



Foreword

Support is what the LGBTQ+ community does. Whenever we've faced challenges in our history, support networks have evolved to nurture, sustain and move us forward. This book is a part of that tradition: an invaluable resource providing support to anyone thinking about adopting, adopters at different stages in the adoption process, and even those with adopted children.

Support is what we all need. LGBTQ+ communities have long created new families, often when the families we came from struggled to understand us. Whether it's sharing our stories or simply lending a listening ear, support networks matter. Empathy and understanding – in particular understanding what it is to be different – are also pretty much essential when welcoming an adopted child into your life.

Going from planet gay to planet parent (and that's a whole separate book) takes some adjustment. And for *all* adoptive parents, one of the biggest challenges can be around feelings of isolation and lack of support as daily life centres around the needs of your family.

Often, intense involvement with professionals ends. And although new friends may come along, some old friendships may fade away. Sometimes there is simply not enough time or space for existing friends. And very often, friends and family just don't really understand what life is like now.

An advantage for many LGBTQ+ adopters is that we are already used to getting support and advocating for ourselves. Our experiences of being "out" stand us in good stead – and often we don't have a choice about being "out" as an adoptive parent. Anyone who thinks life as an LGBTQ+ adopter is one of blending in, hasn't had that school gate conversation that inevitably leads to casual outing. Being a gay or lesbian parent can, even in a small way, help change perceptions – and lead to challenges too, of course.

Even supportive friends and family can assume that life "afterwards" is now "normal". Many new adopters can feel a sense that they are doing this on their own. That is why post-adoption support from other adopters – some new, some with years of experience behind them – is so important. Fellow adopters "get it", don't need all the explanations, and are willing to listen to how it feels and offer their own experiences. A supported parent is a better parent.

One unexpected benefit of adoption for me has been my involvement with the *We Are Family* community. Meeting up in local groups allows adoptive parents – gay and straight – the chance to connect and chat with other parents in the same situation. They can be adult-only sessions allowing for deeper conversations, or family meet-ups, where the children can hopefully play with other adopted kids (always a bonus) while you chat with new and old friends.

As a dad and a gay man, I know how important it is to share experiences of adopting to support each other as a community. This book is part of doing that, and *We Are Family* is delighted that *The Pink Guide to Adoption* is now in its third edition. Full of valuable insights about the reality of the adoption process and shared stories of the challenges and joys of raising a family, this book looks at adoption from the LGBTQ+ perspective. Keep it with you as you go through the process, and revisit it as your family grows.

Enjoy this book. If you are at the start of your journey to adoption, I hope you are inspired to take the next step. Good luck!

Paul Meadows

Chair of Trustees

We Are Family

www.wearefamilyadoption.org.uk

We Are Family is a parent-to-parent adoption support community. It is a registered charity which runs, through its local groups, meet-ups and events for adopters and prospective adopters (Stage 2 or more) in and around London, with specific cross-London groups for single parents and prospective adopters.



Introduction

Welcome to the third edition of *The Pink Guide to Adoption for Lesbians and Gay Men*. For this new edition, I have updated the practical information in the first half of this book and included new case studies in the second half.

Since 2005, when the law changed allowing same-sex couples to adopt, hundreds of lesbians and gay men have adopted children and we have become an important resource for social services. In the year ending March 2018, 12 per cent of children adopted in the UK were placed with same-sex couples.¹

Many people in our community choose adoption as their first option when considering having children. This contrasts with heterosexuals, who may have exhausted other options before turning to adoption. From my interviews, I think this brings a different perspective to adoption. We are not as desperate to replace the baby we haven't been able to conceive biologically – we are approaching adoption as a positive choice, a way of creating a family but with a greater focus

¹ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018

on the child's needs. This approach also results in older children being adopted – one of the new case studies in the book features a five-year-old child.

Same-sex couples can sometimes be an ideal match for a child who has been abused by the opposite gender. Children may feel safer, for example, with two women if they have been abused by a man or with two men if their mother has neglected them. Lesbians and gay men will also know what it is like to be in a minority and may have encountered bullying or discrimination, so will be able to help a child who may encounter discrimination on the grounds of being adopted or living with a same-sex couple.

For some gay men and lesbians, adoption is a way of creating a family where both parents are equal, with neither being the biological parent. It also means that the children become exclusively part of your nuclear unit and you do not need to “share” them with sperm donors or surrogate mothers.

If you are at the early stages of thinking about adoption, consider joining support groups such as We are Family or New Family Social – they are very welcoming to “newbies” and it is a good way of learning from other people's experiences. My final piece of advice, of course, is to read as much as possible.

This book

The first half of this book takes you through the steps involved from first thinking about adoption, to being assessed, finding a match, meeting children, and starting your new lives together. The second half features people who are willing to share their stories of the adoption journey. Some are pioneers, adopting as single people before the law changed or as couples in the early days after the law changed. Others have adopted more recently, one within the last year.

In compiling this third edition, I have noticed some changes. All the

new interviewees referred to “my husband” or “my wife” – five years ago, most people said “my partner”. One of the case studies features a lesbian couple who adopted a relinquished child, which is unusual on two counts: firstly, very few babies are given up voluntarily; and even a few years ago, I doubt a same-sex couple would have been top of the list in an adoption agency for a so-called “easy to place” child.

Two of the case studies feature couples who fostered before adopting – one for several years, who recommend fostering teenagers before adopting as the best way of preparing yourself. Given the shortage of foster carers in the UK, this could prove useful for society as well as helping potential adopters to experience the reality of looking after children in the care system – even cute babies become challenging teenagers. In another case study, the couple opted for Fostering for Adoption during their assessment – a route which can be risky if the adoption order is blocked, but if it goes ahead, can allow babies and carers to bond from a much earlier age – sometimes straight from the maternity ward. If a mother’s previous children have been taken into care, social services may even line up foster carers before a child is born.

Please note that this book does not purport to be the definitive guide to adoption in the UK today. For that, readers considering adoption must read *Adopting a Child* (Lord, 2016), published by CoramBAAF. This is a comprehensive guide that explains the law and describes the process and procedures. It is regularly updated and keeps pace with changing requirements. Another useful CoramBAAF guide is *The Adopter’s Handbook* (Salter, 2018), which contains information, resources and services for adoptive parents, including lists of useful organisations. A short pamphlet, *Adoption: Some questions answered* (2016), also published by CoramBAAF, provides a basic introduction.

So why *The Pink Guide to Adoption*? What distinguishes this book from the titles mentioned above is that it focuses exclusively on adoption by lesbians and gay men. While it does offer an overview of the adoption process, it highlights those issues of particular relevance to lesbians and gay men; all quotations and case studies are from

lesbians and gay men – both single and in partnerships.

Adopting a child or children is one of the biggest decisions in your life. This book will provide a useful companion on your exciting journey.

Note

All names have been changed in the case studies to protect identity. Quotes from the case studies appear throughout the first section of the book, whilst their full stories are featured in the second half.

References are made to lesbians and gay men and same-sex couples throughout the book. We recognise that we are not specifically identifying or addressing everyone's needs in the LGBTQ+ community – we have chosen to focus on the particular issues relevant to lesbians and gay men. However, we hope everyone finds the book useful and we will consider publishing editions which are more encompassing of the community in the future.

CoramBAAF has published a Practice Note, *Assessing and Supporting Transgender Foster Carers and Adopters* (2018), which provides more information.

WHAT IS ADOPTION?

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for a child who cannot be brought up by their birth family. It is a legal procedure by which the responsibility of parenting is transferred to adoptive parents. Once an adoption order has been granted, all legal ties with the birth parents are terminated and the child becomes a member of the adoptive family.

Legal aspects**In England, Wales and Scotland**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002, which applies to England and Wales, came into force in 2005. This allowed same-sex couples to

adopt *jointly* for the first time. Gay men and lesbians have been adopting children for many years; however, even if they were in a couple, only one of them could apply to adopt. Also since April 2007, lesbian and gay couples cannot be discriminated against by adoption agencies, under the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation Regulations) 2007. Since the end of 2008, this law also applies to adoption agencies that have a religious basis, for example, Catholic charities that provide adoption services.

In Scotland, adoption is covered by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. The latter allows same-sex couples to adopt, giving them the same parenting rights as heterosexual couples. The Act states that couples who are in a civil partnership or who are living together 'as if civil partners in an enduring family relationship' may adopt.

In Northern Ireland

Same-sex couples can now adopt in Northern Ireland, following a Supreme Court judgement in 2013. Prior to this, single people, heterosexual or not, could adopt children in Northern Ireland but those in a civil partnership could not. However, same-sex couples resident in Northern Ireland could apply to adopt children from Wales or England.

There are also national minimum standards, regulations and regulatory bodies for adoption agencies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These have been established and developed to address shortfalls and variations in performance in meeting the needs of looked after children. These standards' overall aim is to ensure the provision of more consistent and high quality adoption services which place children at the heart of the adoption process. You can find out more about these on www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-national-minimum-standards.

These bodies can be very useful if you encounter any prejudice or

discrimination as they set out the minimum standards. For example, the National Minimum Standards for England (2011) state:

People who are interested in becoming adoptive parents, and prospective adopters, are treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect.