St David's Adoption Service



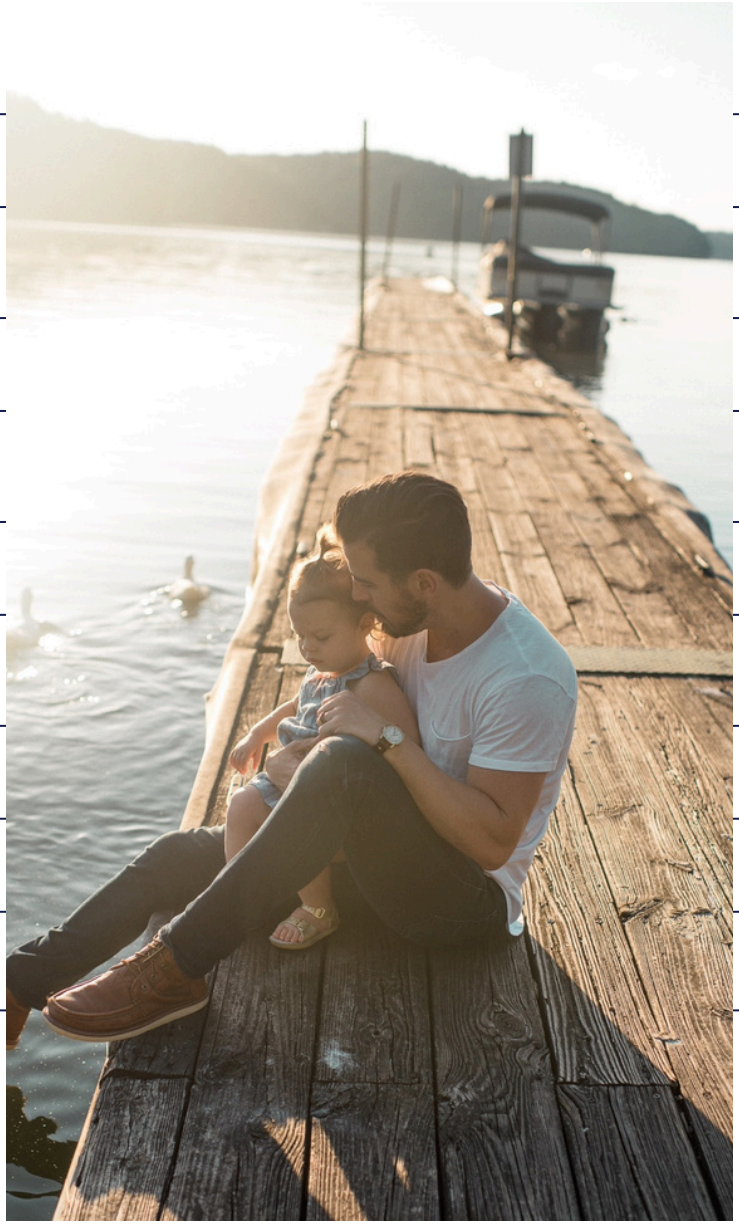
# ADOPTION INFORMATION



GROW YOUR FAMILY THROUGH ADOPTION

# WELCOME TO ST DAVIDS

Thank you for your enquiry, and welcome to St David's, Wales oldest adoption service. We hope this information guide proves helpful as you begin your exploration of adoption. The guide is crafted to provide you with an overview of the adoption process, guiding you from your initial inquiry all the way to the heart warming moment when a child becomes a part of your family.




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# WELCOME TO ST DAVID'S

## A letter from our CEO, Jason Baker

Thank you for your interest in adopting with St David's Adoption Service. We are delighted that you have taken this step with us. St David's is a not for profit charity and we pride ourselves on offering support from the moment you make that decision to become a parent through adoption to becoming a family and beyond.

We are there for you every step of the way, recognising support as the norm whether you are a new parent or have been an adoptive parent for many years. We positively welcome applications from all sectors of the population and we base our work on the belief that there are lots of people who can become parents through adoption and can give children waiting for adoption a loving family for life. Adoption is a lifelong commitment and can be hugely rewarding.

We hope that in reviewing this information guide it will give you a full overview of the adoption process with St David's and information that will help you decide whether you wish to progress.

Please remember we are here to answer any questions you may have on 02920 667007 or email info@stdavidscs.org.

Our website will also provide further information stdavidsadoptionservice.org.

May I offer my good wishes as you move forward in the process to become a family through adoption

Warm regards,



Jason Baker

**JASON BAKER, CEO**

# ABOUT US

At St David's we are proud of our heritage as the longest serving Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) in Wales. Our primary commitment is to find loving families for children so that they can be supported to be the best they can be. We are beside our families every step of the way, providing support, training, and expertise during the adoption assessment and beyond.

Our experienced adoption social workers draw on the latest research and best practice to help and guide you during your adoption journey. We are open to the evolving needs of individuals and will work with you to build an open and honest relationship, helping to set you up for the challenges and rewards ahead. We know that every person involved in adoption is unique and support a diverse range of adopters from across Wales. We welcome applications from all sectors of society regardless of ethnicity, disability, religion, sexuality, or marital status. Post adoption we recognise most families will need some form of adoption support and offer continued support to children and families, being there whenever you need us. We are keen to ensure that Welsh children are placed with a family in Wales giving them every opportunity to maintain relationships which are important to them. A part of our work is to build relationships with Local Authorities so to widen the choice of families available for children. We are a member of the National Adoption Service in Wales and work closely with our partners in voluntary and statutory adoption agencies.

With children at the heart of what we do, we seek to create connections which can help positively shape the lives of children who's plan is adoption.



# WHAT IS ADOPTION?

Adoption is a legal procedure, whereby parental responsibility for a child or children is permanently transferred to the adoptive parent(s) by a Court Order, known as an Adoption Order. It is a lifelong commitment where you legally take on all parental rights and responsibilities. Adoption is a way of providing the security, permanency, and love of a new family when it is not possible for a child to remain with their birth parents or within the birth family.

At St David's we place children of all ages from birth to 8 years old, including single children, sibling groups, children from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and children with various degrees of need. Adoption can be both a rewarding and challenging experience. Many of the children we place are vulnerable with needs resulting from early childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect.

When considering adoption is it imporant to be open to developing your understanding of the potential needs of a child.



> Right from the first phone call to our second time around, their service has been second to none. I urge anyone who is interested in adoption to contact St David's.

# ABOUT THE CHILDREN

In Wales, hundreds of children are in need of adoption. These children come from a wide array of ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, and many of them have additional challenges, such as disabilities or special needs. The reasons they find themselves in need of adoptive families vary, but they often stem from situations where their birth families were unable to provide the necessary care, leading to court interventions.

These children share a common thread of having experienced unsettling and sometimes traumatic events in their young lives. Even those adopted shortly after birth have likely faced loss and separation. Many have endured more severe hardships, including neglect and abuse, which can result in the development of coping mechanisms and behaviours that make forming new relationships challenging.

Understanding the circumstances that lead to children entering care is crucial for prospective adoptive parents. Physical abuse can arise from a lack of knowledge about proper parenting and emotional regulation, leading to harmful outbursts and injuries. Emotional abuse often stems from caregivers who themselves lack nurturing and may result in feelings of worthlessness or being different from others in the family.



Neglect, recognised as a significant contributor to emotional harm, can occur in chaotic environments without structure or attention, leaving children vulnerable and struggling to manage on their own. Sexual abuse, mental health issues, learning difficulties, substance misuse, and cases where children are voluntarily relinquished all contribute to the complexity of adoption scenarios.

Attachment issues play a significant role in these children's lives. Disrupted early attachments can lead to coping patterns that make trusting relationships difficult. Understanding these patterns is essential for adoptive parents to create stable, nurturing environments and rebuild children's trust in adults.

Voluntarily relinquished cases are exceptionally rare, typically comprising only two to three cases nationally annually. These instances involve a birth mother making the difficult decision to opt for adoption, often due to personal circumstances that she believes will be better addressed within an adoptive family setting.

While adopting a child requires patience, dedication, and a deep understanding of these complexities, providing a loving and consistent home can have transformative effects on these children's lives. Over time, with support from adoption agencies and resources, children can learn to trust again and experience stability and love within their new families.



# THE PROCESS

- INITIAL ENQUIRY
- INTRODUCTION TO ADOPTION TRAINING
- INITIAL VISIT
- REGISTRATION OF INTEREST FORM
- STAGE ONE



CAN YOU?

- Provide love, time, and consistency to a child?
- Empathise with a child's experience?
- They may never have felt safe.
- Be patient, flexible, and adaptable to a child's individual circumstances?
- Have the energy and health to provide a long-term family for a child? Provide consistency to a child through a secure and stable family home

- STAGE TWO
- ADOPTION PANEL AND DECISION
- MATCHING WITH A CHILD/REN
- PLACEMENT AND ADOPTION ORDER
- POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT

# APPLYING TO ADOPT

St David's believe there is no such thing as a perfect adoptive family. We are looking for families who can parent a child or children with a range of needs.

Following your first enquiry and reading this information pack, you will speak with a member of staff who will, if appropriate, invite you to 'Introduction to Adoption Training'. This is a two-hour long course explaining more about the adoption process, the needs of the children, and what is required from prospective adopters.

Following this, you will be asked to complete a Registration of Interest (ROI) form.

To do this, you must be:

- At least 21 years old.
- Living in the British Isles.
- Not have been convicted or cautioned for certain criminal offences. (There are specific offences that will prevent you from adopting, but many do not. If you have previous cautions or convictions, please discuss with us).
- If in a relationship, you must have lived together for a minimum of two years.

**If you do not meet the above criteria, we will not be able to proceed at this time.**

**Age** There is not a fixed upper age limit. However, we need to be sure that you will be fit and well to care for an adoptive child, not only now, but as they grow older.

**Health** Health problems do not necessarily prevent approval to adopt, but all applicants are subject to a medical report and the agency works in line with government advice regarding a healthy diet, lifestyle, and exercise.

**Fertility** Sometimes infertility issues/treatments may need some time and further discussion to ensure the time is absolutely right for moving forward with adoption.

**Smoking** We cannot accept an application if either applicant smokes cigarettes or e-cigarettes. If you have recently ceased smoking including smoking e-cigarettes, you will have to evidence, via a GP, that a period of at least 6 months has elapsed before an application can be taken up.

**Alcohol** We will consider alcohol consumption and offer guidance on what is deemed acceptable in respect of parenting children who are adopted

**Finance** Income levels, or whether you are in receipt of benefits, do not affect your ability to adopt. The important thing is that you can afford to care for a child until they reach adulthood.

**Housing** It is not relevant whether you own your own home, or whether you live in rented accommodation. What is important is that you are settled, that you will not need to move at short notice, that there is sufficient space and the accommodation is suitable for a child.

**Registration of Interest** The ROI is quite in-depth and asks for a lot of information. Please try to complete as fully as possible to avoid delay moving forward. When we receive your ROI, we will let you know whether or not we can accept your application within 10 working days of receipt. Your ROI will be reviewed by a manager, and you may be contacted for more information prior to a decision being made. If for any reason we are unable to accept your application, the reasons will be discussed with you. Once we accept your application, you will move onto Stage One of the process



# STAGE ONE

## Stage One should take no more than two months and Stage Two no more than four months (unless there are good reasons for it to take longer or upon the request of you, the prospective adopter.)

We will complete an agreement with you at the start of each stage.

Prospective adopters can take a maximum of six months between Stage One and Stage Two (the agency could also recommend you take a break). Should a break be longer than 6 months, you would be required to restart Stage One.

The focus of Stage One is gathering factual information and checks. We will allocate a social worker and it is likely they will visit you two or three times during this stage. There will be a number of tasks for you to complete, for example, preparing a family tree and documenting your support network. Your social worker is likely to give you greater insight into the needs of children and start to gain an understanding of your personal history

Checks and references at this stage:

**UK DBS Check** You will be sent an email to complete an online DBS. St David's will cover the cost of the DBS in the UK only.

**Overseas Checks** If you have lived abroad for an extended period since the age of 18. Any costs involved would be payable by yourselves.

**Health/Medical assessment with your GP** The agency must obtain a written report about a prospective adopter's health. It is essential a medical check takes place as soon as possible within the two-month period in order for it to be considered by the agency's medical advisor.

**Local Authority Checks** From the previous 10 years.

**CIW or OFSTED Checks** in respect of the applicants themselves.

**Employment** If applicable, written confirmation of employment from an employer, or from an accountant if self-employed.

**Other Household Member Checks** Other family members or adults living within your home.

**Personal and Family References** These should include at least two referees who are not related to you and, if applying as a couple, it is helpful to have a longstanding reference from each prospective adopter.

**Ex-partner references** Should a prospective adopter have lived with an ex-partner, a reference would be sought. We understand that this can be uncomfortable but it is necessary to ensure children will be safe. If for any reason there would be a significant risk from a previous partner, then external evidence of that relationship would be sought from referees or other sources.

**School or Nursery Checks** If you currently have a child living with you, we would ask for a school or nursery reference to be obtained.

**SSAFA Checks** If you have ever been employed by the military/RAF/ British Forces, a SSAFA check is required.

**Foster** If you have previously applied to become a foster carer or adopter, we would seek a written reference from that agency or local authority.

**Child Support Agency.**

**Counselling/Therapy Related References**. We will ask you to consent to us seeking references if you have accessed counselling or therapy previously, or are currently accessing these services now

> I have felt supported every step of the way." – Single Adopter

For some of the checks it will be necessary to have sight of highly personal information in order to verify the identity of the applicant e.g. bank account, pay slip etc.

There may be other checks and references relevant to your application, and these would be discussed with you on a case by case basis. At all points in the assessment process, the assessing Social Worker will aim to be as supportive as possible.

**Preparation to Adopt**

In Stage One, you will be invited to attend a three-day adoption preparation course which will provide an understanding of the types of children who need adoptive families, how their experiences of abuse or neglect may impact on their behaviour and/or development, and how therapeutic parenting may help.

The course takes place over three consecutive days, and you must attend all three days. There is a blend approach to the delivery of the course, it is held online and when in person it is held in Cardiff.

The training provides an opportunity to meet with adoptive parents and others involved in the adoption process, including staff at the agency.

**Completion of Stage One**

At the end of Stage One, your social worker submits a report to a manager and a decision will be made as to whether or not you can proceed to Stage Two. A review meeting may take place with a manager. If for any reason we are unable to proceed, the reasons for this will be shared with you. This decision will be followed up in writing.

If you want to take a break before starting Stage Two, you are able to take up to six months.

# STAGE TWO

## After Stage One is successfully completed, we will sign a prospective adopter assessment plan with you, which sets out what is expected throughout Stage Two

We will do our best to ensure you have the same social worker throughout Stage One and Two, however if this is not possible, we will let you know. Your social worker will arrange weekly visits in Stage Two and complete an in-depth assessment of you. Your social worker is likely to set tasks that you will need to complete.

We recommend that you have the time and space to complete these tasks and not have significant life events at this time, e.g. moving home, house extensions, extended holidays.

We aim to complete Stage Two within four months and you and your social worker will have a panel date that you will be working towards

During Stage Two we will gather:

- Information about you and, if applying as a couple, discuss your relationship
- Information on your wider family and support network Information about your home and its suitability for a child Information about your income to ensure you are financially stable
- Your motivation to adopt
- Your childcare experience and parenting capacity
- Your learning needs and understanding the long-term implications of adoption
- A social media check which will be completed with you



We recognise that the assessment process can be daunting but we are there to support you through the process. We aim to be open and honest with you throughout the entire process. Should we have any concerns, we will discuss these with you at the earliest opportunity. We also want you to be open and honest with us and, should you have any reservations, to share them with us.

You will also be invited to attend various webinars and other training opportunities, which will build on the three-day preparation course.

At the end of the assessment, your social worker will write a Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR). This will be presented to the St David's adoption panel with your social worker's recommendation about your suitability to adopt. If for any reason they cannot make a positive recommendation, this will be discussed with you.

The PAR will be shared with you so you can read and add your views. References are confidential, as are checks provided by third parties, and these cannot be shared with you. You will be invited to attend the panel held in our Cardiff office, this is a great opportunity for panel members to meet you in person.

The panel will make a recommendation. You will be informed by telephone of this recommendation within 24 hours of the panel taking place. This recommendation, along with the minutes, are then sent to the Agency Decision Maker who has a maximum of 10 working days to make the decision about whether you are suitable to adopt. You will be informed of this by letter. If your application is approved, you will then be approved adopters and so can be considered for the children who are available on the Adoption Register Wales. Your Social Worker will support you in this.

If St David's is unable to approve you as suitable to adopt, you can either accept this and withdraw, or request either St David's reviews the decision, or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review. You have 40 days to request this in Wales

# FAMILY FINDING

Once you are approved, your Social Worker will ensure you are referred to Adoption Register Wales and start to actively look for children you may become a parent for.

**Linking and Matching**

You will be given access to Linkmaker, an online national database where local authorities upload information profiles about children. We will assist you to create your own profile as approved adopters. If you wish to use this service, you will be able to search for children, otherwise your social worker will search on your behalf. Local authorities will also be able to view your profile and it is a tool used to share information and find the right families for children.

If a local authority social worker wishes to find out more about you, they will contact you and your social worker via Linkmaker and your social worker will respond.

In St David's, when a link is identified, an internal meeting takes place to help determine both the positives and potential challenges of any link. This information will be shared with you.

Should you wish to find out more about a child and the child's social worker wishes to meet you, a visit will be arranged at your home with the childcare social worker, St David's social worker, and the adoption social worker from the child's local authority.





This will provide an opportunity to have up to date information about the child or children, and a chance for you and the childcare social workers to decide whether or not you wish to proceed with the link. A decision is usually made by the local authority within a week, though it can take longer if more than one family is being considered.

If you are the right match for a child or children, you will be invited to meet with:

- The child's foster carer
- The child's local authority medical adviser
- Other professionals (this is decided on a case-by-case basis, but may include, nursery teachers, schoolteachers, or any other professional involved in the child's life)

These meetings provide an opportunity for you to gain as much up to date information on the child or children to ensure you understand the child's needs prior to moving forward.

You will be involved with preparing an adoption support plan which will reflect why it is felt you will be the right parent for the child and any anticipated support you may need in meeting the child or children's needs.

## Matching Panel

If everyone agrees the match should proceed between you and the child, you will be invited to a matching panel. The panel is held at the child's local authority. The matching panel is similar to an approval panel, however its main purpose is to ensure that you as the prospective adopter can meet the child's needs now and into the future.

The panel will make a recommendation and you will be informed of this within 24 hours. This recommendation, along with the minutes, is then sent to the local authority agency decision maker who has up to 10 working days to make the decision about whether the match is approved.

## Meeting Your Child and Starting Your Journey to Become a Family

Once a match is approved, introductions can begin. Introductions are where you will finally get to meet the child in person. The aim of introductions is to help the child move from their foster carer to your home. Introductions can vary in length depending on the age and needs of each child. They usually take place over 14 days and involve you observing the child in the foster carer's home and gradually taking on the parenting of your child. Your social worker and your child's social worker will support you through introductions.

There is usually a review halfway through and the child or children will move to you when everyone agrees the child is ready.

Things to remember:

- Different Local Authorities operate different styles of introductions.
- You may or may not have the opportunity to meet the birth family.
- Following the matching panel birth parents may make an application to the court to revoke the Placement Order, which can impact on timescales for introductions starting
- If you are not adopting from your local area, you may need to travel for a short period of time. In some situations, financial assistance may be offered by the Local Authority

# BECOMING FAMILY

We recognise the different needs of children, parents and families and after the child or children have moved into your home our social workers will be on hand to offer their knowledge, advice and sometime simply a listening ear.

We find that time between your child or children moving into your home and the decision to apply for an Adoption Order, and it being granted can vary from several months to approximately a year. During this time, your child or children and yourselves will be visited and supported by a St David's Social Worker and a Social Worker from the local authority where your child or children had been living. There will be regular visits to your home and the placement will be reviewed in accordance with the Adoption Regulations, to make sure that all is well and that your child's needs and those of the family are being met.



The Courts will not consider an Adoption application until the child/ren has lived with you for 10 weeks before making the application. Often it is considerably longer as everyone needs to feel that they are ready, that the child has settled and that everyone has made the move to becoming a family.

Once an application to adopt has been lodged in the court, the court process begins. You will be kept informed of the progress each step of the way. Courts can sometimes take a few months to grant an Adoption Order. Once this is done, you legally become your child's parent and guardian. When an Adoption Order has been granted it is irrovocable, it gives the child or children the same legal rights as any birth child. You will receive an adoption certificate directly from the court which shows the child's new surname.

**What can impact on this process?**

When a birth parent is notified that an adoption application has been lodged with the court, they may seek to oppose the granting of an Adoption Order. There is a strict protocol which the Judge will have to follow in order to fully consider whether to agree to the birth parent's request.

At this time, we have no experience of Adoption Orders not being granted to adoptive families. There have been occasional situations where adoptive families have experienced delays in introductions and delays to the granting of the Adoption Order. We appreciate that should this happen it can be a stressful time, but we will be there to help and support.

**Beyond the Adoption Order**

At this stage many families may feel that they want embrace family life and may not feel they need our support. However, adoption support is available to families if needed and we will offer ongoing support for as long as required.

Our door is always open to our families, and you can contact St David's at any stage in the future should you need support or advice. We are here to be a responsible and supportive guide to you in any questions or concerns you may have. A social worker is also always on duty during office hours to answer any queries. Our ongoing support includes regular support groups, including a West-Wales based group, and twice-yearly family celebration days. We also offer post-placement training which you can talk to your social worker about.

We send out regular newsletters and encourage you to keep in touch with us, we love to hear how things are going. We can also refer adopters to a range of pychology related support, including a monthly psychologist-led support group and 1:1 psychologist consultation sessions.

In the first three-years after your Adoption Order is granted the local authority that placed your child or children with you will be responsible for assessing any adoption support needs. After three-years this becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live. Should you have any questions around this we will be here to help.

# MORE INFORMATION

We hope this overview has been helpful, however if you have any questions, please get in touch with one of our team on 02920 667 007 or contact us at info@stdavidscs.org.



There is further information, including a Legal Framework for Adoption, on our website stdavidsadoptionservice.org

We look forward to supporting you on your adoption journey!

Other places to gain information on adoption:

Association for Adoption and Fostering Cymru (AFA) – 029 2076 1155
afacymru.org.uk

Adoption UK
02920 230319
adoptionuk.org

Coram BAAF
020 7520 0300
corambaaf.org.uk

Stay in the loop, follow us on:
Instagram
Facebook
YouTube

***Registered Office:*** *St David's Adoption Service, Lambourne House, Llanishen Business Park, Cardiff, CF14 5GL*

*St David's Children Society is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (Registration No: 509163) and a company limited by Guarantee (Registered Cardiff 1546688) St David's Adoption Service is the brand name of the St David's Children Society's adoption service.*

*Mae Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant wedi ei chofrestru fel elusen gyda Chomisiwn Elusennau Cymru a Lloegr (Rhif Cofrestru: 509163) a chwmni cyfyngedig drwy Warant (Cofrestredig Caerdydd 1546688) Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Dewi Sant yw enw brand gwasanaeth mabwysiadu Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant.*



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