Social workers** are professionals who work for the local authority.

Before a child is adopted, they will usually be in the care of the local authority. Our guide, **Children and the law: when social services are involved** explains what the local authority can do and all the different ways the local authority can be involved with your family.

The local authority and other professionals will talk about a child being **placed** for adoption. This means a child has moved to live with the **possible adoptive parents** (the people who want to adopt the child). They may call this a **placement for adoption** or say that they are looking for a **placement**. The adoption is not finalised until the court has made an adoption order.

No local authority can place your child for adoption with possible adoptive parents unless they have:

- your consent and the consent of everyone else with parental responsibility; **or**
- a **placement order** from the Family Court; **or**
- it is a fostering to adopt arrangement.

If one of the situations above is not the case, the local authority is not allowed to place your child with possible adoptive parents.

Your parental responsibility for your child does not end if your child is placed for adoption. It only ends when an adoption order is made.

During placement for adoption parental responsibility is shared between you, the father if he has it, and the local authority, as well as any possible adoptive parents. However, the local authority can make decisions without your consent on issues relating to your child after they are placed for adoption.

*For example, the local authority has a placement order for your child. Your child has moved to live with possible adoptive parents. As a result, the local authority has arranged for your child to move to a school chosen by the possible adoptive parents. You tell the social worker that you are not happy about this. The local authority does not need your consent to change your child's school.*

**“ There are always legal steps that must happen before a child is adopted. You will know if these steps are being taken because the local authority must tell you. ”**



# Placement for adoption with your consent

The decision to place a child for adoption is a difficult one and affects the lives of all the people involved. It is not a decision that should be made quickly or without talking to someone about it.



**If you are thinking about adoption for your child, talk to someone about how you are feeling. You can speak to the family engagement worker, the chaplaincy, the mental health team or Samaritans.**

If you make the difficult decision that adoption is the best option for your child, this is called giving consent. Giving consent means you agree to it.

**It is not possible to give consent for your child to be adopted before they are 6 weeks old.**

You may be able to get free legal advice from a solicitor if you have very little income and savings. Speak to a solicitor about this. You can ask someone to find legal aid family solicitors for you through the Law Society. Speak to the family engagement worker or Prisoners' Advice Service for help finding a solicitor.

You can tell the social worker that you are thinking about consenting to adoption. The social worker will arrange for a **reporting officer** to come and speak to you in prison. The reporting officer is from an organisation called CAFCASS.

**CAFCASS** is short for Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. CAFCASS is a public body. Officers from CAFCASS are social workers. It is not the same as the local authority. They work with children and families involved with the Family Court.

The duty of the reporting officer is to make sure that you understand what adoption means for you and your child. They must be sure that you fully understand what you are agreeing to if you place your child for adoption. If they are certain that you fully understand, you will be asked to sign a form of consent.



The form to consent to your child being placed for adoption is called a Form A100. The form to consent to your child being adopted is called a Form A104.

Ask the family engagement worker or your solicitor, if you have one, to show you these forms before the reporting officer visits if you would like to see them beforehand. You can tell them that the forms are available online.

If you consent to the placement for adoption of your child, the social worker should keep you informed at each stage of the process. You may attend any court hearings unless you tell the social worker that you do not want to.

It is a legal requirement that you must be told in advance about the date of the adoption hearing, regardless of whether you want to be informed. You do not have to attend this hearing unless you want to.



The reporting officer must also make sure you are aware of post adoption support services, the adoption contact register and the facilities for indirect letter box contact. See the section on **Contact** in this guide for more information. If you would like some support, you can ask the social worker to refer you to post adoption support services. You can also speak to some of the organisations in the **Useful contacts** section of this guide such as **After Adoption – Birth Ties** or **Family Lives**.

## What if you change your mind?

If you change your mind about your child being adopted, this is called **withdrawing your consent**. You can withdraw your consent up until the point when an **adoption order** is made by the court.

What happens when you withdraw your consent depends on what stage of the process your child is at:

- **Before your child is placed for adoption**

The local authority must return your child to you or someone of your choice within 7 days of you telling them you no longer consent to placement for adoption. In this time, the local authority will think about applying for a court order or will speak to the family member you have chosen to consider whether they are suitable to care for your child.

- **After your child is placed with possible adoptive parents but before they apply for an adoption order**

If your child has been placed with possible adoptive parents but they have not applied for an adoption order when you withdraw your consent, then the local authority has 14 days to apply for a court order or return your child to you or someone you have chosen to care for your child.

- **After the possible adoptive parents have applied for an adoption order but before the order is made**

Once the possible adoptive parents have applied for an adoption order, you must get the court's permission to withdraw your consent. You can speak to a solicitor at Prisoners' Advice Service if you are in this situation. They can tell you whether you can get free legal advice through legal aid. If you are not able to get legal aid, they can give you legal advice about how to apply to the court.

The possible adoptive parents cannot apply for an adoption order until your child has been placed with them for **10 weeks**.

## Who are the possible adoptive parents?

Many different people choose to adopt a child. It may be a couple or a single person. Sometimes they may be unable to have a child of their own, or they already have their own children and would like to offer a home to another child. Some adoptive parents will have experience of adoption or supporting vulnerable children and believe they can help.

If the local authority has your consent or a placement order, then they will start to look for adoptive parents. This process is called **matching**.



usual adoption  
assessment  
process

Everyone who would like to adopt a child in the UK goes through a process of assessment and training before they are approved as possible adoptive parents. This process normally takes about 6 months. They are assessed by a social worker first. They are asked to think very carefully about adoption and they have to understand the responsibility they are taking on. They are also given information and training about some of the different experiences that adopted children have, for example, how to explain to a child that they are adopted, what this means and understanding the importance of them knowing things about their birth family.

Once they are approved as adoptive parents, they will go on a register of people approved as adoptive parents.

If the local authority is looking for adoptive parents for your child, they will first look in their area. If they cannot find someone within 3 months, they will look on the adoption register in England or Wales (depending on where they are) for a good match for your child.

Once the local authority has found adoptive parents for a child, they will ask an **adoption panel**, sometimes called a **matching panel**, to consider whether the possible adoptive parents are the right match for your child. The panel is a group of people who have experience of adoption or fostering. They will be social workers, medical professionals and some independent professionals who do not work for the local authority.

If the adoption panel agrees the match between your child and the possible adoptive parents the recommendation is passed to the **Agency Decision Maker**. This is a person within the local authority who has the final decision about whether to approve the match for your child with the possible adoptive parents.

There is a process where your child is introduced to the possible adoptive parents before moving to live with them. Once your child has been placed with the possible adoptive parents, the social worker will continue to visit your child to see how they are getting on.

The social worker should keep you up to date on what is happening during this time.

If you would like to meet your child's possible adoptive parents, you can ask the social worker. It will not always be possible as every case is different. You do not have to meet the adoptive parents and many birth parents don't meet their child's adoptive parents.


## The role of adoption agencies

The social worker may sometimes talk to you about the **adoption agency**. In many local authorities, this is the part of the local authority that deals with adoptions. They are responsible for assessing possible adoptive parents. They do a lot of work to match possible adoptive parents to children. It is often just a part of the local authority.

There are also national and local **adoption agencies** that are independent of any local authority. They are charities that assess possible adoptive parents, provide support and help local authorities find possible adoptive parents for children. One example of a large adoption agency you may have heard of is the children's charity, Barnardo's.

Adoption agencies are not allowed to make profit from adoptions. They have the same standards of assessment of possible adoptive parents as local authorities.

In this guide, we have only referred to the local authority because it is easier to read and even if an adoption agency is involved in your child's adoption, it is the local authority that is responsible for decisions about your child.



**“ ...if an adoption agency is involved in your child's adoption, it is the local authority that is responsible for decisions about your child. ”**

## Lifestory work

Lifestory work is something that every local authority does with adopted children. It is often a box or book about their family. It is an important way of helping adopted children to understand their past and their position as adopted children.

You can be actively involved in helping prepare your child's lifestory book. For example, you can help the social worker prepare a family tree, provide photographs of you, your child and your family and include things such as paintings that you and your child have done together.

You can speak to your social worker about how you can get involved in your child's lifestory work.

## Fostering to adopt

In some circumstances, a local authority in England will decide to place your child with foster carers who are also possible adoptive parents. Most people call this **fostering to adopt**.

The local authority is only allowed to do this if your child is a **looked after child**. This might be because the local authority is providing accommodation for your child or there is a care order or interim care order in place. Please see our guide, **Children and the law: when social services are involved** for more information about looked after children.

You must be told by the local authority that they want to place your child with foster carers who are also possible adoptive parents before it happens.

If the local authority places your child with foster carers in this situation, it will normally be while there are court proceedings going on and you can tell the court why you do not agree to this.

It is unusual that older children will be considered for this option.

If you are worried about the local authority doing anything like this, you can ask the social worker whether they are thinking about it. They have to tell you if it is one of the options they are thinking about for your child. You can speak to your solicitor if you have one and tell them to ask the local authority for you. If you don't have a solicitor, you can contact Prisoners' Advice Service for legal advice.

# Placement for adoption without your consent

If you do not consent, then the only way a local authority can place your child for adoption is if they get a **placement order** from the court. This order gives the local authority permission to place your child with possible adoptive parents.

Most applications for a placement order happen during care proceedings. For more information about care proceedings, please see our guide, **Children and the law: when social services are involved**. If you are involved in care proceedings, you can get a solicitor to represent you for free through legal aid. Speak to the family engagement worker to help you find a solicitor.

Sometimes, the local authority will apply for a placement order by itself. This will only happen if your child is already in the care of the local authority under a care order or with your agreement. It is unusual, and the social worker should speak to you about it before they make any application to the court.

## How does the court decide whether to make an order?

When the court decides whether to make a placement order, the most important thing they will think about is how this will affect your child's welfare throughout their life. They have to think about the effect of the order not just on your child's childhood, but also their adulthood. This bit of the law is found in section 1(2) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

To help them think about your child's welfare, the court must think about the **adoption welfare checklist**. This is set out in section 1(4) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It says the court must think about the following things:

- **Your child's wishes and feelings**, depending on their age and understanding. Generally, the older your child is, the more attention the court will pay to their wishes and feelings.
- **Your child's needs** which include physical, emotional and educational needs. This includes practical needs such as accommodation and food as well as love and affection.
- **The likely effect on your child throughout their life of no longer being a member of their birth family** and of becoming an adopted person.
- **Your child's age, sex, background and any of your child's characteristics which the court or adoption agency considers relevant**. This includes your child's religious and cultural needs as well as your child's age. Adoption is viewed as more suitable for younger children, below the age of about 5.
- **Any harm, abuse, or neglect your child has suffered** or is at risk of suffering.
- **Any relationship which your child has with you and their father, any other relatives** or any other person the court believes to be close to your child such as a family friend or step parent, in particular:
  - The likelihood of these relationships continuing and how good it will be for your child to continue these relationships.
  - The ability and willingness of any of these people to provide your child with a safe and stable home and upbringing, and the wishes and feelings of these people.

## Can they make an order if you don't consent?

A court can only make a placement order when the parent does not consent if:

- The birth parents cannot be found. For example, if a child has been abandoned by their mother and the mother cannot be found.
- The birth parents are not able to consent. For example, if one or other is suffering from a brain injury.
- The court decides that the child's welfare overrules the need for consent of the birth parents.

This means that you may not want your child to be adopted, but if the court thinks that it is best for your child, they can make a placement order without your consent.

## What about contact?

When the court makes a placement order, they must consider whether to make an order for contact between you and your child. See the section on **Contact** for more information.

## Can the court end a placement order?

A placement order lasts until one of the following things happens:

- an adoption order is made
- your child reaches 18 years old
- your child gets married or enters a civil partnership
- the court discharges the placement order.

When a court order is ended by the court, this is called being **discharged**. You may hear some professionals talk about the order being **revoked** and this means the same thing.

If a placement order has been made and your child has not been placed to live with possible adoptive parents, you can apply to the court for permission to make an application to have the placement order discharged. There are 2 application forms to complete. One application for the court's permission and one application to discharge the order. You make both applications at the same time. Speak to Prisoners' Advice Service, or your solicitor, for more information if you want to apply to discharge a placement order.

The court will only allow you to make an application to discharge the placement order if you can show that your circumstances have changed since the order was made. The court will only decide to discharge the order if it is in the best interests of your child.

If a placement order has been made and your child has not yet been placed with possible adoptive parents and you have made an application to discharge the placement order, then your child should not be placed for adoption without the court's permission.

# Adoption orders

Once your child has been placed with possible adoptive parents for 10 weeks, the adoptive parents can apply for an **adoption order**.

An adoption order will give the adoptive parents parental responsibility and will end everyone else's parental responsibility for your child, including your parental responsibility and the local authority's.

If an adoption order is made your child will live permanently with the adoptive parents and you will not have the right to be involved in decisions about your child's life or care. The adoptive parents will become your child's legal parents. Only the adoptive parents will have parental responsibility for your child.

You will be sent a letter telling you the date, time and place of the first adoption hearing and you can attend this. The court will tell you if there are going to be any more hearings.

**Even if a placement order was made in the past the court will not automatically make an adoption order.**

**If you want to tell the court that you do not agree to the adoption order being made, you need to respond to the letter you receive from the court.**

**Speak to your solicitor or Prisoners' Advice Service to get legal advice about what to say to the court.**

If you do not agree to your child being adopted, you need to tell the court. You will need to apply for permission to oppose the adoption order.

When the court receives applications from birth parents to oppose adoption orders, they will think about whether there has been a sufficient change in circumstances since the placement order was made or since you gave consent to the adoption.

It is difficult for birth parents to get permission to oppose an adoption order. Your change of circumstances normally has to relate to the reasons the placement order was made.

*For example, when the court made the placement order, there were no other family members who could care for your child. Your sister has now come forward to say she can care for your child and you believe she would be a good carer.*

Everyone's situation is different and whether the court will give you permission to oppose the adoption will depend on your individual circumstances and the circumstances of your child.

If you want legal advice on whether there has been a sufficient change in your circumstances, speak to your solicitor or Prisoners' Advice Service.

Whatever advice you receive, you are still entitled to apply to oppose the adoption order if this is what you want to do.

When the court is making the decision to make an adoption order, they must consider the adoption welfare test explained in the section on **Placement for adoption without your consent**.

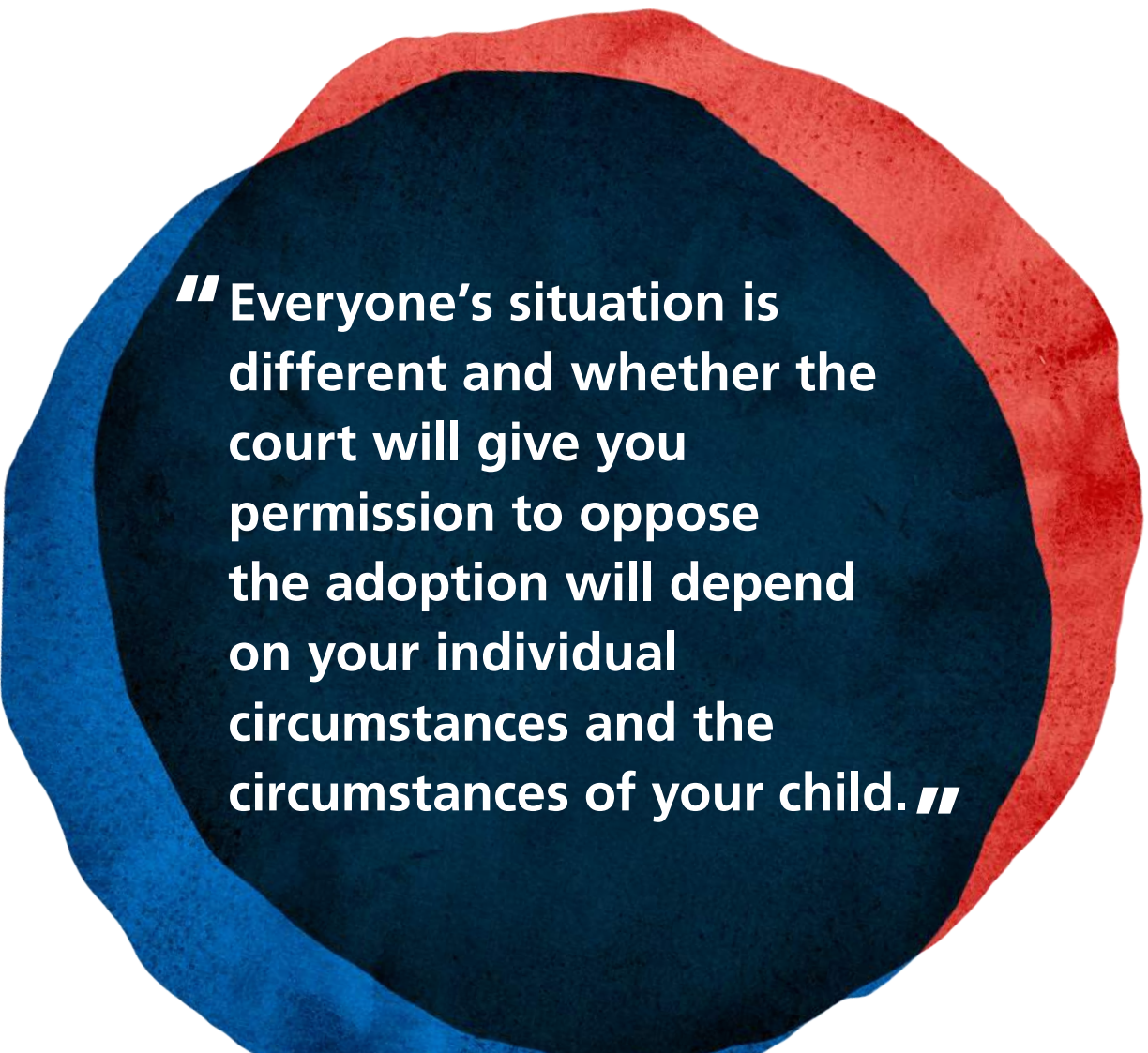
## Can the court end an adoption order?

When a court order is ended by the court, this is called being **discharged**. You may hear some professionals talk about the order being **revoked** and this means the same thing.

The Family Court has the power to discharge an adoption order, but it has only ever happened in very, very unusual circumstances.

The only case we are aware of where the Family Court agreed to discharge an adoption order was one where the adoptive parents were family members who had treated the child badly. The child was a teenager who had returned to live with their birth mother and wanted the adoption order to be discharged.

If your child is going to be adopted, but you don't want to lose contact with them you can apply for contact with your child. See the section on **Contact**.



**“Everyone’s situation is different and whether the court will give you permission to oppose the adoption will depend on your individual circumstances and the circumstances of your child.”**



# Contact after your child is living with adoptive parents

When the court makes a placement order or adoption order, they will consider the ways in which you can keep in contact with your child. The local authority should have explained in the court documents what contact they are recommending between you and your child.

Once an adoption order is made, the adoptive parents will decide what type of contact you have with your child. You can raise questions about contact through the social worker.

In some circumstances, you can ask the court to make an order for you to have contact with your child either at the time that the adoption order is being made or after. The court will not automatically allow you to have contact with your child. See below for further information about asking the court for contact.

## Types of contact

There are different types of contact and the court should consider all the types of contact when they make an order. They are:

- **Direct contact:** which might be face-to-face during visits to the prison or on the telephone.
- **Supervised contact:** this is when someone, perhaps a professional or family member is expected to supervise your contact with your child. The court order should say who is supposed to supervise contact.
- **Supported contact:** this is when someone else is present during contact but not carefully supervising.
- **Letterbox contact:** this is when you can write to your child in letters and cards. The social worker can arrange for you to receive news about your child from the adoptive parents and you may be able to send information about what is happening in your life. This is sometimes called **indirect contact**.

If you are still involved in care proceedings, speak to your solicitor about contact between you and your child continuing. They should explain to you whether this is likely.

You may be asked to sign an agreement with your child's adoptive parents that sets out how frequently letters and other information will be exchanged. For details of organisations that can help you with this see the **Useful contacts** section.

Once an adoption order is made, any contact set out in a court order must take place. If the contact between you and your child is not mentioned in the order, then it will be up to the adoptive parents what contact you have with your child.

## What options do you have in relation to contact?



Some adoptive parents are willing to meet the birth family and keep an open mind about contact. This is more likely to happen if you are supportive of the adoption. Some adoptive parents may be willing to consider contact between you and your child once they have met you. Remember that they are probably nervous about meeting you too.



If you feel able to meet with the adoptive parents, this may be the first step in keeping contact with your child. Even if the adoptive parents do not feel able to support direct contact, meeting them can help improve the quality of indirect contact. The social worker will be able to speak to them about this. Some may not be willing to meet with you face to face. You could suggest writing instead if this happens.

You can ask the court to make an order for contact with you at the same time as they make a placement order or adoption order. You should speak to your solicitor about this while the court case is still happening.

Be prepared that it is unusual for the court to make an order for contact at the time that the adoption order is made because they will normally think it is better to let your child settle into their new home before they think about contact. If the adoptive parents do not feel able to support direct contact it is very unlikely that the court will make an order. It is more likely that the court will leave the question to the adoptive parents and the local authority will suggest contact once or twice a year by letter. This will give you an update on how your child is doing. You will have an opportunity to respond to let the adoptive parents know what is happening in your life.

After the adoption order is made, you can apply to the court for an order for contact with your child. You will have to apply for permission from the court to make the application. The court will think about the following things:

- the risk of your application disrupting your child's life to the extent that they may be harmed by it;
- your connection with your child; and
- the views of your child and the adoptive parents.

If things are going well for you and you have been having good letterbox contact, you are more likely to get permission from the court.



If you are thinking about applying for an order for contact with your child after the adoption order has been made, you should speak to the social worker first and ask them to speak to the adoptive parents. You can ask them to explain how well you are doing and find out if they will meet with you and discuss contact arrangements. They may agree to make plans for additional contact without there being a court order. You should try this before making an application to the court.

## What happens if there hasn't been any contact for a long time but you now want to get back in contact with your child?

For some people, it takes time to come to terms with what has happened. You may find it too hard to think about any contact for a long time after the adoption. Many women feel like this. You may want to talk to someone about how you are feeling. You can speak to the family engagement worker, the chaplaincy, the mental health team or Samaritans.

If you have not spoken to the social worker or written to your child for a long time, you can still contact them at any time. You just need to contact the social worker. Speak to the family engagement worker and ask them to help you to contact the local authority.

If you would like some support after adoption, you can ask the social worker to refer you to post adoption support services at any time. You can also speak to some of the organisations in the **Useful contacts** section of this guide such as **After Adoption – Birth Ties** or **Family Lives**.

**“ If you have not spoken to the social worker or written to your child for a long time, you can still contact them at any time. ”**

# Can a family member adopt your child?

It is possible for family members to adopt your child but if you are thinking about this because you want to make sure your child will continue to live with the family member currently caring for them, there are other options that may be better than adoption.

You could speak to your family member about asking for a **special guardianship order** instead. You may prefer this option because it means you will keep your parental responsibility as well as the special guardian having parental responsibility.

For more information about these alternatives please see our other guides **Children and the law: when families cannot agree** and **Children and the law: when social services are involved**.

## Step-parent adoption

There is one situation where you keep your parental responsibility when someone adopts your child. This is where the person adopting your child is your partner.

This type of adoption removes the parental responsibility that anyone else has for your child, including their birth father.

You would need the consent of everyone with parental responsibility, including the birth father if he has parental responsibility. If you cannot get the consent of your child's father, then the court can still make the order, but they must agree that it is best for your child's welfare, throughout their life.

If you are thinking about step-parent adoption, both you and your partner should get legal advice. You can contact your solicitor or Prisoners' Advice Service for more information on this type of application.



# Who can help you in the prison



The **family engagement worker** can provide a lot of support including contacting family or social workers on your behalf.



**Prisoners' Advice Service (PAS)** can provide free legal advice and support and will be able to tell you if your case is eligible for legal aid.



**Samaritans** can provide emotional support if you need a safe place to talk.



The **chaplaincy** can provide emotional support and someone to talk to about your problems.



A **peer mentor** can help you talk through your problem.



The **mental health team** are available if you feel you are being affected by any issues in relation to your family



Speak to a **custody officer** if you feel overwhelmed and need support immediately.



# Useful contacts

Please be aware that most of the services listed below work across England and Wales but some are limited to certain areas or specific prisons. We have included services that may be limited in this way because availability changes and a service that is currently only available in some prisons, may be available in all prisons in the future. It is always worth exploring what support you can get.

## PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

*For free legal advice and support*

**T: 020 7253 3323**

Monday, Wednesday and Friday.  
10:00-12:30 and 14:00-16:30

Prisoners' Advice Service  
PO Box 46199  
London EC1M 4XA

[www.prisonersadvise.org.uk](http://www.prisonersadvise.org.uk)

## RIGHTS OF WOMEN

*For free, confidential, legal advice on family law including domestic violence, divorce and relationship breakdown and issues relating to children*

Family law advice

**T: 020 7251 6577**

Mon-Thurs: 7-9pm & Fri: 12-2pm

Immigration law advice

**T: 020 7490 7689**

Mon and Thurs: 10am-4pm

## ADVOCATE

(previously Bar Pro Bono Unit)

*For representation at court. A solicitor will have to refer you for support*

[www.weareadvocate.org.uk](http://www.weareadvocate.org.uk)

## PERSONAL SUPPORT UNIT

*For support during court hearings*

**T: 020 7947 7701**

## REUNITE

*For legal advice about child abduction*

**Advice line: 01162 556 234**

## NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY SERVICE

*Helpline for support and advice for your child if they are in care or involved in court proceedings*

**Helpline: 0808 808 1001**

## FAMILY RIGHTS GROUP

*Support for parents and family members when social services are involved*

**Freephone 0808 801 0366**

## THE LAW SOCIETY

*For help finding a solicitor*

**T: 020 7242 1222**

## SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY

*For information about how to complain about poor service from a solicitor*

[www.sra.org.uk](http://www.sra.org.uk)

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN

*To complain about a local authority once you have been through their complaints process*

**Helpline: 0300 061 0614**

## SAMARITANS

*Emotional support if you need a safe place to talk*

**Freephone: 116 123**

## WOMEN IN PRISON

*For advice and guidance in prison, on release and in the community*

**Freephone: 0800 953 0125**

## BIRTH COMPANIONS

*Support for pregnant women and new mothers*

Dalton House  
60 Windsor Avenue  
London SW19 2RR

**FAMILY LIVES**

*Support for parents and families on a broad range of issues including adoption*

**Helpline: 0808 800 2222**

**AFTER ADOPTION - BIRTH TIES**

*Helpline for birth parents of children who have been adopted*

**Helpline: 0800 840 2020**

**NATIONAL OFFENDERS' FAMILIES HELPLINE**

*Support for your family*

**Telephone: 0808 808 2003**

**HIBISCUS**

*Support for black, Asian, minority ethnic or migrant women in prison*

**Telephone: 020 7697 4120**

**E: [info@hibiscus.org.uk](mailto:info@hibiscus.org.uk)**

**ADVANCE - THE MINERVA PROJECT**

*Support for women in contact with the criminal justice service to prevent re-offending*

*It is not possible to refer yourself - speak to the offender service about whether they can help and ask them to call: **020 8741 7008***

**MIND**

*A national charity offering support in relation to mental health*

**Infoline: 0300 123 3393**

**MENCAP LEARNING DISABILITY HELPLINE**

*Advice and information about learning disability*

**Helpline: 0808 808 1111**

The law is complex and may have changed since this guide was produced. This guide is designed to provide general information only for the law in England and Wales. You should seek up-to-date, independent legal advice.

Rights of Women does not accept responsibility for any reliance placed on the legal information contained in this guide.

July 2019

## PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL CHARITY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND REPRESENTATION TO PRISONERS

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS



Lancaster University  
Law School

PAS offers free legal advice and information to prisoners throughout England and Wales regarding their rights, conditions of imprisonment and the application of the Prison Rules.

We pursue prisoners' complaints about their treatment in prison by providing advice and information and, where appropriate, taking legal action.

Examples of issues we can advise on include: parole, temporary release, indeterminate sentences, categorisation, adjudications, sentence calculation, licence and recall, discrimination, resettlement and healthcare matters. We also provide advice on Family Law and on Immigration Law to prisoners with issues relating to detention or deportation.

If you have something that you'd like to discuss with one of our Caseworkers, you can:

Write to us at: **Prisoners' Advice Service, PO Box 46199, London EC1M 4XA**  
(Mark your envelope Legal Mail Rule 39 in all correspondence with PAS)

Call us Monday, Wednesday or Friday between 10:00-12.30 and 14.00-16.30 on 020 7253 3323

We produce the quarterly Prisoners' Legal Rights Bulletin, which shares information about key cases and changes in Prison Law, and is free to prisoners. To sign up for this, please write to the address above.

**[www.prisonersadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonersadvice.org.uk)**

Prisoners' Advice Service (PAS) is a registered charity (No: 1054495) and is a company limited by guarantee (No: 3180659).

**RIGHTS** of  
**WOMEN**  
*helping women through the law*

Rights of Women,  
52 – 54 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8RT

**Office:** 020 7251 6575

**Email:** [info@row.org.uk](mailto:info@row.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)

Charity number: 1147913