

Introduction

Lesbians and gay men* have been (formally and informally) adopting and fostering children in the UK for a long time. Legal changes have also enabled same-sex couples to adopt jointly, whilst discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation across adoption and fostering services has been outlawed. Alongside these changes, the presence and visibility of lesbian and gay adopters and foster carers have increased significantly in social work practice, in various publications and in the media. For example, BAAF has published *The Pink Guide to Adoption for Lesbians and Gay Men* and *Proud Parents* (Hill, 2012; 2013), as well as several storybooks on diverse families aimed at children in care (see Useful Resources). Most adoption agencies have explicitly inclusive recruitment statements, and several now actively seek out lesbians and gay men to come forward as adopters.

This Good Practice Guide responds to these developments and builds on the previous BAAF guide, *Recruiting, Assessing and Supporting Lesbian and Gay Carers and Adopters* (Mallon and Betts, 2005), published just before the legislation enabling same-sex couple adoption was implemented. Much of the information in this book is drawn from two in-depth surveys conducted by New Family Social[†] in 2011, and a shorter survey in 2014. The first 2011 survey was of 168 prospective adopters who identified as lesbian or gay (96 per cent), bisexual (three per cent) or queer (one per cent), and examined their expectations and experiences of the adoption process. The second 2011 survey was of 130 social work practitioners who had been directly involved in the approval of, or placing of children with, a lesbian or gay applicant. In 2014, New Family Social published the results of a further short survey of 400 NFS members, focusing on actual and perceived barriers to adoption and fostering by lesbians and gay men.[‡] In addition, the book includes quotations

*Some adopters may identify as bisexual, trans(gender), intersex or queer. These identities are often dealt with in conjunction with lesbian and gay (as in the acronym LGBT(IQ)). However, sometimes this is done without paying attention to the specific aspects of these identities. In order for this guide to remain concise (as well as precise), it does not claim to cover the specific aspects of bisexual, trans(gender), intersex or queer identities. Nevertheless, many of the issues discussed will be relevant to these adopters too. Similarly, although this guide is focused on adopters, many issues will also be relevant to lesbian and gay foster carers.

† New Family Social is a national membership organisation providing peer support to, and organising activities for, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) (prospective) adopters and foster carers, and their children. For more information, visit www.newfamilysocial.org.uk.

‡ <https://www.newfamilysocial.org.uk/resources/research/new-family-social-research/2014-nfs-survey-actual-and-perceived-barriers/>

from direct interviews with experienced lesbian and gay adopters from one local authority who agreed to help with this guide by sharing their experiences.* The guide also draws on the extensive work of Helen Cosis-Brown and Christine Cocker on the assessment of lesbian and gay adopters and foster carers (see Bibliography), as well as on recent research by the University of Cambridge, published by BAAF in *Gay, Lesbian and Heterosexual Adoptive Families: Family relationships, child adjustment and adopters' experiences* (Mellish *et al*, 2013).

The aim of the guide is to start addressing the questions that some assessing social workers may have, such as:

- What is the latest research on the outcomes for children adopted by lesbian and gay parents?
- How can I, as a social worker, instil applicants with confidence and reassure them that they will be treated fairly?
- How do I ensure that I am confident, for example, about the language that should be used and the issues that should be explored in the assessment of lesbian and gay adopters?
- Should I cover points of “difference” or should I treat applicants rigorously “the same”?
- How do I undertake an assessment without prejudice, whilst still being robust and covering all relevant areas?

To help with engaging other parties who will be involved in the assessment of lesbian and gay adopters, and in the linking and matching process, BAAF has published short Advice Notes aimed at social workers and panel members; Advice Notes on relevant issues are also available for foster carers, birth parents and children (see Useful Resources at the end of this guide).

* Eight sets of adoptive parents (six lesbian couples and two gay couples) from Brighton and Hove were interviewed for this guide in February 2014.