

Adopting as a single parent

A single adopter tells us her story of the highs, lows and adjusting to her new life after adopting her little girl, who is now five.

I didn't make a conscious decision to adopt. I had always thought I would have children but didn't really want to go through pregnancy. In the back of my mind was the knowledge that adoption was the only path for me, especially following my divorce.

First of all, I looked up adoption online and entered my details into the query form on the BAAF website. DFW got back to me the next week where I had a long telephone conversation and then decided to go ahead with a face to face meeting. This went very well and I felt DFW would work with me on the journey ahead.

Following the process with DFW, my amazing daughter was placed with me. Yes I lost friends on the journey, but I also gained new ones. And now my whole life revolves around my daughter, which I love as it gives me the opportunity to try new things and see the world through her lovely eyes.

“I have been angry, sad, joyful, anxious, happy, stressed, excited all in a week but the best thing is at the end of the day, knowing I have helped a little one feel more secure and settled and loved for another day.”

The support I've had from DFW has been brilliant, I've found that I can ring at any time and everyone is happy to help. I also use the Single Adopters group a lot which enables me to bounce problems and ideas off my new friends.

Advice I would give to those thinking of about adoption?

You've got to be prepared for the emotional journey of choosing a child who might not be yours, (due to a number of reasons) and having to do it again and again. Be honest; if you are very set in your ways how will you cope with the changes? (I found this difficult at first).

But like I said, you may lose friends, but you will gain new ones and once you have your child don't sweat the small stuff. We all try to be the perfect parent but that's impossible.

Have time out whenever you can – have a bath, go get your hair done, let Grandma babysit!

Ashleigh

Our forever family

Julie* and David* adopted their two little girls and believe every child even those over 4 deserve to have a loving family too.

***Names have been changed to protect the identities of the children and their family.**

My husband and I decided to adopt when we were not able to have our own birth children. We made our initial enquiry a year before we did decide to start the process, this was to ensure this was the path we wanted to take and what we wanted in our lives. We have adopted two girls, Chloe* 6 and Mia* 3, they are now ours and we truly love our forever family.

We have had the girls with us just over 2 months. Chloe* is so bright and loving, she loves cuddles and praise, Mia* loves playing and anything related to Peppa Pig and Ben and Holly. Chloe* is older than what we initially were looking to adopt – however when we read their profile we knew that they would slip straight into our family.

“We thought long and hard about why we were so adamant that we needed a child under 4, there was no reason...does a child at 6 not deserve to have a mummy and daddy too?”

Mia* has nothing to give but love, funny stories, loud singing and smiles – our little girl needed a family and we have provided her with that and more – I'm not saying everything is perfect – but who's family ever is?



We chose to go with an independent adoption agency as we wanted to be Julie* and David* – not just another number in the council process where we got given a child. With DFW we felt like we mattered from our initial meeting with a social worker, to the week course.

We took two years to find our forever family and not once did we feel like our social worker, or indeed the team, did not help us to find our girls. We know that at any time we can phone or email and have support straight away. The team worked tirelessly to help us and we are very grateful for everything. Even now we attend the Adoption Skills course where we feel part of a big family rather than been left to get on with things ourselves.

“I tell them now that they didn’t grow in my tummy but grew in my heart and that is much more special.”

Our life has totally changed since adopting. We are up early every morning, we are asleep by 9.30pm but we would not change any of it. We love them so much and when we are singing Stevie Wonder in the car, the girls light up and sing at the top of their voices – how can you top that?! We share many lovely things from our special time, to family hugs and when they tell you before bed that they love you to the moon and back it fills your heart with so much love and happiness.

Sarah and Paul

Adopting an older sibling group as a single adopter

Too Old at 4’ not according to our next story from a single adopter who adopted her sibling group of two, Tom* aged seven and Grace* aged five. *Names have been changed to protect the identities of the children and their families.

I was watching television whilst eating breakfast one morning and on the television a five- year-old girl was sitting next to an enormous flower pot. The little girl was explaining that she was waiting for a new family, but she knew that as she was five, she may be too old to find one. Five, she was only five! How could that be too old to need a new family?

A short time after my father died, so many people came forward and told us how he had changed their lives. If you asked my dad ‘why me?’, he invariably replied: ‘Why not you?’ When you ask the question – ‘why not me?’ as an adoptive parent, it is so much harder to step away.

My father died April 2009 and in November 2010 my son aged seven and daughter aged five moved in. 'Why not me' indeed, our family had begun!

With National Adoption Week's theme this year being "Too Old at 4", I asked my children what they thought of it. They said all children need a new family-even teenagers. My daughter said that I thought you would be an ogre when I first moved in but you are not you are kind.

For me the process was fairly straightforward. The assessment is necessarily detailed, it makes you think back over things from your past that you may not have thought about in a long time. The assessment was completed with sensitivity and the end result was a very true picture of me. The matching process can be daunting, there was no question too silly for DFW and my views and thoughts were completely respected throughout.

"When the potential match was found I was supported every step of the way through the matching panel and introductions. There were some practical difficulties in the introductions over what should be happening when I was able to focus all my energy on the children, as DFW stepped in and re-arranged things into a workable plan."

Once home I had frequent phone calls and visits. My children looked forward to our social worker coming to visit and I knew I only had to pick up the phone if there was a problem.



With that said, there has been difficulties and challenges. When my children arrived they had come from a land of chaos, violence and were held in a placement of strict rules- which for a while they needed. They did not understand this land of peace, play, and care, so they worked very hard to make our home what they were used to.

Luckily at the beginning, the Play Therapist from DFW was able to help. She had so many fantastic tips in how to help children who did not know how to play and to take that step into the world of imagination.

For us therapeutic parenting using Dan Hughes model of PACE, playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy has been a life line. There are some fantastic resources out there, do not be afraid to use them.

As my children grow and develop there are new challenges, the tricky teenage years are ahead. My life has changed in so many ways since adopting my children. I used to be fairly career focussed and obtained a lot of self-worth through my work role. Now my paid job is just that, part time and the jobs I have applied for I have looked for flexibility not career progression. I sometimes wonder why it took me so long to work out it was just a job! What I come home to is my true role and love.

“I now read stories at bed time, get the most amazing hugs and have the joy of seeing my children make progress. From time to time I get little cards saying I love you, and today I got a card from my son thanking me for adopting him. Nights out are a rarity and holidays are child family destinations – but that is okay.”

To balance this there are days when boundaries are severely tested, verbal aggression can rumble on and tantrums can erupt. My children have wobbly foundations and these things will and do happen- and again, it is okay. Adoption is difficult, but **it is possible and there is great joy!**



My son became hysterical one day as he thought his eyes were bleeding, he was crying. But he had been so emotionally shut down he did not recognise the sensation. One day when my daughter was unwell I was holding her

close to me with a blanket wrapped round, she became distressed because something was moving- it was me breathing! It is hard to imagine that my daughter has never held close enough for this not be an instantly recognisable sensation.

No child, whatever their age, should be left in a world where they think that tears are blood and that the feel of another human being breathing is alien.

The reason I wanted to adopt siblings is because I am an older adopter and I wanted to give siblings a chance to stay together, so when they are adults it is easier for them to choose to stay in touch if they so wish.

The only constant that there had been in my children's life was each other, they had moved through three foster placements together. The last set of foster parents said they needed to be placed together. On their good days and good moments they are phenomenal, on their bad days, well let's not say too much about that and just say that they are siblings after all!

My advice to people who are considering adoption is, it is possible! Don't concentrate on what you can't do and concentrate on what you can.

But love is not enough, it is helpful to understand most children who need a new home will have had some trauma in their early life. The role is to fill the missing holes and show them that there are other ways to choose to live their lives.

“Surround yourself with good friends and family who will be with you for the good days and bad. You need friends and family who understand that your child may not be doing ‘the same as any child’.”

Because of the trauma from their past it will be harder, more intense and possibly unpredictable. You need friends who see the positive steps that have been made and friends who can put the bad days behind them and start afresh with positivity. A sense of humour helps!

I am now involved in the Single Adopters Group, it is good for my children to know that they are not the only children adopted by one parent. And I am quite a chatterbox so it is good for me to have someone to natter to!

Advice I would give to those thinking about adoption is that I would tell them about our experience and the emotional roller coaster that it is – but how rewarding and fun it can be. I cannot imagine our lives without the girls now.

Our social worker has been amazing though our process, she talked to us like people and didn't make the process feel intrusive and I know that we could call her for advice and support. DFW has been amazing and even now with the post adoption support and the Adoption Skills course which we now attend.

Adoption is a fantastic and rewarding thing to do when a little person who has done nothing wrong and is so innocent just wants a mummy and daddy to love and love them back.

Lisa

Adopting a four year old

This is Alex and Kate's* beautiful insight into adopting their little girl at 4 years old and why they disagree with this year's National Adoption Week theme 'Too Old at 4'.

***Names have been changed to protect the identity of the children and their families.**

My husband and I had tried unsuccessfully for a family and after having had 2 rounds of IVF, we weren't emotionally happy to continue with this. We had discussed adoption but felt very nervous, had not had any experience of this and didn't know anyone else who had adopted.

We then started reading books such as Sally Donovan, *No Matter What* and that had to be the pinnacle book that turned the corner for us. It inspired us to get over ourselves and start being proactive in looking to build our family. We then attended the three day introduction days at DFW, meeting others who were just like us! Over the three days our eyes were opened to the whole adoption world. The excitement, the possible challenges, but most importantly of all, the fact that there are kids out there that just want to feel they belong and to be able to call someone Mummy and Daddy!



Our home visits started not long after we had our third day. We had already met our social worker at the introduction days so didn't feel nervous. We then opened up our own life story. The whole experience was quite therapeutic, when else would you have the opportunity to talk about yourself in such detail? We both not only enjoyed this part, but we also learnt an awful lot more about ourselves from each other, long after our social worker had gone.

“Throughout this time we also agreed that we would like to adopt a girl, about 3-4 years old. I could be classed as an older mum in my early 40's and to be honest was not worried about having to change nappies, nor did I have the urge to have a very young child.”

We were approved for adoption in the December, only 6 months after starting our journey with DFW. At the time and living through it, it seemed to take time, but looking back now, the experience went very quick. Once we heard we had been approved I burst into tears – as the day had come closer to go to panel we started thinking we weren't good enough, they would find something to stop us being approved. The relief was enormous.

We looked at about six profiles over the weeks following approval, all little girls who needed to be placed on their own, but Sophie* just seemed to jump out at us! She had just turned 4 so just the age we had hoped for and once we had the green light from her social worker we were matched with her quite quickly.

We then started preparing her family book which was to be given to her before we would meet. When we started seeing further photographs of our daughter, the whole process was starting to become real. When we finally met Sophie*, I remember her excited face and her saying: “it's Mummy and Daddy” when we walked into the room. I have a tear remembering this even now!

A week of introductions and a year and a half later, we have the best little girl in the world. Sophie* is now 5, going on 6 (or should that be 16) and is thriving!

“Although she wasn't a baby when she came to us and she still has memories of her life before us, we like to think that the memories we are creating will cement her to us for ever.”

We talk with her about those past memories when she needs to, while also focusing on the here and now. It can catch you off guard now and then when a past name is mentioned out of the blue, but why deny her the opportunity to talk about it? In a way, her past is our past as we are now a family.

She came to live with us at just the right age. Already we have experienced her first day at big school, losing her first tooth, her first time at Disney, learning to read and write – so much in such a short space of time.

We chose DFW simply because we drive past the office every day. They recognised our nervousness and apprehension, but even after their first home visit to meet us, we felt at ease and confident that we would not be doing this alone.

We have come across various difficulties through our adoption process. We were advised about the Honeymoon period, the first few weeks or even months when everyone is settling down together and life is fun, filled with new activities. Then once this period is over, the switch from being rosy to seeing red, came a bit too swiftly.

One minute all was well, then the next we were faced with a child who wanted to lash out, scream and throw things at everything in sight – poor cats! **How did we cope?** By talking to friends and family, realising that this happens in all families. Learning to cuddle each other when sometimes you want to go and hide. Making things fun!

I will always remember one of the turning points; our little girl would stare at us with what looked like pure hatred if she didn't get her own way. My husband turned round to her one day and just started to giggle! She looked so shocked, and then a little grin appeared. The stare still appears but never without the grin.

We have learnt how to adapt to parenting. We have tried many techniques, some work some don't. We have learnt that what worked yesterday may not work today, so always being ready to change. We have learnt to be patient and slow life down a bit.

I also had the opportunity to go on the Adoption Skills course provided by DFW. The focus was on play and interacting with your child and we learnt so much from putting this to the test. We learnt how to ignore the trivial things and give plenty of praise. We learnt how to focus on the good things and build these memories, rather than dwell on the things that may cause upset.

Advice to those thinking about adoption? It's not easy but it's well worth it. Get experience from looking after other children on your own. Make notes if you have to on how you see other parents interact with their children. What works well and what sees them going off in a temper. You never know when you need to visit the notebook.

Alex and Kate