

Information Kit for Families Wanting to Adopt a Child

Adoption Services Victoria



Contents

Welcome	1
A basic overview of what the process of adoption looks like	2
Myths about adoption in Victoria	3
The experience of adoptive families	5
Adopting Sophie.....	5
Adopting Noah	6
Adopting Olivia.....	7
Adopting Aaryan	9
Understanding the approach to adoption in Victoria.....	11
The History of Adoption	11
The Adoption Act	11
Adoption and consent	11
Open adoption	12
Understanding Adoption Services Victoria	13
Adoption Services Victoria team	13
The role of Community Service Organisations	13
Characteristics of families sought	14
Stability and Readiness	14
Culture and Diversity.....	14
Health and disability	15
Emotional sensitivity	15
Understanding the process of applying to be approved to adopt.....	16
Submitting an Expression of Interest	16
Invitation to apply	16
Application and education.....	16
Assessment	17
The Child Profile form	17



Understanding the Register of Approved Persons	18
Approval	18
Working with Adoption Services Victoria	18
Will I be matched to a child?	18
Understanding the process after being matched to a child	19
Guardianship	19
Transition from Foster Care	19
Placement Supervision	19
Application to the County Court	20
After an Adoption Order is made	21
The legal status of adopted children	21
An adopted child's birth certificate	21
The child's name after adoption	21
Identity and the lifelong needs of adopted children	21
Supports for adoptive families	22
The Adoption Information Service	22
Understanding birth families	23
The experience of an adoptive family whose child is now older	25
By the adoptive mother	25
By the birth mother	26
Suggested reading	27
Specific Recommended Texts	27
International Literature on Adoption	27
Accounts of Adopted People	27
Adoptee Led Organisations	27
Further Information about the adoption	28
What next	29
Attachment 1: Requirements relating to approval as fit and proper persons to adopt a child	30
Attachment 2: Safeguards to ensure that birth parents gave their consent in a free and informed manner	31
Signing consent	31
Before signing consent	31
The role of the Child Adoption Victoria team in taking consent	31



Welcome

Thank you for your interest in adoption in Victoria. This information kit has been prepared to assist individuals and families who are considering the possibility of adopting a child

Adoption is a significant and enduring commitment. It offers the opportunity to provide a child with a stable, loving, and permanent family life when all options for them to remain with their family of origin have been thoroughly explored and found not to be viable. At the same time, adoption involves complex emotional, legal, and ethical considerations. It is a process that must always be approached with care, integrity, and above all, a focus on the best interests of the child.

Page | 1

This information kit is about children placed for adoption from Victoria

- If you are wanting to adopt a child that you know such as a stepchild or relative, this information kit is not for you. Please go to the information on our website <https://www.vic.gov.au/adopt-child-you-know>
- If you are wanting to adopt a child from overseas, please refer to: <https://www.vic.gov.au/adopt-child-overseas-program>

This information kit contains a comprehensive overview of the adoption process in Victoria, including legal requirements, the stages of assessment and approval, and the role of Adoption Services Victoria and its affiliated organisations. It also addresses commonly held myths about adoption, clarifies eligibility criteria, and outlines the importance of readiness, stability, and openness in prospective adoptive families.

In addition to procedural guidance, the kit includes information on the history of adoption practices in Victoria, the principles underpinning open adoption, and the lifelong identity and emotional needs of adopted children. Insightful first-hand accounts from adoptive families illustrate the lived experience of adoption, while the sections on birth families, cultural considerations, and support services highlight the importance of respectful and informed practice.

We encourage you to read this information kit carefully and reflect deeply on the information it contains. The decision to pursue adoption should be informed, thoughtful, and grounded in an understanding of both the opportunities and responsibilities it entails.

On behalf of Adoption Services Victoria and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, we commend you for taking the time to explore this path.

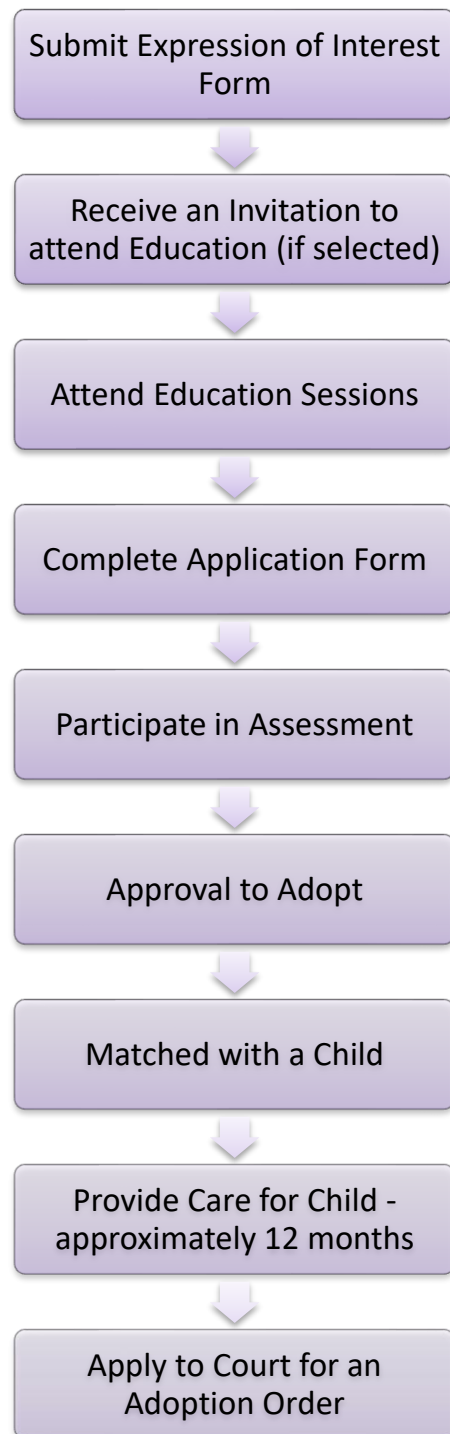
Adoption Services Victoria

Department of Justice and Community Safety



A basic overview of what the process of adoption looks like

Below is a basic flowchart of the steps when adopting a child to give you some context when reading this information kit. More detail about the process of adoption will be provided later in this information kit. The process begins with finishing reading this information kit and then submitting an expression of interest.





Myths about adoption in Victoria

There are many widespread beliefs about adoption that are untrue. Some were true but have changed. Others are true, but of intercountry adoption, not for adopting Victorian children.

Unless otherwise stated, all the data below is from the last six years, when Adoption Services Victoria, transferred to the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Page | 3

You can see more data about children placed for adoption of the past 6 years here - <https://www.vic.gov.au/annual-adoption-data#placements-of-children>

Myth: Single people cannot be approved to adopt

The Adoption Act does not impose any restrictions on Adoption Services Victoria approving single people to adopt. Single people have been approved to adopt and children have been placed with them in the past six years.

The Act does state that the Court can only make an adoption order in favour of a single person “where the Court is satisfied that special circumstances exist in relation to the child which make it desirable so to do” (s11(3)). This means that Adoption Services Victoria can approve a single person to adopt but must consider whether a Court will make an adoption order when matching a child however the Court has never refused to make an order because the applicant was single.

Myth: Same sex couples cannot adopt

Since September 2016 couples in Victoria have been able to adopt regardless of their sex or gender identity.

Myth: It takes about 10 years to adopt a child

The average is just over 2 years. On average it was 16 months from Expression of Interest to being approved to adopt and 12 months from between being approved to adopt and having a Victorian child placed.

This however is an average for families that have had children placed. Many families that express an interest in adoption are never invited to apply to be approved and some families that have been approved are not matched to children. Over the past two years about one in four families who submit an expression of interest are invited to apply to be approved.

Myth: Most children who require adoption have severe disabilities

Sometimes a parent’s decision to place a child for adoption may be influenced by that child having a disability. There is therefore an over-representation of children placed for adoption with medical conditions. The number of children though that have been diagnosed with any medical condition is approximately 1 in 3. Such conditions include delays in gross and fine motor skills, mild developmental delay and being exposed to high levels of alcohol use in utero.

The proportion of children with diagnosed severe medical conditions placed through the intercountry adoption program is much higher.

Myth: Many older children are placed for adoption

More than 85% of Victorian children who are placed for adoption are with their adoptive families before their first birthday. No child has been placed for adoption in Victoria in the past six years who had reached their third birthday.

The proportion of children who are older placed through the intercountry adoption program is much higher.





Myth: Most children who require adoption have suffered trauma

The definition of trauma is not a settled issue (Resick, 2024), however the experiences of most children who require adoption are not well described by the most common definitions of trauma. Children placed for adoption are much more likely than other children to have had suboptimal antenatal care and to have been in the care of multiple families. Such children therefore require sensitive and stable care.

Furthermore, as children grow older, adoption often can impact on children's formation of an integrated identity. This can be exacerbated when the adoption is less open.

The relationship between adoption and trauma is sometimes confused because the term adoption means different things depending on time and place. Before the Adoption Act 1984 many children placed for adoption in Victoria had been removed by authorities from their parent on welfare grounds. This continues to be true in many other countries and in some states of Australia. Such children are more likely to be older and have experienced trauma. Early adoptions where a parent has consented to the child being placed are much less likely to be associated with trauma.

Myth: Children are no longer placed for adoption

There are much fewer children adopted today than in the early 1970s. The reasons for this include:

- There is greater support for parents, including single parents
- Families who previously may have adopted a relative or step-child now seek Family Court Orders rather than adoption order
- Abortion becoming safer and legal restrictions being removed
- Child protection in Victoria no longer use adoption orders

There are usually between 10 and 20 children placed for adoption each year.

While there has been a small reduction in the number of Victorian children being adopted over the past 20 years, the reduction in the number of children being adopted from overseas has been great:

- **Victorian adoption:** Between July 2004 and June 2007 there was an average of 17 adoptions of Victorian children per year in Victoria. Between July 2021 and June 2024 there was an average of 11.7 adoptions of Victorian children per year in Victoria. This is a reduction by **31.18%**
- **Intercountry adoption:** Between July 2004 and June 2007 there was an average of 110.3 intercountry adoptions of children per year in Victoria. Between July 2021 and June 2024 there was an average of 1.3 intercountry adoptions of children per year in Victoria. This is a reduction by **98.82%**.

Victoria continues to maintain an intercountry adoption program, but it is very small.

Myth: There are costly fees when adopting

There are no fees charged by Adoption Services Victoria for any part of adopting a child from Victoria. When a family applies to the County Court to make an adoption order, there is a fee of about \$400.

Reference

Resick, Patricia A. 2024 How the Definition of Trauma Has Changed Over Time, Psychology Today <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/trauma-and-ptsd/202402/how-the-definition-of-trauma-has-changed-over-time?msocid=2d427375e89069d7241a661be9e368bf>



The experience of adoptive families

Adoption involves much more than a legal process—it is a significant life decision that shapes family life in deep and lasting ways. The following stories offer insight into the real experiences of families who have adopted, including what helped, what was unexpected, and what they have learned over time.

These reflections are shared to give you a clearer understanding of the practical and emotional aspects of adoption. They highlight the importance of openness, preparation, and ongoing support in building strong, secure relationships with children through adoption.

Page | 5

Adopting Sophie

Our journey with Sophie began at the onset of the first lockdown. I remember the day vividly: I was packing up at work when my husband called, his voice filled with excitement. “Are you sitting down?” he asked. When he revealed that we had been chosen to be the parents of a little baby girl, I nearly fell off my chair!

As the city locked down, we dove into preparations to bring our beautiful seven-month-old daughter home. For a week, we met Sophie and her incredible foster family every day, sharing laughter, learning and bonding until the moment came when Sophie was finally ours forever. Unfortunately, due to restrictions, we couldn't meet Sophie's birth mum as we had planned. Instead, we sent her a video expressing our gratitude and commitment to caring for Sophie—a really important message that has since guided our relationship.

Over the past four and a half years, Sophie has taught us so much. We feel incredibly lucky to be the parents of such a happy, cheeky, and loving little human. While we cherish the joy of our family, we are always mindful that with our happiness comes the reality of loss for Sophie and her birth family. This awareness has made maintaining contact with her birth family a vital part of our role as parents.

When Sophie first joined us, we adhered to contact guidelines, sending quarterly updates, birthday messages, and photos until we could meet in person. Fostering a bond with her birth family was essential, but Sophie's well-being came first, and we navigated this step-by-step with guidance from our social worker.

Our first face-to-face meeting was emotional and beautiful! We gathered at a park with Sophie's birth mum, her sisters, and our social workers, spending the morning playing and getting to know each other. This meeting solidified our connection with Sophie's birth family and hopefully planted the seeds for Sophie to begin understanding her identity and the love that surrounds her. We left with special memories and photos for Sophie's life book, confident that we were all committed to what's best for her future.

During that meeting, we agreed to send regular updates and meet four times a year where possible, carefully approaching our relationship to protect Sophie from confusion. Since then, our relationship has naturally grown, with regular emails, photos, and video updates, as well as opportunities for in-person visits. We have not always managed to meet 4 times per year but have always checked in and offered that as an option to help ensure that contact is maintained.

Sophie delights in spending time with her sisters and birth mum, and she's even met with her birth grandmother who lives overseas. As she has grown, questions about her life story have arisen. We strive to be transparent, fostering trust in the adults around her and nurturing her sense of identity. Knowing her birth mum and sisters has helped Sophie navigate her questions about her origins, allowing us to discuss her story in a way that feels safe and familiar. By providing this support, we hope to ease her worries and help her feel secure in herself.

The adoption process and being Sophie's parents has truly been the greatest experience of our lives. Daily, she teaches us to be kinder, sillier, and braver, and to love more than we



ever thought possible. We can't imagine our lives any differently; we feel like we won the day we received that call. As Sophie prepares to head off to prep school, we are in awe of her growth and the joy she brings to our family. We love our little unit and the extended family we've formed with Sophie's birth mum and sisters.

Adopting Noah

Page | 6

The phone rang and "No Caller ID" appeared on the screen as my husband and I were driving along the New South Wales coast. We silently looked at each other. Could this be the call we had waited and hoped for? Holding the phone in my hand, I stared at the screen as it rang again. "Answer it, love," my husband said with a hopeful smile. Accepting the call, I lifted the phone to my ear and we both held our breath.

A couple of years earlier, we had signed up to an information night on adoption. As we listened to the stories presented and the adoption process in Victoria, we decided this was something we wanted to pursue. Two years into marriage with no children sitting around our table, we realized that maybe our shared dream of adopting children would come sooner than we thought. Taking the next step, we submitted applications to attend the training sessions.

The training sessions were interesting and informative with an emphasis on connecting with the child's birth family and culture. We loved meeting other couples who were on a similar path to us and were all inspired by the Adoptive parents who came to share their experience. With high hopes, we completed all the paperwork and checks required. While the application process felt quite involved, it did give us time to process the journey as a couple and to emotionally prepare for welcoming a child through adoption.

Part of the discussions we had with the social workers were around what types of needs and situations we would be open to accepting. Lots of scenarios were presented. A child of a different ethnic background to us. A child who has experienced abuse and neglect. A child whose parents have mental illness. A child with a physical disability or a shortened life expectancy. The list went on. Eventually, this list was slid across the table, and we were asked to take it home to tick yes or no next to each.

We had heard about this list from others and how it can be confronting to fill out. It was important to us that we both felt comfortable with our answers and that we both were on the same page.

We have not had biological children, but we can only imagine that if we did, we would love our child however they came to us. Even if they shared our genes, we would not be able to predict their future. There would be no guarantees of what life would be like. We both had experience with children from vulnerable backgrounds and children with disabilities, and knew that caring for these children in rewarding, despite challenges. Committed to our dream of having a family, filling in the form was simple. We would welcome any child who needed parents.

Once we were approved, it was surreal to think that from that moment on we could receive a call to say there was a child for us. We knew to expect the call to come from a "No Caller ID".

A few months after our panel meeting, we took a road trip along the east coast of Australia. Driving somewhere between Byron Bay and Evans Head we heard the phone ring. I gave my husband an enormous smile as I pressed the phone onto the loudspeaker. It was the social worker. "We have a boy available for adoption. He is 7 months old, of European descent and has a rare genetic syndrome." She would be emailing us some information on the syndrome and would give us the weekend to think about it. We were ecstatic. We were going to be parents!

Ding! The email arrived from the social worker which had attached to it the information sheet



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about the genetic syndrome. We clicked into it, but then after reading a line or two we stopped. "Let's wait to read this. Let's just spend tonight enjoying the fact that we have a son," My husband said. I agreed. We had waited so long to celebrate this moment. Later that night we called our parents and siblings to share the wonderful news that they were going to be Grandparents, Uncles and Aunties. Just like the best of baby announcements, our family members erupted with tears of joy.

After breakfast the next morning, we opened up the attached information. Neither of us had ever heard of the syndrome. While we had prepared ourselves and our families that our child could have special needs, it still came with a shock to see the words "rare genetic syndrome."

The booklet was 60 pages long and covered medical and developmental differences. There was a history of how the syndrome was discovered. Statistics. Growth charts. On its own, the information was overwhelming and took a few days to fully read through. We were confronted with fear of what the future might hold with this child. Yet we both agreed that we still wanted to move forward despite knowing the journey may not be easy.

A few days later we called the social worker back to say Yes. After a few more meetings with the social workers to discuss the needs of this little boy, we were handed a photo of our future son. He was absolutely gorgeous. He had beautiful big eyes and thick black hair. We were already proud parents of the boy in the photo.

Early one sunny morning, we arrived at the foster carer's home and held our breath as the front door opened. There he was. The most adorable boy who was now our son. He looked up at us with wide eyes and, as he was placed in my arms, he smiled. This was the moment we had dreamed about, and it was more beautiful than we could have even imagined. We were in baby bliss the next few days as we did our first bottle feed, first nappy change, first bath, and first walk in the pram. By the end of the week, we buckled him into the car and drove him home.

We knew to expect our son to be slower to learn to roll, crawl or take his first steps. But what we couldn't anticipate was how excited we would be when he did eventually meet those milestones. I literally shrieked with joy the first time he intentionally clapped. We watched in awe the first time he stood balancing without holding on to anything. When we hear our boy chatting away with different sounds and syllables, we go quiet and smile proudly at each other.

Our son has been home with us now for over two years. He has a smile that lights up the room and the most adorable laugh. He loves music, books and riding his tricycle outside. He races around with his walker and has recently started to take independent steps. He finds everything Dad does funny and will always be soothed with a song from Mum. He is extremely social and wants to spend time with other people more than anything. He likes trips to the playground and swimming pool. He has a gentle, kind and slightly cheeky personality that we are getting to know more each day. This is the boy we love.

Parenting our son has been a gift to us. Our lives have been enriched and our hearts expanded. We have seen first-hand how unconditional love allows a child to overcome challenges and thrive. We feel privileged to get to be the ones to journey with him through life, knowing that his future is bright and will not be limited by the label of a diagnosis. We are so glad that we said Yes.

Adopting Olivia

I still get chills thinking about the day we received a life-changing phone call from our case worker to say that we'd been chosen as parents for a baby girl named Olivia who was 8 months old. It was winter 2022 and we had been approved to adopt 10 months earlier. The 10-month wait had been hard but all of those months of waiting, all that paperwork, and all those years of IVF, evaporated in a moment when we received that phone call.





We were sent Olivia's file where we learned of her cultural background, her health and her birth family. Throughout the adoption training and approval process we learned how critical birth family contact is for identity formation for adopted children. We were 100% on board and could see the benefits of our child having a clear understanding of their story and where they came from, particularly during the tricky teenage years. We had romantic ideas of creating a big, blended family for our child, with four parents and four sets of grandparents, more people to love on this child! So, it was quite a shock to read in the report that her birth family didn't want any physical contact, we didn't even have a photo of them. We knew enough, even at that stage, to know that we would need to work hard to develop other ways of connecting Olivia to her birth story and her culture as she grew up.

The transition began a few days after that phone call, and we spent 10 days getting to know Olivia in her foster carer's house. The first day we met her was surreal, she was wary of us, we were strangers after all, and the transition plan stipulated that we shouldn't hold her on the first day so that she didn't feel overwhelmed. So, we spent the time interacting with her from the safety of her carers lap, while they explained her daily routine, her personality and her development so far. Each day we would arrive and see the flicker of recognition in her eyes, by day four she beamed at us as we walked in and my heart exploded. By the last few days of transition, we were at the carers house from when she woke up until she went to sleep at night, doing all her care activities, it gave us the confidence to know what to do when we brought her home.

Seeing her attachment grow over the next 12 months was incredible. We had some medical issues that we had to get on top of very early into placement as she wasn't meeting all her milestones. Medical appointments were traumatic for her (and us!) as she hadn't formed a strong enough attachment to us to feel safe in new places with new people yet. She would scream and cry if anyone unfamiliar tried to touch her. We practiced attachment-focused parenting, making sure that she felt secure and loved. We kept her close to us, learned her signs of discomfort before she got too distressed, and taught her that we were her safe people through predictable and reliable attention and love. One day, around 9 or 10 months into her being with us, I sat in the GP's office with a happy, content child on my lap while the doctor examined her, I almost cried with joy seeing how far she'd come!

When Olivia was around 12 months old our paediatrician diagnosed her with a developmental delay, particularly with her gross motor skills because she was late to crawl and walk. As any parent would, we accessed allied health services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, who provided assistance to begin addressing her delays.

When she was almost 2 years old the Paediatrician recommended we have a blood test to check if Olivia had any genetic reasons for her developmental delay. The blood test came back showing she has a genetic condition which affects her legs and her balance. The condition means that she appears clumsy and has trouble running and walking up and down stairs, she moves slower than her peers and, although she tries her best to keep up, she tires more easily as keeping up with them is more effort for her. The treatment includes physiotherapy, and occupational therapy and when she is older most likely orthotics and ankle supports. These treatments are all covered by NDIS.

Our Paediatrician helped us to access NDIS and we're linked in with an excellent kids physio and podiatrist, as well as annual check-ups at the RCH. Her symptoms are considered mild currently but are expected to get worse over time, we hope that the early intervention may lessen the effects of the condition later. The diagnosis was a lot to process at first but we are committed to making sure she receives all the support she needs from us, as well as from professional services, so she is able to enjoy her life to the fullest, now and in the future.

Olivia is about to turn 3 and she is doing brilliantly, she's an energetic toddler with a loving and caring nature. She is prone to more trips and falls than her peers but it's incredible to





see that it's not holding her back from trying new things and playing with her friends. She zooms around on her balance bike and loves the swings and slides at the park. She knows her limits and when to ask for help from us or from the educators at daycare.

We have enjoyed numerous great adventures since becoming a family of three. We have gone camping, traveling on a plane, to the snow, and many trips to the beach. She has adored every adventure. Twice a year we drive interstate to stay on our family's farm. Olivia has such a great time on the farm with her grandparents, aunt, uncle and cousins; she loves them so much and they are totally besotted with her. We pick oranges and feed them to the cows and their calves and go on bush walks around the farm.

Olivia's birthday is a special time for us, but we also celebrate her Family Day, the anniversary of the day we brought her home. We've read and heard from adult adoptees that birthdays can bring up complicated feelings for adopted kids, so we want her to be able to choose if she feels like celebrating her birthday or not as she gets older and deals with the complexity of her adoption. But Family Day is a day full of happiness and joy because it celebrates the day we became a family.

Our daughter is an absolute delight, and we love her beyond words. She is loving and kind and also cheeky with a real twinkle in her eye. We might have our work cut out for us as she grows, but we wouldn't want it any other way! We think she's just perfect and she is totally adored. She lights up a room with her smile and we could not imagine our lives without her.

Adopting Aaryan

Coming from an Indian heritage, we were initially guided by the understanding that adoption meant keeping a child's beginnings private. The common perspective we grew up with in India was that closed adoption, where the child doesn't know their birth family, was in the child's best interest. This approach seldom considered the emotions of the birth family, instead focusing on creating a new, self-contained family unit. Yet, despite how widespread this view was, it never felt entirely right to us in our hearts. It was just what we'd been told.

When we began our journey with open adoption in Australia, however, everything changed. The concept of maintaining a connection to the birth family for the child's sense of identity and emotional well-being was so different from what we had known but immediately resonated with us. We quickly realised that honouring every part of a child's story, including their origins and birth family, could help create a strong, secure foundation for them. This understanding shaped our journey forward and deepened our commitment to open adoption.

We soon learned that open adoption is not only about the child knowing their birth family—it's about acknowledging everyone's experience and navigating the grief and loss that are often part of adoption. During our education sessions with Adoption Services Victoria, we came to understand the profound grief felt by birth families, which is so often overlooked. In India, we had only ever considered the emotions of the adoptive parents and the child, but here, we saw the full picture and the importance of honouring everyone involved. Keeping a connection with our child's birth family became essential to us. This connection would allow our child to know where they come from, maintain cultural roots, and hold onto the name given to them—a link to their identity that can be grounding and empowering.

This shift in perspective wasn't something we achieved alone; it took many conversations with our families back in India, who had grown up with a different understanding of adoption. We shared what we had learned, answering their questions and showing them the beauty of an open approach. Our families saw our commitment, and in time, their understanding grew as well.

Our bottom line was simple: our child's needs and well-being would come first. By embracing open adoption, we are honouring every part of our child's story and giving them a foundation rooted in love, respect, and openness.



I still remember the day we received the placement call for our son. The overwhelming disbelief and gratitude brought tears to our eyes, and we couldn't stop crying. We couldn't believe we were lucky enough to be on that call so early in our journey. As we heard all about him, we fell in love even before seeing his photo. Then we saw that little face, and instantly, it became our favourite face in the world.

Meeting his foster parent was just as unforgettable. She welcomed us with open arms and taught us everything we needed to know, from nappy changes to understanding his unique needs. Her generosity and love for him were evident, and even now, she's been a constant presence, offering advice and support that only someone who cared deeply for him could provide. We want our son to grow up knowing that he was loved long before he met us, by so many people who cherished and kept him safe. Because of this, we stay in close contact with his foster parent, sending her photos and visiting together to keep that connection strong.

Page | 10

There are countless moments that fill our hearts, but the day he called me "Mumma" as I walked into his room will always be my favourite. When he first came to us, his eyes were unfamiliar, his gaze unsure, but slowly, those eyes lit up with love and trust. Watching him open his heart to us has been the most beautiful journey we could have imagined. This little guy has changed our lives in ways we never expected, filling our hearts and home with more love than we knew was possible.

Before our son came home, we were honoured to meet his birth mother. It was a moment filled with unspoken emotions—a quiet understanding that connected us all. In her eyes, we saw relief and hope, knowing her son would grow up surrounded by the love and culture she wanted for him. We reassured her that we were open to contact, that we would follow her lead in whatever way felt right to her, whenever she was ready.

We want her to be a part of his life, to hold a place that no one else can. As she left the first contact, her parting words to us were, "Take care of my son." At that moment, we felt the depth of her grief, and we made a promise in our hearts to love and care for him more than anything in the world. Our hope is for her to remain a part of our family, joining us in celebrations and festivals, like Diwali, when we gather in our home.

We want our son to grow up knowing the incredible love his birth mother has for him and to feel that love always. We want him to see that our family setup includes everyone who cares for him—his "tummy mummy" and all of us. By embracing this openness, we hope he'll never have to wonder about where he comes from or how deeply he is cherished.

For anyone considering adoption, especially families from Indian backgrounds where adoption may be viewed differently, we want to encourage you to embark on this journey with an open heart and mind. Adoption is not only about bringing a child into your family; it's about welcoming their whole story, honouring the people and places they come from, and embracing a love that may look different than expected.

Our experience has taught us that openness to birth family contact and connection doesn't diminish our role as parents. Instead, it enriches our family in ways we never imagined, creating a space filled with love from everyone who has been a part of our child's journey and helping him grow up with a strong sense of identity and belonging.

The most rewarding part has been watching our son blossom in a world where he is deeply loved, cherished, and celebrated for every part of who he is. While some parts of the process may feel unfamiliar, approach each moment with a willingness to learn and grow, and you'll find that the challenges are more than worth it.

Adoption has expanded our hearts and taught us that family is built on love, understanding, and a shared commitment to give our child the best possible foundation. We hope you, too, will find that adopting with openness and love is one of the most beautiful experiences you'll ever have.



Understanding the approach to adoption in Victoria

The History of Adoption

The first adoption order was made in Victoria in 1929.

People affected by adoption have had a range of experiences. The worst experiences of adoption have been devastating for the people involved. This includes instances where parents were forced or tricked into consenting to an adoption, the Stolen Generations and where adopted children were maltreated. You can read more about the history of adoption later in this kit.

In recent years, both the Commonwealth and Victorian governments have issued official apologies for their involvement in these practices, recognising the profound harm and trauma inflicted upon families and individuals.

These apologies serve as a powerful acknowledgement of the past, and a commitment to support those affected and address the ongoing effects of forced adoption practices.

Through a consideration of these apologies, it is possible to gain insight into the ways in which historical injustices can be acknowledged and addressed, and to contemplate the importance of ensuring that such events are never repeated.

Learnings from past adoption practices informed the development and subsequent changes to the Adoption Act 1984. They have also led to emphasis on consent and open adoption.

You can read more about the history of adoption in Victoria at <https://www.vic.gov.au/past-adoption-practices>.

The Adoption Act

You do not need to have read the Adoption Act 1984 to apply to be approved to adopt a child. Many of the practices of Adoption Services Victoria however are required by the Act including the requirements relating to approval as fit and proper persons to adopt a child. If you want to read about this further, there is more information about this at the end of this information kit

Adoption and consent

In the past in Victoria and in many places outside of Victoria, the term adoption is used for a permanent order used for children who have been removed from parents by the state's child protection system. This is no longer the case in Victoria. **Here adoption is exclusively used when a parent has chosen adoption for their child.** The permanent order used by child protection is called a permanent care order.

When parents are considering adoption for their child, they go through a formal counselling process with a trained and approved Adoption Counsellor. They are given information about a variety of options so they can make an informed decision about their plans for their child. As part of this counselling, birth parents share information about themselves which can be shared with the adoptive family and the child as they grow, should they be adopted. As the Adoption Act allows for birth parents to be involved in the selection of an adoptive family, the type of adoptive family they wish their child to be placed with is discussed during counselling.

If a birth parent is considering adoption for their child, the child may be placed in a voluntary foster care arrangement while the parent considers their decision.

There are a number of safeguards in the Adoption Act to ensure that birth parents are giving their consent in a free and informed manner.

If birth parents decide on adoption for the child, they give consent to the adoption through a formal process, usually at the County Court of Victoria. When birth parents consent to the adoption of their child, they are giving up all their legal rights and responsibilities as a parent.

After the consent is given, there is a 28-day period where the parent can change their mind and





revoke their consent. They can also ask to extend this period up to 14 days if they feel they need more time. It is only after this period that the consent is considered final. At this stage the natural parent is no longer the child's legal guardian, and an adoptive family can be sought.

Open adoption

Under the Adoption Act there is opportunity for ongoing contact between the child and their family of origin. This can have many benefits, for the child and for both sets of parents. The contact helps the child with their identity development. It also reassures the family of the child's development within the adoptive family, which can provide comfort and assist them with their grief. Many adults who were adopted under a closed adoption system say that the hardest part of being adopted was not knowing anything about their origins. Contact in adoption allows a child to have more information about their family of origin and as they get older, an opportunity for their questions to be answered.

Page | 12

Contact is not only with the child's birth parents. It can be with other members of the child's family, nominated by the parents in their wishes. Sometimes a birth parent might find it difficult to attend contact meetings, but if someone else in their family can come, such as the child's grandparent or aunt, this can be very beneficial for the child. They can still gain a level of understanding of their birth family and origins, as well as the valuable knowledge that their birth family are interested in them and care about them.

Sometimes the child might have siblings, and it is important that they have the opportunity via regular contact and information exchange to get to know their siblings if possible. Siblings may not always live with the birth parent.

After giving consent, birth parents have an opportunity to express their wishes in writing about the race, religion and ethnic background of the adoptive parents. These wishes must be carefully considered by Adoption Services Victoria, who must try and find a suitable family for the child. Birth parents also have an opportunity to express their wishes in writing about:

- whether they or a relative would like contact with the child after adoption, and if so, how often.
- whether they would like information about the child to be provided after the adoption, and if so, how often.
- whether they would like the conditions for contact and information exchange included in the adoption order.

You can read more about the history of past adoption practices and closed adoption here:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/past-adoption-practices>



Understanding Adoption Services Victoria

Adoption Services Victoria is a program of the Department of Justice and Community Safety that is responsible for all services provided under the *Adoption Act 1984*. This includes services to people affected by past adoption as well support to parents considering placing their child for adoption. You can read more about the various services provided by Adoption Services Victoria at <https://www.vic.gov.au/adoption>.

Adoption Services Victoria team

The Adoption Services Victoria team is responsible for all work involving people who are seeking to adopt a child. This includes both work done by the Adoption Services Victoria team directly and work done by other organisations. This includes everything from considering expressions of interest in adopting to following an application being made to Court for an adoption order, providing the Court with a report. Most of your contact with Adoption Services Victoria will be with the Child Adoption Victoria team.

The role of Community Service Organisations

Adoption arrangements for children in Victoria can only be made by Adoption Services Victoria, Department of Justice and Community Safety. It is illegal to make a private arrangement to place or care for a child with a view to adoption.

Historically most adoptions were arranged by approved adoption agencies. The approval of the last adoption agencies expired in October 2021.

Some adoption related services are provided by Community Service Organisations overseen by Adoption Services Victoria. This includes providing counselling to parents considering adoption for their child. Community Service Organisations are also engaged to

- undertake assessments of families seeking to be approved to adopt
- supervise children placed for adoption prior to an adoption order being made

The Community Service Organisations currently providing these services are:

- Uniting Vic Tas
- Anglicare Victoria



Characteristics of families sought

Generally, Adoption Services Victoria seeks families who are:

- **Open Minded & Insightful:** You will need to have the ability to accept different views and ways of thinking; including the differing perspectives of birth parents and adoptees; be able to seek out and try new approaches; be willing to try to make sense of how an adopted child's behaviour or thinking is affected by their background, history, experiences and genetics; want to be guided by the unique needs of a child; seek and accept help from others including professionals.
- **Physically / Psychologically Healthy & Resilient:** It is tough being a parent to a child with additional needs. You need to be around for the long haul, not just until they are 18 years old. You cannot help your child if you are not psychologically robust. If you have unexplored grief associated with infertility, you may not be able to assist an adopted child with their grief.
- **Compassionate, Sympathetic & Understanding:** Accept that adoption in and of itself brings with it lifelong and complex identity issues for an adopted child. Be able to walk in the shoes of the birth family and the adopted child. Be capable and committed to contact and information exchange with a child's birth family. If this is not possible, supporting a child to later search for birth family. Believe in the long-term benefits of open adoption and support your child through the highs and lows. Embrace the culture and country of origin of your child, support them in developing their cultural identity.
- **Able to Be Present:** Be there. Be able to dedicate the time required for your child to be safe, secure and assured of your permanency in their life. Assess the impact of this on any future plans you may have about other children entering your family.
- **Accepting:** Be ready to commit to an intrusive and challenging process with no guarantee of a child placement. There are things outside of your control. You must be willing to cope with uncertainty and show how you have managed life stressors in the past.

Stability and Readiness

While the typical experience of a family that is selected for a child is that they expressed an interest in adopting just over 2 years earlier, Adoption Services Victoria require that any family wanting to be assessed to be approved to adopt must be ready to adopt.

There are many reasons why a person may consider adoption but not yet be ready to adopt. Some examples are:

- Some people consider adoption while or just after completing fertility treatments. While the right time to consider adoption after completing fertility treatments can vary, it is important when applying to be approved to adopt, that adoption is your preference
- The Adoption Act 1984 requires that a couple who are adopting be in the relationship for at least 2 years. This reflects a requirement that a couple adopting should be in a stable long-term relationship.
- Families that are also foster carers are highly valued as potential adoptive parents, often bringing experience that is complimentary when adopting. Commitments to foster care, especially to children who have been placed for a long time, can sometimes impact on a family's readiness to adopt.

Culture and Diversity

When a child is placed for adoption, Adoption Services Victoria needs to match that child to a family based upon:

- What is known about the child and





- Wishes expressed by the child's birth parent/s

In order to select a family that is the best fit for that child, Adoption Services Victoria needs a range of approved families. If all approved families had the same characteristics, there would not be a basis on which the best fit could be found.

One of Adoption Services Victoria's considerations when asking a family to apply is whether that family adds to the diversity of the overall list of approved families. Most children placed for adoption are born to parents that were born in Australia, however about one in three children placed for adoption are of parents born overseas.

Page | 15

You can read more about children placed for adoption of the past 6 years here -

<https://www.vic.gov.au/annual-adoption-data#placements-of-children>

Health and disability

Some children placed for adoption have a disability or medical condition. Children that have been adopted are at greater risk of developing later health conditions for two reasons. First the family history of an adopted child is not often as well-known as would be the case for children born to parents. Second sometimes the antenatal care of adopted children has been suboptimal.

For this reason, Adoption Services Victoria seeks families who are able to provide for a child with a disability or health condition. Having a child with a disability or chronic illness will normally bring changes for the whole family. Adoption Services Victoria seeks families who have the capacity to cope with such changes if necessary.

Emotional sensitivity

Research has identified many family and parent-related factors that impact adopted children's psychological adjustment, emotional well-being, and identity, often contributing to whether their adoption experience is an affirming and supportive one or a disruptive, destabilising and even traumatic one. For example, parents who display greater openness in adoption communication, who are sensitive in the way they share adoption information, and who are attentive to their children's points of view about adoption, generally foster healthier family dynamics and more positive adjustment in their children. This is especially true when they support a free exchange of ideas about adoption among family members and provide guidance to children in interpreting family of origin and adoption information, and support search interests. Adoptive parenting cognitions (their way of thinking as well as specific beliefs) have also been shown to play a key role in children's emotional well-being.

Parents who readily acknowledge the inherent differences in raising adopted children compared to non-adopted children usually are better prepared to support their children's curiosity about their origins and share adoption information in an open and empathic manner, which in turn is linked to more positive adjustment in adolescence. Adjustment in adolescence for many adopted people can be complex as they develop a coherent sense of identity though includes self-narratives spanning both their adoptive family and biological family.

In short, children's lived experiences of being adopted are continuously being influenced by the dynamic interplay within and between the various contexts that are part of their everyday lives. When the messages they receive are respectful, affirmative, and supportive, healthy internalization and integration of their adoptive identity usually occurs. On the other hand, when their adoption experiences and feelings are ignored or disrespected, and when there is a lack of support by key people in their lives for exploring the meaning of being adopted, it can lead to feelings of marginalisation, diminishment, fragmentation of self, and emotional destabilization.



Understanding the process of applying to be approved to adopt

Submitting an Expression of Interest

This Expression of Interest covers a range of questions aimed at identifying your:

- interest
- capacity
- knowledge
- understanding of the needs of children who may require adoption.

Page | 16

This is also used by families wanting to adopt from through overseas partner programs for intercountry adoption.

To register:

- finish reading this information kit
- complete an expression of interest
- send it to adoptionvic@justice.vic.gov.au

Once we receive the completed document, we will send you an electronic receipt.

A social worker is then allocated to review and decide on the eligibility and suitability of the family. If you meet the basic eligibility and suitability requirements, you will be placed on the department's expression of interest pool for people who have submitted an expression of interest. The department will then invite people to undertake the formal application process from this pool on an as needs basis.

Invitation to apply

Adoption Services Victoria works to make sure a range of approved people able to meet the needs of the children who require adoption are available.

We will invite people to apply to be assessed as fit and proper persons to adopt a child. The frequency of this will depend on how many families have been approved and how many children we are anticipating being placed for adoption.

Invitations will only be extended to people who have submitted an expression of interest and registered their interest within 2 years

Application and education

Before being assessed as suitable to adopt, you will need to attend education and complete a detailed application. Education is usually held over three days.

Education sessions will help you understand the adoption process and prepare you for the challenges of bringing an adopted child into your family.

Education sessions include:

- Understanding issues regularly associated with adoption including loss, rejection, guilt, shame, grief, and loss of control as well as difficulties with identity and intimacy.
- Parenting styles that work best with adopted children, understanding the impact of disrupted care
- What happens after an adoption – information sharing and contact; having brave conversations; supporting identity formation
- An explanation of the assessment and adoption process



- hearing lived experiences from a birth parent, adult adoptees and adoptive parents

The application includes but is not limited to:

- police checks
- medical checks
- working-with-children checks
- financial statements
- personal references
- a life story to provide background information.

Assessment

After you have attended education and we have received your application, a social worker will meet with you to prepare an assessment report.

We assess your application against requirements outlined in the *Adoption Act 1984* and *Adoption Regulations 2019* and take into consideration needs of children requiring adoption.

Assessment requirements will include home visits to speak with:

- you
- your children
- other adult household members
- your nominated referees

You can read more about the requirements of the *Adoption Act 1984* and *Adoption Regulations 2019* at the end of this document.

The Child Profile form

During the assessment, families will be asked about whether there are any characteristics of a child that would lead them to being unwilling or uncomfortable in having that child matched to them. Many families are open to a diversity of children but for some families there may be characteristics that they do not believe they can support. These may include:

- children conceived from rape or incest
- children with particular disabilities or medical conditions
- children with family histories of illnesses, including mental illness
- children with natural parents who have histories of substance use
- children from particular ethnic or religious backgrounds

Adoption Services Victoria always try to find the family that is the best match for each child. Adoption Services Victoria will always strive to ensure the best match for a child and family, however it isn't possible to know and account for every detail of their respective backgrounds.

It is common that families being assessed or who have been approved will reconsider what children they can provide for. Many families as they develop a better understanding of children requiring adoption will become more open to a greater diversity of children.



Understanding the Register of Approved Persons

Approval

Approval is a formal process under the *Adoption Act 1984* (the Act). The Act requires that approved people are placed on a register and that this register is used to match families with children requiring adoption.

Page | 18

To be placed on the register, a person must be approved by Adoption Services Victoria. Sometimes this decision is informed by a report from another organisation or the persons history of being approved as a permanent carer, foster carer or in another state. The decision however is always made by Adoption Services Victoria.

Working with Adoption Services Victoria

It is rare that a family is matched with a child very soon after they are approved to adopt. Usually, approved families continue to work with Adoption Services Victoria after approval. They prepare for the challenges of bringing an adopted child into their family. Many families further develop the capacity to provide for a variety of children during this time.

Approved families can use this time to learn about children's developmental challenges and build therapeutic parenting experience. It is also important for families to prepare for birth family connections, which may involve reflecting on emotional readiness, planning how contact can fit into family routines, and considering how to support a child's cultural and religious identity when it differs from their own. This is also a chance to connect with the adoption community and engage with experienced adoptive parents. Families are further encouraged to consider their lifestyle and commitments, identifying adjustments needed to create a stable, flexible, and nurturing home environment.

Will I be matched to a child?

Even if a family is approved to adopt, there is no guarantee that they will be matched to a child.

Generally, there are 2 factors that impact on the likelihood of an approved family being matched to a child:

1. **The restrictiveness of the child profile form:** The more open families are to a diversity of children, the more likely a child is to be matched to them.
2. **The quality of the assessment:** The greater the confidence Adoption Services Victoria has in a family, the more likely a child will be matched.

Being approved is therefore not the only consideration. Families that have been open during and after the assessment process and have taken steps to improve their knowledge of adoption, are more likely to be matched to a child.



Understanding the process after being matched to a child

Guardianship

As soon as consent for adoption is final, Adoption Services Victoria becomes the sole guardian of that child until the Court makes a final adoption order.

Usually, the first decision Adoption Services Victoria makes as guardian is to select a family from the Register of Approved Persons. This is done by:

Page | 19

- considering information about the child
- considering any wishes expressed by a birth parent, including in some cases, consulting with the birth parent using family profiles. These are de-identified profiles of families from the Register of Approved Persons.

Transition from Foster Care

Infants develop internal working models (mental representations) of relationships, particularly with their caregivers, which influence their expectations about trust and relationships throughout life. A secure attachment, characterised by responsive and sensitive caregiving, leads to a positive internal working model where the infant trusts others and feels worthy. Conversely, inconsistent or negative caregiving can result in a negative internal working model, making it harder for the child to trust others.

Most children are with the same caregiver from birth. Adopted children, even those adopted from an early age, have experienced changes in caregiver, often having been with their birth parent and at least one foster family. Great care is therefore taken when transitioning the child to their adoptive family.

During this time the proposed adoptive parents will also work with Adoption Services Victoria to develop the adoption plan. The adoption plan (also called case plan), means a written document negotiated between the child's natural parents, adoptive parents, and Adoption Services Victoria setting out—

- arrangements for contact with the child by the child's natural parents, grandparents, siblings and other persons of significance to the child, including the purpose, frequency and location of the access; and
- supporting your child's ethnic and racial identity: This means more than occasional cultural activities or books. You are expected to actively help your child feel proud of and familiar with their culture through language, traditions, role models, and everyday experiences, and to support them to gradually understand and navigate experiences of difference or racism as they grow.
- engaging with your child's cultural community: You are expected to take steps to build meaningful connections with your child's cultural community, including participating in cultural events and activities together, forming genuine relationships, and demonstrating through your own actions that your child's culture is valued and part of family life.
- the type of information about the child that is to be exchanged and the frequency of that exchange.

Even after transition is completed, many children will continue to need extra sensitivity and support to establish a trusting secure relationship. For this reason, prospective adoptive parents need to be prepared to not use childcare for a period of time until the child is ready for this.

Placement Supervision

The purpose of placement supervision is to:



- monitor arrangements between a birth parent of the child and the proposed adoptive parents for contact with the child or sharing information about the child
- monitor plans that have been established to promote a healthy and positive cultural, ethnic and racial identity
- support the proposed adoptive parents as required
- exercise guardianship decisions and responsibilities

Typically, placement supervision will continue for about 12 months. When Adoption Services Victoria can confidently recommend an adoption order be made, they will inform the prospective adoptive parents who then apply to the Court.

Application to the County Court

When the adopting parents apply to the County Court to grant an adoption order, the Court will request Adoption Services Victoria to investigate

- the circumstances of a child in respect of whom an application for an adoption order is made and
- the applicants and
- all other matters relevant to the proposed adoption

as fully as possible and provide a written report.

The report includes details of:

- background of the child before placement, including details of circumstances of how consent was provided by the birth parent/s
- the approval of adopting parents and whether their affidavit is true and complete
- whether the wishes of the parent were considered when placing the child
- the adoption plan including arrangements between a birth parent of the child and the proposed adoptive parents for contact to the child or the giving of information about the child
- whether the welfare and interests of the child will be promoted by the adoption and whether it is desirable for the welfare of the child that the Court should be asked (i) to make an interim order; or (ii) in making an adoption order, to impose any particular terms or conditions or to require the adoptive parents to make any particular provision for the child.

Because adopting parents apply to the County Court after Adoption Services Victoria confirm that they will be supporting the making of a final adoption order, the Court normally makes a final order.



After an Adoption Order is made

The legal status of adopted children

The *Adoption Act 1984* states:

Section 53 - General effect of adoption orders

(1) Subject to this Act and to the provisions of any other Act that expressly distinguishes in any way between adopted children and children other than adopted children, upon the making of an adoption order—

(a) the adopted child shall be treated in law as a child of the adoptive parent or adoptive parents, and the adoptive parent or adoptive parents shall be treated in law as the parent or parents of the child, as if the child had been born—

(i) to the adoptive parent; or

(ii) to the adoptive parents

Once the adoption order is made the adoptive parents are the sole legal parents.

An adopted child's birth certificate

Once the adoption order is made a new birth certificate is issued. The post adoption birth certificate is the legal birth certificate. It is applied for in the same way as a birth certificate for a person who was not adopted. See <https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/get-birth-certificate>.

The child's name after adoption

Generally, the surname of the adopted child on the new birth certificate will be the surname of the adoptive parents. Some adoptive parents will also consider changing the child's first name. This is discouraged as many adult adopted people have found that this practice further compounds identity issues experienced by adopted people.

Identity and the lifelong needs of adopted children

Adolescence is a formative yet often challenging stage of life, when young people begin to question who they are, what they value, and where they belong. While this period offers important opportunities for growth, it is also marked by uncertainty, emotional vulnerability, and internal conflict. Many adolescents struggle to form a stable sense of identity in the face of social pressures, changing relationships, and complex personal experiences.

For adopted adolescents, these challenges can be even more pronounced. In addition to the universal tasks of identity formation, they may grapple with questions about their origins, reasons for adoption, and feelings of loss, rejection, or divided loyalty. The absence of genetic or cultural continuity can intensify confusion about personal identity and belonging. Navigating adoptive and birth family narratives—often with limited or incomplete information—adds further complexity. Supporting adopted young people through this critical period requires sensitivity, openness, and access to information that validates their unique experiences and helps them construct a coherent and resilient sense of self.

Research highlights that adopted individuals often wrestle with questions of origin, loss, and identity (Verrier 1993; Eldridge 1999). When adoptive parents acknowledge and respect the complex emotions birth parents may experience—including grief, regret, or hope—they create a more emotionally secure environment for the child. This approach also enables more honest, empathetic conversations within the adoptive family, which research shows supports long-term identity formation and psychological wellbeing (McAdams 1993; Roszia and Maxon 2019). Failing to recognise the birth parent perspective may unintentionally invalidate a child's experience and inhibit open communication. A trauma-informed, empathetic approach fosters healthier adoptive relationships and helps children integrate all aspects of their story.



Supports for adoptive families

Some adoptive parents find it useful to link with other adoptive families. In 2003 a group of adoptive families began the Post Placement Support Service (PPSS) to support each other. In 2013 PPSS changed its name to Permanent Care and Adoptive Families. [Permanent Care Adoptive Families](#) (PCAF) continues to support permanent care, kinship care and adoptive families to help their children to thrive through the delivery of individual support and peer support services. PCAF also operates a Helpline and offers flexible funding.

The Adoption Information Service

While most applications to the Adoption Information Service are about adoptions that occurred decades ago, an adoptive parent of a child may also apply to the Adoption Information Service. They may do so for a variety of reasons including:

- to receive a copy of documents on the record such as the Court Order
- to place information on the file that may be accessed at a later time by a birth parent
- to seek to make contact with a birth parent

You can find out more about the Adoption Information Service at <https://www.vic.gov.au/past-adoption>.

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Roszia, Sharon Kaplan, and Allison Davis Maxon. 2019. Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency: A Comprehensive Guide to Promoting Understanding and Healing in Adoption, Foster Care, Kinship Families and Third-Party Reproduction. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Verrier, Nancy Newton. 1993. The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child. Lafayette, CA: Gateway Press.



Understanding birth families

Throughout this document the term birth parent has been used. Terms used for parents in the context of adoption can be contentious (Coleman & Garratt, 2016; Adoptive Families, 2024). Usually, Adoption Services Victoria uses the term parent or natural parent when working with someone considering placing their child for adoption or someone returning years later for adoption information.

Page | 23

The experience of birth parents is different today than it was forty years ago or is in some countries outside of Australia. You can read about the approach taken in Victoria when a parent considers adoption for their child here: <https://www.vic.gov.au/consider-adoption-my-child>.

Developing a good understanding of the birth parent's perspective is essential for adoptive parents for both ethical and practical reasons. This awareness fosters empathy, strengthens adoptive family relationships, and supports the long-term wellbeing of the adopted child.

It Supports the Adopted Child's Identity and Emotional Health

Adopted children often have questions about their origins, including why they were placed for adoption. Understanding the birth parent's perspective allows adoptive parents to provide nuanced, compassionate, and truthful answers that validate the child's experience. It helps the child:

- Make sense of their life story,
- Feel connected rather than rejected,
- Navigate complex emotions like grief, loyalty conflict, or curiosity.

When adoptive parents dismiss or misunderstand the birth parents, children may internalize shame or confusion about their own identities.

It Encourages Empathy and Respect in the Adoption Relationship

Adoption begins with loss—especially for birth parents, who may experience long-lasting grief, guilt, or societal judgment. Acknowledging this helps adoptive parents:

- Move beyond simplistic narratives (e.g., “They gave you up”),
- Speak with empathy and dignity about birth parents,
- Approach open adoption or future contact with compassion and sensitivity.

It Improves Communication and Openness

In open or semi-open adoptions, positive relationships between adoptive and birth parents can benefit everyone involved—especially the child. Understanding the birth parent's situation and feelings can reduce tension, avoid assumptions, and foster healthy, respectful communication.

It Promotes Good Parenting

Recognizing that adoption can involve trauma, systemic pressures, or difficult life choices enables adoptive parents to make more ethical decisions, such as:

- Supporting the child's right to know their origins,
- Avoiding judgmental language,
- Creating space for grief or difficult questions to surface.

A deep, informed understanding of birth parents' perspectives is not about glorifying or diminishing their role—it is about humanizing them and giving the adopted child permission to embrace all parts of their story. It helps adoptive parents parent more effectively, respond to their child's



emotional needs with insight, and participate in an adoption process rooted in empathy and respect.

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Please note – the four experience of adopting families provided earlier were unedited accounts provided by real families, only changing information that may identify the child. The account provided now as an experience of an adoptive family whose child is now older is a composite of the experience of many adopting and birth families



The experience of an adoptive family whose child is now older

By the adoptive mother

Our daughter Amira is 14 now. She came into our lives as a baby—just 6 weeks old—and from the moment we met her, we knew she was meant to be part of our family. Her adoption was finalised when she was 15 months old, but she was our daughter from the beginning in every way that matters. My husband Luke and I were always committed to being open with her about her adoption. We wanted her to grow up knowing her story, without secrets or shame.

Page | 25

When Amira was very young, we had some contact with her birth mother, Rachael. At first it was through letters and photos exchanged via the agreed contact arrangement. Later, when Amira was around four or five, we arranged a few in-person visits. They were gentle and warm—Amira was too little to understand the full meaning, but she enjoyed the time, and Rachael clearly cared deeply. I remember watching them together, feeling both grateful and protective. Rachael often looked emotional when it was time to say goodbye, and I could see how difficult it was for her. But over time, the contact slowed down. By the time Amira was eight, we received what turned out to be the last letter. Rachael wrote that she wasn't in a place to keep up contact and hoped that one day Amira would understand.

We kept all the letters and photos. We've shared them with Amira gradually, in age-appropriate ways, and have always encouraged her to ask questions. But now that she's a teenager, those questions are becoming more complex—and more emotional. Recently, she had to do a school project on family history. She came home unsure about what to write. She asked if she should include Rachael on the family tree. Then she asked about her birth father. His name isn't on her birth certificate, and sadly, we don't know who he is. Telling her that was incredibly difficult.

Amira is a thoughtful, creative young woman. She's kind and sensitive, and I can see that she's beginning to feel the more complicated sides of her adoption. She talks openly with us about her feelings, but sometimes she also pulls away, like she's not sure how much she's allowed to want to know. She's never angry with us—if anything, she seems afraid to hurt us by expressing how much she wonders about her birth family. We've told her again and again: her feelings are valid. Her curiosity is healthy. And we will support her however we can.

Some days, she tells us she feels proud of being adopted, like it's part of what makes her unique. Other days, she talks about a kind of emptiness she can't quite name. She wonders why Rachael stopped writing, whether she has siblings, what parts of her come from people she's never met. She has a love of drawing that none of us share, and she's started asking where that might come from. She's noticing how different she is from our extended family in little ways—her hair, her sense of humour, the way she overthinks things. It's not dramatic, but it's there. I can see her trying to hold both sides of her story at once.

Luke and I are trying to meet her where she is. We talk about what we do know, and we're honest about what we don't. We've started revisiting whether it might be possible to re-establish contact with Rachael. We don't know what we'll find, but we want to be ready if Amira wants to try. More than anything, we want her to feel seen and supported—not just as our daughter, but as a young person with a full and complicated story.

Being her mum is the greatest privilege of my life. Watching her wrestle with these questions is painful at times, but it's also a sign of her strength. I hope she grows up knowing that she never has to choose between love and truth. Her story holds both. And so do we.



By the birth mother

Not a day goes by that I don't think about my daughter, Amira. She's 14 now. I haven't seen her since she was eight. I wonder every day what she looks like, what she's interested in, whether she's happy. I wonder if she thinks I forgot about her. I didn't. I never could.

When I was 19, I became pregnant with her. I was scared, completely unprepared, and alone. Her father wasn't in the picture—he didn't want to be—and I didn't have much support from my family either. I remember lying awake for nights in a row, panicked and ashamed. I didn't feel like I had the right to raise a child when I couldn't even look after myself properly. Eventually, I agreed to adoption. It broke me, even though I told myself it was the best thing for her. That didn't stop the grief. Or the guilt. Or the shame that settled deep in my chest and has never really left.

I was grateful, at least, to have some contact with Amira in those early years. Her adoptive parents, Sarah and Luke, were kind. I knew they loved her. They sent photos and letters, and when Amira was still very small, I visited a few times. I remember one visit when she reached out and touched my necklace—just a simple moment, but it shattered me inside. I would smile and laugh during the visit, then cry in the car all the way home. I tried so hard to keep it together, to be someone she could look up to even if I wasn't in her daily life. But I was falling apart.

The truth is, it got harder and harder for me to keep up the contact. Every time I received a letter with photos of her growing up—happy, healthy, loved—I was hit with both relief and sorrow. She was doing well, which I wanted more than anything, but I felt like an intruder in her life. Like my presence only reminded her of something complicated. And I didn't feel like I had the right to ask for anything more. I was still carrying so much shame—for giving her up, for not being stronger, for not being the mother I thought I should have been.

When she was eight, I wrote a final letter. I told Sarah and Luke I couldn't keep writing. I didn't explain much—I didn't have the words. I was overwhelmed by a sense that I was doing more harm than good. I've regretted that decision every day since. I often replay the thought: what if she feels abandoned? What if she thinks I stopped loving her?

The guilt is heavy, even now. I keep everything—copies of the letters, the photos, even little gifts I bought but never sent. I imagine her flipping through them one day. I hope she knows I didn't disappear because I didn't care. I disappeared because I didn't know how to face the pain of being near but not part of her life.

I don't know if she'll want to find me one day. If she does, I'll be here. And I'll be honest. I will answer every question she asks, no matter how hard. I want her to know she was—and still is—loved deeply. That she was never forgotten.



Suggested reading

Specific Recommended Texts

Eldridge, Sherrie. 1999. Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew. New York: Dell Publishing.

Lo, Albert & Cashen, Krystal. (2020). How Adoptive Parents Think About Their Role As Parents. In book: The Routledge Handbook of Adoption (pp.278-290)

Page | 27

Melina, Lois Ruskai. 1991. Raising the Adopted Child: Practical Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent. Revised ed. New York: Harper Perennial.

Roszia, Sharon Kaplan, and Allison Davis Maxon. 2019. Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency: A Comprehensive Guide to Promoting Understanding and Healing in Adoption, Foster Care, Kinship Families and Third-Party Reproduction. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

International Literature on Adoption

The term adoption is sometimes used to describe the legal arrangement made for children who have been removed from their parents for safety reasons by the state. Such children are usually older when placed for adoption and have experienced abuse and neglect. The needs of such children can be different to those who are adopted earlier and whose birth parents consented to their adoption. Caution should therefore be applied when ready about adoption in other places.

Accounts of Adopted People

Chung, Nicole. 2018. "People Want To Hear That I'm Happy I Was Adopted. It's Not That Simple." Time, November 16, 2018. <https://time.com/5450784/adoption-identity-nicole-chung/>.

Mackieson, Penny. 2015. Adoption Deception: A Personal and Professional Journey. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press.

Adoptee Led Organisations

While adoption has changed a lot over the last century, reading material produced by Adoptee Led Organisations can give families considering adopting a child a better insight into the issues faced by many adopted people as they grow up.

VANISH

For over 30 years, VANISH has provided specialist search and support services for adults affected by adoption, out-of-home care, and more recently, donor conception. Through this work, thousands of individuals have been assisted to know more about their identity and their family of origin, or in the case of parents, about their child.

VANISH was established in 1989 by individuals from three grassroots organisations who shared a belief that those with a lived experience could make a vital contribution to post-adoption services. They came together to form what was then known as the "Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help (V.A.N.I.S.H.)". This name was changed to "VANISH" in 2001.

Since then, VANISH has been a strong and consistent voice for those separated from family or from a child or children. Aided by volunteers, supporters, and over 1,000 members, VANISH continues to advocate for a society that honours the right to genetic connection and identity.

<https://vanish.org.au/>



Jigsaw Queensland

Jigsaw was established in Australia and New Zealand in 1976 and was incorporated in Queensland in 1988. Since then, we have assisted more than 30,000 people in searching for their biological heritage and many others who were not actively engaged in the process of searching or seeking a reunion. A growing element of our membership in recent years has been people who are well down the path of reunion and are consciously seeking to understand and know themselves better.

Jigsaw is a non-profit, member-based organisation relying on a combination of professional and trained volunteer helpers to provide a range of services to anyone affected by adoption. We rely on membership and donations from individuals, business and government to achieve our objectives and to help us provide ongoing services to our members and the community at large.

<https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/>

Further Information about the adoption

The Victorian Adoption Act 1984

Section 15 (1) (a) of the Adoption Act 1984 requires that applicants demonstrate that they meet the prescribed requirements relating to approval as fit and proper persons to adopt a child. The requirements as outlined in regulation 7 the Adoption Regulations 2019 These can be found at

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/statutory-rules/adoption-regulations-2019/001> or

https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_reg/ar2019216/s7.html

National Principles in Adoption and Victoria policy standards

Principles, policies and guidelines for practice are always evolving as the adoption field continues to learn and develop from the experiences of adoptees and their families. The intent of all underpinning principles is not only the prevention of adoptive placement breakdown but to ensure the best possible long-term outcomes for an adopted person and their family.

<https://www.vic.gov.au/national-principles-adoption>

Further information about the history of adoption in Victoria

Victoria has had new Adoption Acts in 1928, 1958, 1964 and 1984. Each iteration has reflected evolving societal values, with a stronger focus on protecting the rights and welfare of adopted children. Initially adoptions occurred predominately between individuals and the Courts. Authorised adoption agencies and then Government bodies were established to safeguard the rights of children and their natural parents

You can read more about forced adoption and past adoption practices here:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/forced-adoption-history>

<https://www.vic.gov.au/past-adoption-practices>



What next

You can register your interest to adopt a child by submitting an expression of interest form to Adoption Services Victoria at: adoptionvic@justice.vic.gov.au.

The expression of interest form can be downloaded here:

- Local Adoption:
<https://www.vic.gov.au/adopt-child-victoria>
- Intercountry Adoption or Dual Adoption (Local and Intercountry):
<https://www.vic.gov.au/adopt-child-overseas-program>



Attachment 1: Requirements relating to approval as fit and proper persons to adopt a child

The suitability requirements set out in the Adoption Regulations include consideration of:

- physical health
- any criminal history of the applicant or household members
- appreciation of the importance of open adoption
- emotional and mental health
- age and maturity
- skills and life experience;
- capacity to provide a stable, secure and beneficial emotional and physical environment during a child's upbringing until the child reaches social and emotional independence;
- capacity to provide appropriate support to the maintenance of a child's cultural identity and religious faith
- the stability and quality of the applicants' relationship with each other is suitable (except in the case of a sole applicant)
- the stability and quality of the applicant or applicants' relationship with the other household and family members
- financial circumstances

Page | 30

For the purpose of these suitability requirements, open adoption includes

- access to a child's natural parent or parents and family;
- exchange of information about the child with the child's natural parent or parents and family; and
- participating in the formation of an adoption plan for the child

If the applicant or applicants have or have had the care of a child before applying for approval as fit and proper persons to adopt a child, suitability includes whether the applicant or applicants have shown an ability to provide a stable, secure and beneficial emotional and physical environment for the child.

In the case of an applicant or applicants may be considered for the adoption of an Aboriginal child, the applicant or applicants must also have a suitable appreciation of the importance of and a commitment to—

- maintaining and developing the child's Aboriginal identity; and
- maintaining a connection between the child and members of the Aboriginal community to which the child belongs;
- the general stability of character of the applicant or applicants is suitable;

The relevant regulation of the *Adoption Regulations 2019* can be found at https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_reg/ar2019216/s7.html



Attachment 2: Safeguards to ensure that birth parents gave their consent in a free and informed manner

On 25 October 2012, the Premier apologised on behalf of the Victorian Government to people affected by forced adoption practices acknowledging that many thousands of Victorian babies were taken from their mothers, without informed consent, and undertaking to never repeat these practices.

Page | 31

Adoption today is very different to adoption in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Some of these changes occurred when a new Adoption Act was made in 1984. Other practice changes have occurred since then.

Signing consent

Before the *Adoption Act 1984*, the “consent form” for adoption was set by the Court, but not witnessed by the Court. The legislation required that the parent did not sign consent before the child’s birth and could only sign within five days in special circumstances, however there were few other requirements.

The Act introduced new requirements in 1984 including that consent from birth parents be witnessed by both:

- the approved counsellor and
- a prescribed official of a court. This usually means the Registrar of the County Court

The Registrar cannot witness the consent unless they believe the birth parent has received counselling understand the effect of adoption. The consent form used is set in Form 5, schedule 1 of the *Adoption Regulations 2019*.

Before signing consent

When a parent considers adoption for their child, a counsellor supports them in considering their options. All such counsellors have received training from and been approved by Adoption Services Victoria. Some are employed directly by Adoption Services Victoria, and some are employed by community service organisations.

You can understand more about the approach taken by counsellors by reading the information provided to a parent considers adoption for their child. You can find this information at:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/information-parents-considering-adoption-their-child>

Irrespective of whether the counselling to the birth parent was provided by a counsellor from Adoption Services Victoria or by an approved counsellor from a community service organisation, an authorised person from Adoption Services Victoria needs to certify that the birth parent has received counselling and information about the effect of an adoption order, the alternatives to adoption, the names and addresses of organizations that provide family support services and their rights to apply for an original birth certificate, before consent is taken. This certificate is set out in Form 9, schedule 1 of the *Adoption Regulations 2019*.

The role of the Child Adoption Victoria team in taking consent

Child Adoption Victoria works with families who want to adopt and children after their birth parents have consented to the adoption. The Child Adoption Victoria team is not involved with parents considering adoption for their child. The reason for this is that in the many inquiries into past adoption practice it was identified that the relationship with people wanting to adopt was seen as contributing to not being impartial when a parent is considering adoption for their child. In order to avoid this, counselling for parents considering adoption for their child and approving families to adopt are carried out by different teams in Adoption Services Victoria.