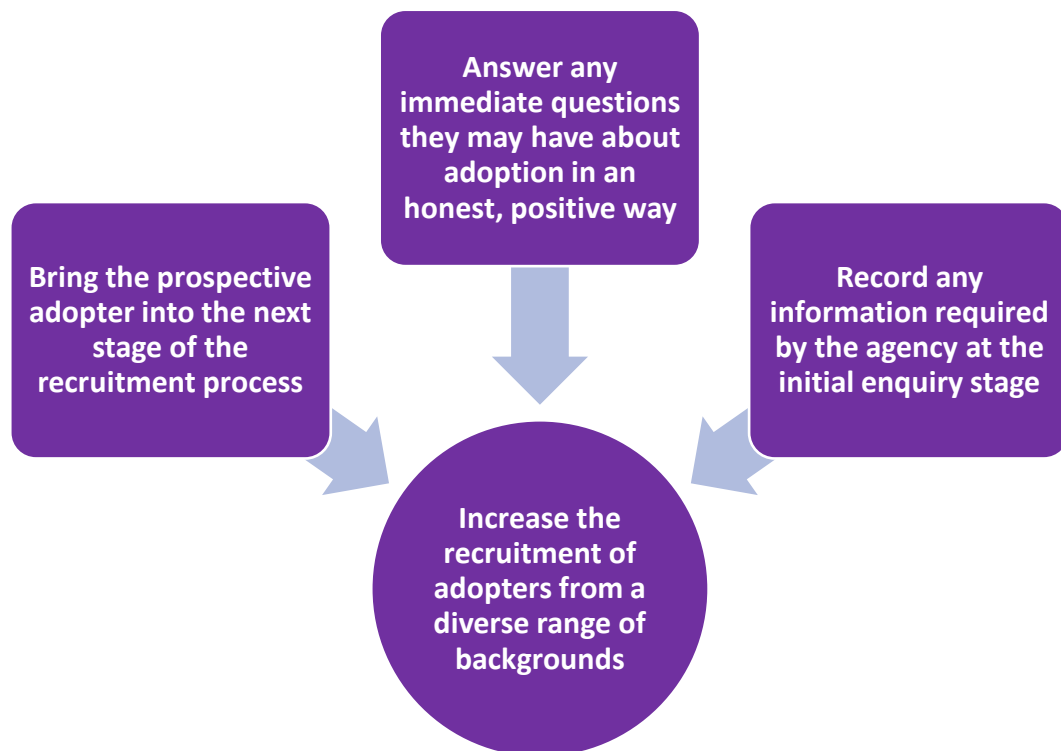


Initial enquiries from prospective adopters – a guidance note for practitioners

This guidance note is an update to the front door script originally co-developed by Adoption UK and Adoption England. It takes on board recommendations from a mystery shopping exercise that took place in early 2025 and has been updated to better reflect modern adoption practice. Even though different agencies have different arrangements at their front door, we want prospective adopters to have a consistent, high-quality experience, ultimately improving the recruitment and retention rates of prospective adopters.

Common aims in handling the initial enquiry



**Remember!**

The initial enquiry is not the time to resolve concerns about adopter suitability. No prospective adopter should be discouraged at this stage because of their ethnicity, ability, or understanding of adoption. Relevant information about the process can be passed on, but the intention should be to welcome and retain their interest in adoption. Suitability or otherwise will be determined later.



Step 1 - Before the call

1. Have details of forthcoming information events to hand.
2. Have a template email ready to personalise and send promptly after the conversation. Tailoring information for each caller is key.
3. Have a clear enquiry management process that includes: logging enquiries; managing email and phone contact; sending out downloadable guides/marketing materials/website links & ensuring timely follow-ups.
4. See [appendix 1](#) for further guidance on relational conversations and building rapport.



Step 2 - During the call

Introductions:

Answer the call within 4 rings with your name, role title and team name. Smile when you introduce yourself – even if you're busy and the to-do list is growing – it will come over in your voice and the caller will have a positive impression from the beginning.

“Hello, this is Jane Smith, Adoption Social Worker in XX Adoption Agency's team.”

If you are returning an answerphone or email message, introduce yourself as above and be mindful of the caller's availability – flexibility is key.

“Is this a good time to speak about adoption or is there a better moment for us to have this call?”

If the timing of the initial call doesn't work, plan a time to ring them that is convenient for them. Being available for a call in the evening, after they have finished work is often appreciated by adopters.

Establish why they are calling:

“How can I help you?”

“I understand you're interested in becoming an adopter?”

“Thank you for considering adoption. There are many children waiting, and we are grateful to you for thinking about adoption.”



Prospective adopters will form a view of the agency at the point of their initial enquiry. They may also bring uninformed perspectives of adoption into the conversation, which should be handled sensitively. People coming forward to adopt are opening their homes, lives and dreams to scrutiny, and this should be respected from the start.

Welcome their interest:



Prospective adopters often feel anxious making the call and may have had trouble finding the right team or number. Put them at ease – we want the caller to be empowered to ask questions and to understand there are no silly questions. Provide a warm invitation to chat without any pressure to make any decisions on the call.

“You’re in the right place – I can help you with that.”

“It’s great that you’re interested in giving a home to a child in care. I can give you all the information you need to take the next step.”

“We always need adopters for the children in our care who can’t go back to their first families.”

“We need families from different ‘walks of life’ because the children waiting are all different and need different families to love and care for them.”

Capture information:



Ensure name, contact details and email address are collected systematically and accurately, in line with data protection, GDPR and privacy requirements. If agency policy is to gather further background information on living arrangements, ethnicity etc. then explain clearly that this is used for monitoring purposes only.

“Before we talk further about the adoption process, let me take a note of your contact details. After this call I will follow up with an information pack and details about next steps.”

“I also need to take down some information about you, so that we can monitor where the interest in adoption is coming from. This doesn’t form part of any adopter approval process, and you don’t need to provide any details you’re uncomfortable with at this stage.”

Provide navigation:



Prospective adopters are likely to find information about the adoption process, timelines, eligibility and adoption training/preparation helpful. These themes can be useful prompts when guiding the conversation and structuring the information which is provided.

“Let me tell you how adoption works at this agency.”

“Would it be helpful if I explain a bit about the adoption process and what you can expect from it?”

Give a simple description of adoption eligibility criteria, covering age, residency and criminal history. If your agency has additional eligibility criteria mention these too.

“The next step is to invite you to an information event, which will be a chance for you to hear more about adoption with us, meet some of the social workers, understand about the children who need adoptive homes, and hear from some adopters who have already gone through the process.”

Give a simple description of your agency’s process around registering interest, initial visits (if relevant), stages 1 and 2 etc.

“You can pause or withdraw at any stage, and you’ll have support all the way through from our adoption team.”

Invite clarifications:



Ensure the prospective adopter understands the next steps, reiterating if necessary that they will be invited to an information event before formally registering their interest in adoption.

“Does that make sense? Is there anything else you’d like to ask at this stage?”

This is the most likely point for questions about suitability and matching to come up. Use positive language and keep the answers open, knowing that the prospective adopter’s understanding of adoption will evolve rapidly during the preparation process.



Selection and suitability questions: Will I be allowed to adopt if I’m older / disabled / single / in a same-sex relationship / have high BMI / smoke / am from a particular ethnic group?

Refer to the You Can Adopt website’s [Q&A’s](#) page for specifics, but in general return to the message that the only people who can’t adopt are those under 21, not resident in the UK, or have

specified convictions. Reassure them that the panel's priority is to find people who can offer a stable, loving home to a child who needs one.

"We welcome adopters from all walks of life."

There will likely be more nuanced conversations about a prospective adopter's likelihood of being matched with a child however these are best timed after they attend the adoption information event.

"The most important consideration is your ability to parent a child who has had a difficult start in life – and that's what the approvals process is there to establish."

For prospective adopters with a strong background match for priority children:

"We're especially looking for people with your background as you'll be a strong match with some of our priority children, so it's really important that you've come forward."



Matching questions: I've always dreamed of adopting a baby / will I get a child who looks like me / will I have to take on siblings / can I become a transracial adopter?

Be honest, positive and gentle in answering these questions. Prospective adopters are likely to appreciate answers which honestly reflect the realities they will experience but balanced with positive messages about the different options available to them and the support they will receive along the way in navigating the decisions to make. Always defer the main discussion to the information event.

"You'll hear more about the children who need adoption at the information event."

"There will be lots of time to explore your best match as you go through the process."

"It's completely normal for your thoughts about what the right family looks like to change as you learn more along the way. You'll never be pressured into being matched with a child where it doesn't feel right for you."



Maintaining relationships questions:

Callers may ask about expectations in terms of maintaining relationships with birth relatives, particularly around the possibility of having face to face contact with birth parents. This is a conversation that will evolve over stages 1 and 2 however some basic information can be shared here if prospective adopters have questions.

"As you move through the process and learn more about adopted children's needs, you will see there are different ways of staying in touch. All plans made for children are based on what is in their best interests and that could change over time."

"It is completely normal and understandable to have questions about this and sometimes, if children do have face to face meet ups with members of their birth family, it will be carefully assessed, supported and reviewed to make sure everyone involved feels safe and happy with

any arrangement. Any staying in touch plan for an adopted child will be individualised to them and their needs.”

Give messages of reassurance.

“There are lots of learning materials and research on the Adoption England [website](#), that as you move through the process you will be able to read and reflect upon with your social worker and of course ask questions about this at the information evening.”



Adoption support questions:

Ensure you have a clear understanding of the support offer within your agency and how adopters can access this support. You will also need up to date information about the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF).

End the conversation on a positive note



Leave the prospective adopter feeling confident about the next steps in their adoption journey and in the agency.

“That’s everything I need to cover with you today. You’ll get your email / information pack soon, and I’ll see you at the information event if you would like to attend.”

Adopters will have a lot of information to process from the call and may feel overwhelmed. It’s therefore important to take the pressure off and assure them that there is no rush. The enquiries team are an information service and it’s important the caller knows they can call again if they have more questions and that the team are alongside them.

“In the meantime, please do call back if you have any questions.”

Encourage adopters to contact more than one agency to help them find the right fit for them.



Step 3 - After the call

Send a personalised email and include suggestions of up-to-date reading/listening materials about adoption. Give links to where information can be found on the agency website. Invite the prospective adopter to the next information event.

Check if the caller would like a follow up conversation in several weeks' time (if so, log this on your enquiry management system). Crucially, leave the door open to future conversations and outline next steps.

It can also be helpful to have a template follow up email for people who enquired a while ago but did not proceed further. This can be sent a few months after the information session if you have not heard from the prospective adopter.

Appendix 1 – further reading regarding rapport building and relational conversations

Some communication experts indicate that we should match speed, expressions, and other nonverbal communication to give us the best opportunity of connecting. **Commonality** is finding a basis for communicating in the first place. This is why so many conversations start with “What do you do?” “Where are you from?” and “Do you know?”. What we should be seeking in these situations is some level of commonality that we can build upon. Finally, clues. **Clues** are the verbal and nonverbal indicators that people give in a conversation.

Phone calls are a lot trickier than face-to-face meetings when trying to build a relationship with any individual. Building rapport over the phone is an essential step in relationship building and nurturing. Even if we aren’t meeting our prospective adopters in person, there are still strategies for building rapport over the phone leaving the individual feeling a stronger connection to you by the end of the phone call.

Connecting with individuals is the skill of getting on the same wavelength as the person you are communicating with. Our prospective adopters are just at the start of opening their world and may be nervous in this initial call to your agency, although some of the emotions they are feeling may not come across on the call. It is important that they leave the call feeling confident and encouraged to move onto the next stage of their journey.

Active and reflective listening is a great way to build rapport. Listen carefully as the individual speaks, taking note of any detail they share about their living situation, personal life, and personal priorities. Simple and short responses like “uh-huh” and “right” indicate to them that you’re listening without interrupting them fully. Reflecting what they share with you back to them is a sign of good listening with simple summary statements. This works in building rapport over the phone by showing that you have been listening and paying attention to the individual as they speak.

Using the individual’s name is a good way of building rapport which can encourage the individual to feel more relaxed and not as formal.

Showing empathy when building rapport over the phone is an important part of this journey for prospective adopters, as many do not know what to expect. Phrases like “I understand”, “I can see how that might be exciting, frustrating, worrying, etc.” are great ways to build a relationship and a positive experience with the caller. Be sure to keep the “I” in your phrasing to add more connection between you and the caller.

Put your personality into the call. You may use scripts within your agency which is great for consistency, but don’t be afraid to let your personality shine and be flexible for off-script moments. Maybe the prospective adopter mentions something about their dog. It’s okay to go off-script and ask them what kind of dog they have and to share what kind of dog you have (if you have one). A quick flash of personal touch lets them see you as a human and interested in them.

Be honest about timelines. There may be times when you can’t give all the information requested at that very moment. Rather than skirt over the details just be honest and follow through with any commitments to sharing information at a later time.

End the call with a shared understanding of next steps, taking time to summarise the conversation and lay out possible next steps.