

# Working with adoptees - how to help

In June 2026, the Church of England apologised for its role in the historic forced adoption era. As a result of widespread publicity, you may find people in your congregation coming forward for support or beginning to explore what adoption means to them, possibly for the first time.

This guide has been put together by the Adult Adoptee Movement who provide peer support and speak to policymakers on behalf of adoptees.

## What you should know

Every adoptee story is different. Some are happy they are adopted. Some may be very angry that they were separated from their family. Others may feel conflicted and torn between their first and adoptive families. For many, views change as they get older and experience life's milestones. The process can be painful and involve revisiting long-held assumptions with a critical eye, or uncovering family secrets.

There are very high rates of mental health difficulties and suicide rates in the adoptee population. A [recent study](#) has adoptees as 35 times more likely to attempt suicide.

## What you should consider

The effects of adoption are lifelong. It is not something that happened in the past and is now over. Separation from identity, wider family and culture can be devastating. Adoptees usually have little or no medical history and there are often implications for mental health and relationships. It is common for adoptees to live with complex PTSD due to the trauma of having their mother and other family members taken from them at a very young age.

You should be aware of commonly-used platitudes that can be triggering, for example 'grateful', 'lucky' or 'chosen'. You should be careful not to frame adoption as 'good' or 'saving' as each case will be different.

Adoptees will often struggle with birthdays as they are a reminder of the family they are separated from. Mother's Day and Father's Day can be difficult.

## What you should not do

Above all, begin by listening. Avoid assumptions and allow adoptees to describe their own experience in words.

- Ask for details of their family, unless they offer them. For many adoptees, this is a sensitive issue. They may have found a different situation to the one they were expecting. They may have found that their parent(s) have passed away. To be aware, rates of suicide amongst birth/first mothers are extremely high.
- Claim any knowledge of adoption based on knowing another adoptee. Each person's experience can be very different. It is also common for adoptees to hide how they are feeling and it is possible, if you do know an adoptee, that you do not know how they really feel.

- Employ flippancy. Jokes at the adoptees' expense are quite common in film, TV and the media and it can be a sore point.
- Reference enjoying Long Lost Family or other similar programmes. Many adoptees feel these are trauma voyeurism, and they simplify the search and reunion process.

## How you can help

- You should ensure that all help is safe. Those with a close affiliation to adoption (for example, adoptive parents, adoption social workers or members of Local Authority adoption boards) should declare their status before offering support, and should usually step back.
- Ask, or pay attention to, which terms the adoptee prefers for their family members e.g. 'birth mum (or mother)', 'first mum', 'natural mum', 'biological mum', or simply 'mum'. Similarly, some may refer to their 'parents', 'adoptive parents', or 'adopters'. And some may prefer 'adopted person/people' over 'adoptee'.
- Many adoptees will appreciate support, particularly as they consider searching and reunion. There can be difficulties in obtaining records and the process of searching for and reuniting with family members can be complex and emotional. There is limited support available and some of it is offered by organisations who support or facilitate adoptions today. The following are safe organisations for sign-posting:

PAC-UK - offer specialist adoption counselling, intermediary services, trace support and advice for adult adoptees and birth relatives.

<https://family-action.org.uk/get-support/pac-uk-adoption-and-special-guardianship-support/>

Adult Adoptee Movement - host adoptee-led spaces and provide peer support.

<https://adultadoptee.uk>

How To Be Adopted - provide blogs, organise meet ups and coordinate a list of adoptee therapists.

<https://howtobeadopted.com>

Inter Country Adoptee Voices - brings together and advocates for those adopted internationally

<https://intercountryadopteevoices.com>

[Adult Adoptee Movement](#), A Community Interest Company

Registered in England, company number 14788263

Registered address: 2 Frederick Street, London WC1X 0ND

Please send all correspondence via email to [adultadopteeuk@gmail.com](mailto:adultadopteeuk@gmail.com)

