

Thinking about adoption if you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)

From the earliest days of adoption in England, it has been possible for single people (regardless of sexual orientation) to adopt. Same sex couples could not adopt and although adoption agencies helped many couples by approving one of the couple singly, it took a change in law from December 2005 to allow adoption orders to be granted to unmarried couples including same sex couples.

Since that time adoption agencies have been able to openly recruit and assess lesbian and gay couples, as well as single adopters, there are many more LGBT adopters and the numbers continue to increase, for some agencies up to 10%¹ of their adopters are LGBT people.

The majority of adoption agencies now have experience of assessing, approving and placing children with LGBT adopters and the UK is now one of the world leaders in this respect.

Adoption: What you need to know?

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 gave unmarried couples, including same sex couples, the right to adopt, and this became law in December 2005. If you are a same sex couple you don't need to be in a Civil Partnership or married to adopt, you will need to show that you are living together in an enduring relationship.
- Single adopters are also welcome whatever their sexual orientation.
- You must be aged 21 or over and there is no upper age limit, as long as you are fit enough to cope with the rigours of parenting and to see children through to early adulthood.
- You should not experience discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. After equalities legislation was passed in 2006² a few adoption agencies (with religious objections) ceased operating. All agencies are committed to equal treatment of all potential adopters and in fact may positively welcome applications from LGBT adopters.

Research

There has been encouraging research recently into parenting by lesbian and gay adopters. This has helped to dispel myths and increase agencies' confidence in placing children. A recent UK study³ shows, for instance that:

¹ PACT website

² Equalities Act, 2006

³ Cambridge University Study, Mellish et al, 2013

- The quality of parent-child relationships is just the same when children are adopted by lesbian or gay couples compared to heterosexual couples.
- Children's psychological development and wellbeing is just the same when children are adopted by lesbian or gay couples compared to heterosexual couples.
- Lesbian and gay adopters are more likely than heterosexual adopters to have come to adoption as their first choice.
- Lesbian and gay adopters felt well equipped to help children deal with difference and that children would have advantages growing up of being tolerant of difference in others.
- Adopted children of lesbian and gay parents don't experience greater problems at school and in peer relationships compared to children of heterosexual parents, and bullying and teasing is rare.

What about transgender adopters?

Because the numbers are small adoption agencies may not have experience of transgender people who wish to adopt. However the same laws apply, you can adopt whatever your sexual orientation and are protected from discrimination. Talk to New Family Social (see below), see Harriet and Lizzie's story here: <http://www.lgbtadoptfosterweek.org.uk/adoption/transgender-people-can-be-parents-too-harriet-lizzys-story/> and remember you can make initial enquiries of as many adoption agencies as you wish, before deciding which one to apply to adopt through.

Support Networks

There are well established organisations that offer support groups and information for LGBT people who have adopted or are thinking of adopting.

New Family Social – an organisation led by lesbian, gay, bi- or trans adopters and foster carers, forming a UK LGBT network with local groups. This organisation can put you in touch with other adopters, as well as those deciding how to form a family or on the way to parenting www.newfamilysocial.org.uk

Stonewall – the UK-wide lesbian, gay and bisexual charity, provides information about all aspects of parenting including adoption www.stonewall.org.uk

The Beaumont Society – help and support for the transgender community www.beaumontsociety.org.uk

We hope this information has helped answer some questions you may have. If you feel ready to approach an adoption agency you can find local agencies by visiting our website www.first4adoption.org.uk. Alternatively call **0300 222 0022** and speak with one of our advisers who will provide you with details of adoption agencies. Agencies are happy to give information and answer questions even if you're not yet sure about adoption, so do contact them if you want to find out more.

We are also here to provide information and answer questions at any stage along the way, so don't hesitate to get in touch. Good luck with your exploration.