

**Voluntary Adoption Agency Advice Guides
2026**

Advice from Adopters
**Understanding
Adoption via
Early Permanence**



Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies

www.cvaa.org.uk

Voluntary Adoption Agency Advice Guides:

Early Permanence

We are delighted to share with you our advice guide for people considering Early Permanence (EP) as a route to adoption. Created by Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) along with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), with very special contributions from adoptive parents who have adopted via EP.

In this guide, families share their experiences of Early Permanence, talking about why they decided to choose EP as a route and the things they considered as part of their adoption journey.

What is EP and why is it a route to adoption?

Early Permanence aims to reduce the number of moves a young child experiences when adoption is a potential part of their care plan. By doing this, it helps reduce the impact of trauma caused by moves and supports the development of early life attachments.

As a prospective adopter, you would also need to be approved as a foster carer. This can be done by the child's local authority or your VAA, if they are registered as a fostering agency. This fostering approval is temporary and specific to the child, pending a change to a formal adoption placement or the end of the fostering arrangement. Placements can also be made under Fostering Regulation 25a, which is a similar foster to adopt arrangement.

What are the benefits of EP?

Children with adoption plans often move to adopters after living with one or more foster families. Research shows that children who experience three or more moves are more likely to be at risk when it comes to future placement stability.

Early Permanence allows carers to provide continuity of care both before and after adoption. In some cases, this means a child placed directly from hospital might not experience any further moves at all.

This type of plan can help promote greater stability and security for a child which is important for their overall wellbeing. It reduces the number of moves a child may make as these can be traumatic because of their experience of loss. A child can begin to bond earlier which leads to stronger attachments and relationships.

What is a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA)?

VAA's are independent, not for profit organisations which are smaller than most statutory agencies and offer a personalised service to adopters from all backgrounds. VAA's work in partnership with local authorities and regional adoption agencies across the whole of the UK to find families for children in care who are unable to stay with their birth relatives.

There are 21 Voluntary Adoption Agencies, covering every region and country of the UK, who are members of CVAA. Learn more and find details of your local VAA via:

www.cvaa.org.uk/agency-finder



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Adopting via Early Permanence was one of the best decisions we have made in our whole life. Our family has been immeasurably blessed with the most precious little girl, who also gained a loving family with stability from day two of her life.

We'd encourage anyone considering adopting to at least get dual approved so you have the option to consider EP as part of matching.

Mike & Caroline, Adoption Focus (pictured below)

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“ We first looked into Early Permanence as we really wanted the chance to have a baby. Our social worker knew us so well, that she knew, when she approached us about this particular placement, it was the one. A little boy aged 4 and his younger sister aged 17 months. She knew that we really wanted a baby and that a four year old was actually older than usual at the time for an Early Permanence placement. We then learned that birth mum was also pregnant with sibling number three. So, we went from a couple to a family of five very quickly!

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Rachael & Paul, Adoption Matters

“ We chose Early Permanence because our hearts were open and our babies were our priority from the very beginning. A child’s early years are incredibly precious, and we wanted to give them the safest start, the strongest chance to thrive, and a love that would never waver. It was an extraordinary journey — one that changed us, completed us, and proved that every child deserves a forever

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Liza & Dev, Diagrama

“ We have been able to experience all his firsts and develop a really strong bond and attachment from the beginning. We are all our little boy has known, and when he asks questions when he is older about when he was a baby, we can answer them all.

We can also say we had a good relationship with his birth mum and answer any questions he may have about her or his story.

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Karl & Adam, ARC Adoption North East



Early Permanence gives children stability and security from the earliest possible moment



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We decided Early Permanence was right for us because we understood the benefits to limiting the number of placements for a child. Whether that child became ours or went back to their birth family we knew we would be able to say we have given that child the best start we possibly could.

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Lucy & Vicki, ARC Adoption North East (adopted twice through EP)

— “ —

I hadn't heard about Early Permanence before, but when I approached Coram, pioneers of this form of care, I was instantly drawn to its benefits. The court process takes a long time, and so it's a good idea for younger children to be able to bond with a family who may then go on to become their permanent parents. It gives them stability.

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Frankie*, Coram



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Early Permanence allowed us the opportunity to bring in our second little one at only one day old meaning we have been able to experience life from the very beginning with him.

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**Adam & Naomi, ARC Adoption North East
(adopted twice through EP)**

**Name changed to protect identities*



Early Permanence fosters early bonds between children and their parents

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Sophie* was three-months-old when I became her Early Permanence carer. I was really surprised how quickly I bonded with her. In the adoption training we were told that it's normal not to feel an instant bond. But I was hopelessly in love from the moment I saw her and I didn't want to hold that back.

I believed that whatever the outcome was, it would be in Sophie's best interests, and that I would love her wholeheartedly for as long as she was with me.

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Frankie*, Coram

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Early Permanence has certainly helped establish our relationships with our children and develop secure attachments with both from a very young age. Our eldest has only known us and despite understanding the uncertainty which comes with any Early Permanence placement, we felt when he was placed in our arms at 32 hours old that he was our son. The scenario with our second son was slightly different as he was in foster care before he came to us at 10 weeks old but that didn't affect us establishing a relationship with him - it just took a little longer.

Lucy & Vicki, ARC Adoption North East (adopted twice through EP)

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He came to us when he was six-days-old, and his plan changed to adoption when he was eight-months-old. We knew this was the best place for him and loved him like our own child. You just have this protective instinct for the child in your care and want what's best for them.

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Tony & Aine, Barnardo's

**Name changed to protect identities*



This early bonding is key to building secure attachments and routines

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We learnt about EP during our training and really aligned with the notion that it provided an opportunity for very early attachment for the child. We felt capable of bearing the burden of uncertainty, rather than a child spending time moving between homes at a young age.

Alex & Ellie, Yorkshire Adoption Agency

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We have had two contrasting experiences with Early Permanence. The first time round, our little one came to us from birth family at 11 months old. In the second instance, he came to us from one day old. Both instances have meant that the boys didn't need to go into temporary care and came straight to us from birth family. I think this has allowed both of our boys to settle quicker having not experienced multiple moves and changes in caregivers. It also allowed us to provide our own structure and routine from the off rather than having to manage a routine inherited from another care giver. This has allowed us to form a much stronger bond and manage routine accordingly from the early stages on the placement.

Adam & Naomi, ARC Adoption North East (adopted twice through EP)

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Voluntary adoption agencies specialise in providing lifelong support to children and families

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We've never looked back from our first day of fostering. Not for one second. Although it can be tiring and bring frustration, you have to ride that with the children. The therapeutic training we had from Barnardo's has helped us overcome the difficult times. It's actually changed our way of parenting completely, with our grandchildren too – we find ourselves practicing it naturally it now.

Tony & Aine, Barnardo's

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The support we received during this difficult waiting period was great. We made use of the groups offered by Adoption Matters to be able to speak to other carers / adopters and this helped so much – being able to speak to people that have either been through it, or going through it, made such a difference ... We have made some really good friends through the agency who all live locally and we all have similar aged children who are now also friends.

Rachael & Paul, Adoption Matters

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We've had brilliant support from family and our Barnardo's social workers throughout the process of adopting our boy. What we'd say to someone at the beginning of their fostering journey is 'be prepared for the changes. And embrace it as well'.

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Tony & Aine, Barnardo's



Family time arrangements can be challenging but also bring benefits

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We did family time for the first six months. It was difficult at times as we had a newborn baby and had an agreement to be at family time three times per week. For those three days we found the best part of our day was taken up, which made it difficult to get into a routine, and it was difficult to be able to do things such as baby groups as they were on at the same time. As our little boy got older and had developed a strong bond with us it became more difficult as he was more aware of us not being there – he would look for us, so we would get a phone call to pick him up as mum was unable to settle him. A positive though was that we formed a good relationship with birth mum and felt lucky that she was not challenging the adoption.”

Karl & Adam, ARC Adoption North East

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All the training provides you with information about what is involved but nothing can honestly prepare you for the real thing. Having to travel multiple times a week and hand your little one over to a social worker is an awful feeling and at times, you do feel like you are not in control and a little bit helpless. We initially struggled with this, but also understood the importance of family time and the requirements behind it, knowing that it was the right thing for little one. We coped with this by utilising this for some 'our time'. Going for a nice walk to reflect or nipping for a coffee. The whole process is extremely demanding, but this allowed us to check in on each other which helped us to cope.

Adam & Naomi, ARC Adoption North East (adopted twice through EP)

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We are able to talk about birth parents first hand because we got to know them a bit and can share first hand anecdotes with our children. This has been especially important with our eldest as he talks about them and we can share things with him. For example, his birth mum would bake cakes sometimes and send some for us, and she spoke about sports she liked in relation to clubs A was doing. It certainly wasn't easy, but the positive impact it will have on our children and for their future, outweighs anything else for us.

Rachael & Paul, Adoption Matters (pictured below right)

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Some final words on adopting via the Early Permanence pathway

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Firstly, we really believe that (for couples) having a strong relationship is key, or for single adopters having a strong network. You need to be able to spot the signs of burnout in each other; having a newborn baby is stressful enough but the additional emotional and physical requirements of EP can really take a toll and you need to be able to support each other.

Having a supportive network and workplace is also important - we couldn't keep up with our friends and some family for the first few weeks because it was all consuming but we knew they understood.

Secondly, there is no amount of preparation that can make you comfortable with the uncertainty of EP placements. There is an element of endurance needed - to get through the periods of time in between meetings and court dates, where you feel helpless. Keeping the child's care as a priority helped quieten some of the worries, and trusting in the teams around you helps you stay resilient.

All this being said, Early Permanence led us to our beautiful boy and we feel so lucky to have been there from the start, able to tell him his full story and be his comfort and security right from the beginning.

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Alex & Ellie, Yorkshire Adoption Agency



What next? Are you interested in learning more?

If the advice shared by adoptive families in this guide has inspired you to learn more about Early Permanence or adopting, VAAs in your local area will be delighted to help you further.

Agencies host regular information events which will help you to find out more about adoption and the support available, and consider if it's right for you. Agencies also offer the opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with a team member, who will be able to talk you through the process and answer any questions you may have.

A list of agencies can be found via the CVAA agency finder in the list below or on the next page of the advice guide.

Useful links and further information on adopting:

- CVAA agency finder for a list of all VAAs - click [here](#)
- Information on why to adopt with a VAA - click [here](#)
- First4Adoption website - click [here](#)
- Adoption UK Charity website - click [here](#)
- You Can Adopt podcasts - click [here](#)

Useful information on Early Permanence:

- [EP National Practice Standards](#)
- [The Coram Centre for Early Permanence](#)
- [Barnardo's Fostering & Adoption Podcast with Tony, Aine and Helen](#)
- [Adoption Focus Podcast Mike & Caroline adopting via Early Permanence](#)



Early Permanence: How Your Social Worker Will Support You

A friendly guide for Early Permanence carers

Early Permanence (EP) gives babies and young children the chance to experience stability as early as possible. As an EP carer, you'll be offering a nurturing home while the courts make decisions about a child's long term future — and your social worker is here to walk alongside you every step of the way.

1. Getting You Ready for Early Permanence

Your social worker will make sure you feel informed, confident and supported before a child comes to live with you. This includes:

- Talking through what EP involves — both the fostering element and the possibility of adoption.
- Helping you prepare your home, including any safety checks, baby equipment and practical arrangements you may need.
- Making sure all the right paperwork is in place, like sharing your assessment (PAR) with the child's team and contributing to Regulation 25a information.
- Working with the Local Authority so they can formally approve you as EP foster carers. Some VAAs can grant this approval themselves, others can't. Your social worker will guide this process for you.

You won't be expected to navigate this alone — they'll explain things in a clear and manageable way.

2. Helping You Welcome a Child Into Your Home

Once you're linked with a child, your social worker will:

- Share everything known about the child's routines, needs, and background so you feel prepared.
- Check that the Local Authority has granted the ADM (formal) decision — this is essential for a safe and regulated EP placement.
- Join you at the Placement Planning Meeting (usually within 72 hours of the child arriving), where everyone agrees how best to support you and the child.
- Make sure the Working Agreement is clear — including what support you'll receive, how decisions are shared, contact plans, and any financial help available.

Your social worker's goal here is to ensure you feel both supported and understood as you settle into your caring role.

3. Ongoing Support Once the Child Is With You

Your social worker will keep in close touch, in ways that feel purposeful but not overwhelming.

Regular Check Ins

They'll visit within one week to make sure you and the child are settling. After that, you'll agree a visiting routine together with a friendly mix of virtual and in person check ins. They will coordinate with the child's social worker and supervising social worker to avoid too many professionals visiting at once.

Emotional and Practical Support

They're there to:

- Listen to how you're feeling — EP can be a rollercoaster, and it's okay to need reassurance.
- Help you make sense of the child's behaviours, routines, or responses to family time.
- Offer guidance around fostering logs, attending appointments, or completing safe care records.
- Support you through the dual role of foster carer and possible future adopter — something that many people find emotionally complex, but deeply meaningful too.

Support Around Family Time

Your social worker will gently guide you through the child's family time plan, when the child will see members of their birth family in person. They will explain what to expect and advise you how to support the child before and after. They'll also offer space to talk about how you feel. This is very normal and very welcome.

4. Working With Everyone Involved

You can expect your social worker to help with the behind the scenes coordination so you don't have to worry about it.

They'll:

- Liaise with the child's Local Authority team.
- Attend relevant meetings or debrief you if their attendance isn't appropriate.
- Ensure essential documents (like the ADM letter, Reg 25a paperwork, family time plan and safe care plan) are added to your file.

5. When Adoption Becomes the Plan

If the Local Authority and courts decide adoption is the final plan, your social worker will:

- Support you as the placement transitions from fostering to adoption.
- Guide you through the adoption medical, paperwork and any additional meetings.
- Help you understand when and how you can apply for the Adoption Order. The application can be made once it has been agreed by the child's social worker and supervising social.
- They'll continue to be a calm, steady presence throughout.

If the final plan is for the child to be returned to their birth family rather than adopted, your social worker and other professionals will be there to support you.

6. You Are Never Doing This Alone

Being an Early Permanence carer is an incredibly important and compassionate role. Alongside the joy, there can be a lot of uncertainty — and that's exactly why your social worker is here.

They're here to:

- Listen without judgement.
- Celebrate the small wins with you.
- Offer honest guidance.
- Keep you and the child at the centre of every decision.

You will be doing something extraordinary, and your social worker will be with you every step of the way.

CVAA Members



Adopters for Adoption
England



Adoption Focus
Central England



Adoption Matters
North of England, Yorkshire and Humber, Stoke, Staffordshire and Shropshire



ARC Adoption North East
North East England, Cumbria and North Yorkshire



Barnardo's
Across the UK



Caritas Care
North West inc Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Cumbria



CCS Adoption
South West England



Coram Adoption
London and the surrounding areas



Coram IAC
Across the UK



Cornerstone UK
North East and East Midlands



Diagrama Adoption
London, Surrey, East and West Sussex and Kent



Family Care Adoption Services
Northern Ireland



Family Futures
London



Family Routes
Northern Ireland



Kibble Adoption
Scotland



Parents and Children Together (PACT)
Southern and Central England



Scottish Adoption and Fostering
Scotland



St Andrews's Children's Society
Scotland



St David's Adoption Service
Wales



St Margaret's Children and Family Care Society
Scotland



Yorkshire Adoption Agency
Yorkshire and surrounding areas



