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Adoption of children looked after by the local authority

REFERENCES

Introduction

Adoption aims to provide a new family for children who cannot, for whatever reason, live with their own families. The law on adoption is set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and its accompanying Regulations and Guidance. This Act came in to force on 30th December 2005. This advice sheet sets out the key stages of the adoption process and offers advice to birth family members about their rights within that process.

This advice sheet does not cover the transitional rules, which apply to cases which began before 30th December 2005. If your case falls into that category you need to seek the advice of your solicitor or call Family Rights Group advice line.

There is a separate advice sheet on open adoption, which outlines the steps birth family members can take to try to maintain contact/links with their child when they are placed for adoption.

AA: Adoption Act 1976
AAR: Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
ACA: Adoption and Children Act 2002
APCR: Arrangement for Placement of Children Regulations, 1991
ASSR: Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
CA: Children Act 1989
FLR: Family Law Reports
FP(A)R: Family Proceedings (Amendment) Rules 2005

Advice sheet no 7 which is available from Family Rights Group

A. The legal framework for adoption

A child who is placed for adoption will normally be **looked after** by the local authority beforehand¹. This will either be:

- by agreement with the parents in which case the child is in **accommodation** with the local authority and the parents or others with parental responsibility will have agreed the plan; or
- **under a care order** in which case the local authority can override the parents' wishes in most respects about the plans for their child.

Reg 3, ACPR

s.33(3)(b) CA

When a child is **looked after** the local authority must comply with certain statutory duties set out below and they may not place a child for adoption unless either the parents give formal consent to the placement or the court makes a placement order.

s.18(1) ACA

[Note: It is also possible that someone who is looking after a child without the local authority being involved decides that they want to adopt them. Further details on this can be found in section 4 below.]

1. What happens before a child is placed for adoption?

Unless or until the adoption agency² has the consent of the parents (with parental responsibility³ (PR)) to their child being placed for adoption or a

For further information on these duties, see

¹ The only exception to this will be where someone who has already been already looking after a child for some time wants to apply to adopt him/her and either the local authority is not involved or does not agree with the proposed adoption. In this situation there are special rules which apply. For further advice contact Family Rights Group advice line or speak to your solicitor.

² The term adoption agency means the local authority children's services or a voluntary adoption agency, which is authorised to undertake adoption work.. Where the child is looked after, it will be the local authority, in its role as adoption agency, that deals with the adoption plan, although a voluntary agency may also be involved, for example if it has approved the proposed adopters.

placement order is made, the local authority must comply with the general duties which apply to all children who are looked after by the local authority. These duties include the following: *advice sheet nos.3, 4, 5.*

- making plans which will promote the child's welfare. Such plans must be kept under regular review and, if the child is in accommodation, the plan must be agreed with his/her parent with PR, or the child himself if s/he is over 16; *s.22 & s.26, CA
Reg 3, APCR, 1991*
- placing the child with his/her parent, relative or friend before placing him with someone unrelated, even in the short term, provided this is consistent with his/her welfare; *s.23(6) CA*
- allowing the child **contact** with his/her family unless the court has said they do not need to. Recent case law suggests that the court should only allow the local authority to stop contact where this will benefit the child, rather than because it will make it easier for the local authority to find adopters; *Sched 2, para 15 and s.34 CA;
Re: S (Care: Parental Contact) [2005] 1 FLR 469; Re: H (Termination of Contact) [2005] 2 FLR 408*
- finding out and give due consideration to the **wishes and feelings of the birth parents**, others with PR, the child and others whom they consider relevant in relation to any decision they make about the child; *s. 22(4) & (5) CA*
- once they have been looking after a child for a period of 4 months, drawing up a plan for the child to have a permanent home. *Adoption Agency Regulations Guidance, chapter 2, p.2*

Permanence for a child may be achieved in a number of ways:

- Ø returning home to his/her parents;
 - Ø being placed with a relative who is either approved as a local authority foster carer or who applies for a residence or special guardianship order to provide legal security for the placement;
 - Ø placement with foster carers;
 - Ø placement in a residential setting; and
 - Ø placement for adoption.
- finding out if there is anyone else in the family who is willing and able to look after the child before they consider placing him/her with a new family in the long term. *s.23(6) CA & s.1(4)(f) ACA*

If your child is in accommodation, the local authority cannot implement any plans for the permanent placement of your child without the agreement of a person with parental responsibility, unless they obtain a court order (see below). *Reg 3, APCR, 1991*

If there is a care order on your child the local authority will have prepared a care plan for the court which will set out their proposals regarding a permanent plan for you child. It may propose any of the above options for placement or it may propose several different options as alternatives too. *s.31A CA*

If the local authority submitted a plan to the court to work towards returning the child home, they may only change the plan later and decide to place the child *See for example: Re M (Care: Challenging Local Authority Decisions) [2001] 2FLR 1300; Re L (Care: Assessment: Fair Trial) [2002] 2 FLR 730;*

³ **Parental responsibility:** mothers have parental responsibility from birth; fathers have parental responsibility if they are married to the mother at any time after the child's birth, or they have signed a formal agreement with the mother and sent it to court or if they are have acquired PR under a court order or if they are registered as the father of the child on the birth certificate after 1/12/03.

for adoption against the parent/s' wishes if they have fully consulted the parents about this change of plan. If they fail to consult them in this way the authority is likely to be in breach of the Human Rights Act 1998.

and Re G (Care: Challenge to Local Authority's Decision) Proper ref needed); Re P (Adoption: reach of Care Plan) [2004] 2 FLR 1109

2. What steps must be taken to place a child for adoption?

In all cases where the local authority/adoption agency is considering placing a child for adoption, they will need to comply with a number of steps before they can proceed with a plan to place a child for adoption:

2.1 Counselling and information:

The adoption agency is required to provide counselling and information to the child and his/her parent/guardian about the legal procedures and implications of adoption, and find out the child's and the **parents' wishes and feelings** about:

Reg 14 AAR

- the possibility of a placement for adoption,
- the child's religion and culture and
- contact arrangements between you and other members of the family with your child if s/he is placed for adoption or is adopted.

The local authority should also obtain information about the views of the **child's father** (where he has no PR), his/her **wider family** and any other person the agency consider relevant regarding the placement and contact arrangements after placement.

Reg 14(3) AAR

If you are a father but do not have PR they should ask you if you intend to apply for PR and/or a residence or contact order for your child. If you wish to do this you must seek legal advice urgently.

Details of how to contact a solicitor specialising in child care law and/or Family Rights Group Advice line can be found at the end of this advice sheet.

All this information must then be given consideration when making any decision about the adoption proposal, including in due course matching the child with prospective adopters. It is therefore important that you tell the adoption agency what you would like in relation to contact when they first start talking to you about a possible adoption placement. See the section on tips for some ideas on how to present your views.

2.2. Adoption Panel

Before the local authority can decide to pursue a plan for adoption they must refer the case to an adoption Panel.

The function of the Adoption Panel is to make a number of recommendations, including:

- whether the child should be placed for adoption ;
- whether proposed adopters should be approved as prospective adopters; and
- whether the needs of the child in relation to adoption are matched by the care offered by the proposed adopters.

Reg 18 AAR

Reg 26 AAR

Reg 32 AAR

When a child's case is first referred, the Panel must consider whether a child who has been referred by the agency should be placed for adoption, taking into account:

- all the information and reports about the child and his/her family submitted by the local authority; and Reg 17 AAR
- the legal duty on the agency to consider the child's welfare throughout his/her life, including the relationship the child has with his/her relatives (including his/her mother and father) and any other person whom the adoption agency considers relevant. The Panel should also consider: s.1 ACA
 - Ø the likelihood of such a relationship continuing and the benefit to the child of it doing so; s.1(4)(f) ACA
 - Ø the ability and willingness of the child's relatives/other person to provide a secure environment in which the child can develop and otherwise meet the child's needs; and
 - Ø the wishes and feelings of the child's relatives/other person.

Where the Panel recommends that a child should be placed for adoption, it may also advise the agency on:

- any proposed contact arrangements (this might include contact with grandparents, aunts uncles, brothers and sisters and sometimes parents); and
- whether or not it should apply for a placement order. Reg 18(3) AAR

Since the Panel will be advising the adoption agency about contact arrangements, it is a good idea for birth family members who want to remain in contact or raise other issues to **write to the Adoption Panel** setting out their views about what contact they think would be beneficial *for the child*, giving reasons from the child's perspective, so that the Panel can consider this before making any of the above recommendations.

It is also worth **sending a copy of this letter to the local authority** as well, because once the Panel makes recommendations, the local authority then makes a decision about whether to pursue the plan and whether, in due course, the proposed adopters are the best people to adopt the child.

2.3. The agency decision about an adoption plan:

Once the Panel makes a recommendation regarding a proposed placement for adoption, the adoption agency must decide whether or not to pursue a plan for adoption of the child. When making this decision they must take account of the Panel recommendations and any advice given regarding contact and placement order(s). Reg 19 AAR

2.4 Obtaining authority to place a child for adoption

If the local authority propose to *place* the child for adoption, they can only do so if either:

- i) each of the parents with PR gives formal consent to the placement; or s.19 ACA
- ii) the court has made a placement order. s.21 ACA

Parental consent to placement for adoption:

Consent to placement for adoption can only be given by a parent who has PR for the child. s.52(6) ACA

This consent is only valid if it has been witnessed by a CAFCASS officer. s.52(3)ACA

The mother of a new born baby cannot give this formal consent until the child is over 6 weeks old although she can enter into informal arrangements about placement of her child with prospective adopters, but the agency is not 'authorised to place the child' for adoption until her formal consent is given and witnessed by a CAFCASS officer, 42 days or more after the birth.

Reg 19 AAR and paras 65-68 ACA Guidance

[NB: If the mother gives formal consent and the father does not have PR, once the child has been placed for adoption, he will be deemed to have given formal consent to the placement for adoption when the mother consents, even if he later acquires PR. A father in this situation should take urgent advice about any steps he can take with regard to the child.]

s.52(9)(b) ACA

Once such consent is given there are only limited circumstances in which a parent can:

- a. withdraw their consent and remove the child from an adoptive placement; and
- b. oppose the making of an adoption order at a later date.

ss.31-33 ACA

s.47(5)&(7) ACA

Since the consequences of giving formal consent to placement are potentially very serious, it is important that a parent only gives this consent if s/he has taken independent legal advice first. Similarly, if a parent has given this consent and later changes their mind they need to take advice as a matter of urgency to find out what rights they may be able to exercise, if any.

Details of how to contact a solicitor specialising in child care law and/or Family Rights group Advice line can be found at the end of this advice sheet.

Placement order authorising a placement for adoption:

A placement order authorises the adoption agency to place a child with any prospective adopters as long as they have complied with the duties set out below.

A placement order can only be made where the court is satisfied that:

- a) either the child is subject to a care order or the threshold criteria in s.31 Children Act 1989 have been proved i.e. that:

s.21 ACA

- the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm; and that
- this harm is due to the care being given to the child before the case started not being 'what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him/her' or because s/he is out of the parents' control.

Harm in this context means "ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development including for example impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another"; or

- b) the child has no parent or guardian;

and

- c) either each parent with PR for the child has consented to the child being placed for adoption with any prospective adopters and has not withdrawn that consent, or the consent of each parent should be dispensed with.

The grounds for dispensing with the parents consent are either that s/he cannot be found or is incapable of giving consent, or that the child's welfare requires the consent to be dispensed with; s.52(1) ACA

NB: Where the parent gives consent to a placement order or the court decides that his/her consent should be dispensed with, that parent may not oppose the making of an adoption order at a later stage unless the court gives permission, known as leave. The court will only give leave if the parent can prove that there has been a change in circumstances. This is discussed further below s.47 ACA

In addition to being satisfied that these two grounds are met, the court must also apply the welfare principle when deciding whether or not to make the placement order. This principle states that: s.1 ACA

- the welfare of the child **throughout his/her life** is the paramount consideration, and s.1(2) ACA
- the court must consider a checklist of factors set out in the Act which includes s.1(4) ACA
 - Ø the child's wishes, background, age, sex, personal characteristics and needs;
 - Ø any harm the child has suffered or is likely to suffer;
 - Ø the likely effect on the child of ceasing to be a member of his original family and becoming a member of his adoptive family;
 - Ø the relationship the child has with his/her relatives (including his/her mother and father) and any other person whom the adoption agency considers relevant; and s.1(4)(f) ACA
 - § the likelihood of such relationship continuing and the benefit to the child of it doing so; the ability and willingness of the child's relatives/other person to provide a secure environment in which the child can develop and otherwise meet the child's needs; and
 - § the wishes and feelings of the child's relatives/other person.
- The court must also consider all its powers and not make a placement order unless this is in the child's best interests. s.1(6) ACA

The court must also consider any contact arrangement before making a placement order and any existing order for contact ceases to have effect. ss.26(1) & 27(4) ACA
For further information see advice sheet no 7.

Once a child is subject to a placement order, it is not possible to remove the child from the local authority's care (whether or not s/he has been placed with adopters) even if they were previously in accommodation, unless the court revokes the placement order and certain other criteria have been met. For further advice on this, contact Family Rights Group advice line. s.34-6 ACA

When a placement order is made, any existing care order ceases to have effect for the duration of the placement order. s.29 ACA

2.5 Introducing the child to the adopters

Once the adoption agency has decided to pursue a plan for adoption, taking into account the Panel's recommendations, and has authority to place the child for adoption either because the parents (with PR) have given formal consent or the court has made a placement order, they must undertake various Reg 31 AAR

preparatory steps in relation to the proposed placement, including:

- giving the prospective adopter information about the child and his/her family background;
- finding out what the prospective adopter thinks about proposed contact arrangements between the child and members of the family
- assessing the needs of the child and the prospective adopter for support services; and
- giving the prospective adopter 10 days to make observations about the proposed placement before it is considered by the Adoption panel. *Reg 32 AAR*

NB: The adoption agency cannot make a final decision on whether a proposed placement should go ahead until the case has been referred to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation on whether it is a suitable match and any advice about contact arrangements. The adoption agency must take account of this recommendation when making its final decision about whether a proposed placement proceeds. *Reg 33 AAR*

Given the role of the Adoption Panel in advising on contact, you may want to write to the panel at this stage to say why you think your child will benefit from maintaining links with you or other members of the family, such as grandparents, brothers and sisters etc... Again you may want to copy your letter to the adoption agency which makes the final decision about the placement. If you cannot agree the contact arrangements that will take place during the placement, you should consider applying to court for a new contact order to operate during the placement. *s.26 & s.27(4) ACA
For further information
see advice sheet no 7.*

2.6 What happens during the placement for adoption?

When a child is placed for adoption by the adoption agency, PR for the child is held by:

- the prospective adopters,
- the adoption agency, and *s.25 ACA*
- the parents, although in practice they may have great difficulty in exercising their PR for two reasons:
 - they are unlikely to know where the child is placed or have any contact with the adopters; and
 - the local, authority has the right to limit their (and the adopters') exercise of PR.

In effect, this means that, unless the adoption agency specifically restricts the things the adopters can decide, the adopters have the right to make all major decisions (other than changing the child's name or taking the child outside the jurisdiction for more than one month) without referring to the parents or the adoption agency. *s.28 ACA*

However, the child also remains looked after which means that regular reviews are carried out and an independent reviewing officer (IRO) will be responsible for monitoring the child's case and seeing that the plans made are implemented. If you have any concerns about the plans not being put into effect, for example around contact, it is a good idea to contact the IRO to let them know the situation and discuss your concerns. *s.18(3) ACA*

3. When can an adoption order be made?

An adoption order can only be made by the court if it is applied for by someone who meets certain requirements set out below.

3.1 Who can apply for an adoption order?

The conditions for making the application in respect of a child who has been looked after by the local authority is that:

1. Where the child has been placed with the applicants by an adoption agency (with the parents' consent or under a placement order - see above), the child has lived with them for at least 10 weeks before the application is made. s.42(2) ACA

2. Where the child has not been placed for adoption with the applicants by an adoption agency (following the placement process described above) then, unless the court gives leave:
 - in the case of local authority foster carers who want to adopt the child [without the agreement of the local authority], they can only apply to adopt if the child has been living with them for one year before they make the application; and s.42(4) ACA
 - in any other case (except step-parent cases), the child has been living with the applicants for 3 out of the last 5 years. s.42(5) ACA

In each of these cases, they must give notice of their intention to adopt to the local authority at least 3 months before making the application. s.44 ACA

In all cases:

- Applicants must generally be over 21. ss.49-51 ACA
- A single person can apply to adopt on their own.
- A couple can apply whether or not they are married or civil partners. However if a person who is married or in a civil partnership wishes to apply for adoption they must apply with their partner unless s/he cannot be found or the couple is permanently separated.

3.2 Who is at the adoption hearing?

The following will be parties to the proceedings: FP(A)R 2005

- the adopters who are the applicants;
- the adoption agency which is also required to file a report on the suitability of the applicants to adopt; s.43 ACA
- parents who have PR; and
- anyone with an existing contact order.

Children will not automatically be parties to proceedings, which means that there will not necessarily be a guardian. However they will be joined as parties in some situations, for example where the parent is granted leave to oppose the making of an adoption order (see next section), where the child opposes the adoption order, or where a CAFCASS officer has recommended that it is in the child's best interests to be represented and the court accepts this recommendation.

Relatives are generally not parties, unless they have an existing contact order, so, if for example you want contact after the adoption, you will need to apply for leave to be joined as a party when making your application for contact.

3.3 What are the grounds for making an adoption order?

Parental consent: The court can only make an adoption order if the parents who have PR consent to adoption or the court is satisfied their consent should be dispensed with. In most cases, this issue will have been dealt with before placement. This means that a parent:

s. 47(2)&(4) ACA

- who has consented to a placement for adoption under s.19, or
- who has given advance consent to adoption under s.20, or
- whose child is subject to a placement order

s.47(3)&(5) ACA

may not oppose the making of an adoption order without the court's leave.

The court may only give a parent leave to oppose the making of an adoption order where it is satisfied that there has been a significant change of circumstances. This might arise where a father has acquired PR after the child was placed for adoption.

s. 47(7) ACA

[NB: If the mother gives formal consent and the father does not have PR he will be deemed to have given formal consent to the placement for adoption when the mother consents, even if he later acquires PR. A father in this situation should take urgent advice about any steps he can take with regard to the child.]

s.52(9) ACA

Where leave is given, the grounds for dispensing with the parents consent are either that s/he cannot be found or is incapable of giving consent, or that the child's welfare requires the consent to be dispensed with.

s.52(1) ACA

If the applicants wish to apply to adopt a child who was **not** placed with them for adoption by an adoption agency, they will have to satisfy the court at the adoption hearing that either the parents with PR consent to the order being made or that their consent should be dispensed with.

Welfare principle: When deciding whether or not to make an adoption order the court must apply the welfare principle (described above on page 6) and it must not make an adoption order, as compared with any other kind of order, such as special guardianship, unless this is in the child's best interests.

s.1 ACA

Munby. J, 2006, "Special Guardianship: A judicial Perspective", in Jordan, L & Lindley, B (Eds) Special Guardianship: What Does it Offer Children who Cannot Live with their Parents, London: FRG. For further information on special guardianship, see FRG Advice sheets nos 19 & 20.

[NB Initial judicial thinking suggests that the court must certainly look at other possible orders when applying this principle, including special guardianship which secures the permanent placement of a child with carers who are not their parents but does not sever legal ties with the birth family.]

The court must also consider any contact arrangement before making an adoption order.

s.46(6) ACA

3.4 What happens if the parents do not consent?

Parents will be parties to the adoption proceedings and will be notified of the hearing date so will have a chance to express their views. However, in cases where a child has been placed for adoption by an adoption agency, it may be difficult to oppose the adoption (see section above).

FP(A)R & s.141 ACA

Any parent, including a father who has acquired PR after the child was placed, who does not consent to adoption, should take urgent legal advice including about:

- whether they can apply for leave to oppose the making of the adoption order, and/or
- whether they may want make representations to the court about any other possible order such as special guardianship and/or contact arrangements.

Details of how to contact a solicitor specialising in child care law and/or Family Rights group Advice line can be found at the end

4. What is the effect of an adoption order?

An adoption order severs all legal ties between an adopted child, and his/her birth parent, and creates a legal relationship between the child and the adoptive parents as if s/he were born to them.

s.67 ACA

Once an adoption order has been made it cannot be revoked.

5. Are birth family members entitled to support services?

Birth parents should have access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the moment that adoption is identified as the plan for the child.

Para 2.25 guidance, and NMS 7.4

Birth parents are entitled to counselling and written information about adoption and related issues. This also involves finding out the parents' views about the plan for the adoption of their child. Counselling should also be available to brothers and sisters of a child who is adopted.

Reg 14 AAR and pp 6-11 Guidance

Reg 4 ASSR

Birth parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives who have an important relationship with the child also have a right to an assessment of their need for support services. This may be particularly relevant in relation to support for contact arrangements, which might include engaging family mediation services to help resolve difficulties or tensions arising over contact or financial support with the costs incurred during visits.

s.4 ACA & Reg 13 ASSR

Reg 3 & 8 ASSR

For further information see advice sheet no 7.

B. What does research say?

There is no one method of deciding when an adoption has been successful. Most research uses one or more of the following indicators of success.

Placement breakdown: No national statistics exist for the breakdown rates of adoption but the success rate decreases with age. The placement is more likely to succeed if the child is placed under five years of age. For children adopted over five, there is no significant difference in breakdown rate between adopted and permanently fostered children. The child's sense of permanency is not related to their legal status.

See generally: Fratter, J., Rowe, J., Sapsford, D. and Thoburn, J. (1991) Outcomes of Permanent Family Placement, London, BAAF

Signs of well-being/disturbance: Research has shown that the majority of adopted children are well adjusted, but some studies have found that there is no significant difference in their well-being and social adjustment and it may be slightly poorer than the general population. Research has also shown that there may be slightly more adopted children subsequently referred to child guidance and being looked after by the local authority.

Thoburn, J. (1990) Success and Failure in Permanent Family Placement Aldershot, Gower/Avebury

Children's sense of identity: Some adopted children seem to experience identity problems and many will seek to find more about their birth families as adults. Most researchers conclude that this is a sign of normal curiosity. However a substantial number of those who seek help as adults have problems around a sense of identity.

Contact with the family: In some studies continuing contact with family of origin has been shown to be a protective factor preventing placement breakdown. Contact is most likely to help children when birth families and adoptive parents work together in a spirit of co-operation. Research has also shown that adopters willing to continue contact can be found and many adopters welcome continuing contact; it is often the social workers who are reluctant.

C. Tips for negotiation

It can be very distressing to hear that the local authority is planning to place your child for adoption. You may be so angry and upset that you want to avoid them altogether. However, it is very important for you to stay involved at this stage as you may:

- q Have people in your family or network who could offer to care for your child on a long term basis. If so, ask them to contact the social worker as soon as possible to ask to be assessed as carers. You could also ask the social worker to arrange a Family Group Conference so you can discuss plans for your child within the family.
- q Want to make proposals for alternatives for your child, such as a residence order or special guardianship order in favour of their current foster carers.
- q Ensure that the agency has all the correct information about you and your family so that any decisions about your child are made on the correct basis, and that information, for example about health issues, that will be shared with any prospective adopters is as full as possible. You might also be able to help in putting together information for your child, for example by contributing to his or her 'life story' book.
- q Be able to make representations to the Adoption Panel. Ask your social worker if you can attend the panel or put your views and feelings in writing or on tape. The agency will be required to report your views to the panel and should offer you the chance to write down what you think. You should also be given a copy of the report (or most of the report) that the agency is going to give to the adoption panel. This is called 'the child's permanence report.'
- q Be able to influence the choice of adopters by saying the kind of person you would like your child to live with and the kind of contact with your family that will best meet your child's needs. Ask them if you can meet the prospective adopters and help with the move.
- q Be able to ask for adopters who agree to continuing contact, but remember that you are more likely to be allowed some form of continuing contact if they are confident that you won't undermine the adoptive placement.

*Mullender, A. (1991) Open Adoption: The Philosophy and Practice. BAAF; Neil, E and Howe D. (2004) Contact in Adoption and permanent foster care: research, theory and practice BAAF
Further information about the research evidence on contact can be found in advice sheet no.7 on open adoption.*

You can obtain more information about Family Group Conferences from Family Rights Group

D. Where to get more information

- q Contact a solicitor who specialises in child care law. Ask your local Citizens Advice Bureau to recommend one or contact the Law Society's information line on 0870 606 6575 or search on www.lawsociety.org.uk. If you are on a low wage, or on income support or job seekers allowance, you may be able to get free advice initially under the Legal Help Scheme.
- q Contact **Family Rights Group** advice line which offers specialist advice to any family member or friend who is involved with social care agencies about the welfare and/or protection of their child. This includes birth parents and relatives of a child who is being adopted. We can discuss with you the specific details of your case, and can also send you written advice information including the other advice sheets referred to above. Our advice line is open on Freephone 0800 731 1696 from 10am to 12pm and 1.30 to 3.30pm Monday to Friday. If you are unable to phone you can either email us at: advice@frg.org.uk, or write to us at: The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London, E8 3DL
- q Contact the **Post-Adoption Centre** which supports birth relatives. They offer counselling, advice and information via the Advice Line 0870 777 2197 Mon, Tues, Wed & Fri 10.00am – 1.00pm and Thurs evening 5.30pm – 7.30pm. They also offer:
 - o individual counselling at PAC and various outreach clinics,
 - o a birth parent support group on Monday afternoons every fortnight, assistance with contact arrangements (direct/indirect) and
 - o a project which offers services for women in prison who have had contact with their children curtailed.Their contact address is: 5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RZ, Tel: 020 7284 0555
- q **After Adoption** helps anyone affected by adoption. To contact them for advice you can call their action line number: 0800 0 586 578, Their contact address is : 12-14 Chapel Street, Manchester, M3 7NH Tel: 0161 839 4932 or you can email the on information@afteradoption.org.uk
- q **Adoption UK** has a large team who help to provide support to prospective and established adopters. Adoption UK can only answer queries from prospective adopters who are to be assessed and approved by adoption agencies within the United Kingdom. Their address is 46 The Green, South Bar Street, Banbury OX16 9AB, The office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. Tel: 01295 752240, Fax: 01295 752241 Helpline number: 0844 848 7900 (10am to 4pm)
- q **UK College of Family Mediation** The UK College of Family Mediators - established in 1996 – sets standards for family mediation and maintains a register of family mediator members who meet those standards; it works to promote best practice in family mediation and to protect the public. Their contact address is, UK College of Family Mediators, Alexander House, Telephone Avenue, Bristol BS1 4BS Tel: 0117 904 7223 Fax: 0117 904 3331 Email: admin@ukcfm.co.uk