

Adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand

Information for Parents Considering Adoption



**Ki te whei ao
Ki te ao Mārama
Tihei wa mauri ora!**

**To the glimmer of dawn
To the bright light of the day
There is life!**

The whakataukī talks of a life: a newborn, a pēpi, born of light. Blessings are bestowed on the beginning of life which rests in the whakapapa of pēpi.

In our role, it is a privilege to be part of the journey for pēpi, walking alongside whānau during this time.



What's in this booklet?

The purpose of this booklet is to introduce you to our service, give you an understanding of the expectations you can have when working with us and provide you with some initial information about adoption in Aotearoa.

Our Service

- Introduction
- About Oranga Tamariki and our guiding values
- What can you expect when you are working with your social worker?

Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to adoption

- Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to Adoption – promoting openness
- Working with parents, wider family and whānau
- Considering the views of the adopted person

Adoption Requirements

- Consenting to adoption
- Social workers responsibilities
- Information-gathering and the Privacy Act 2020
- Effect of the Adult Adoption information Act 1985

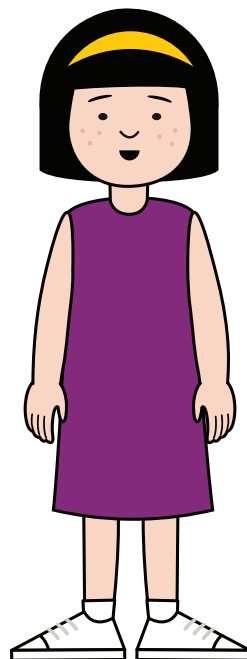
Available Support Services

Kupu Māori

Throughout this booklet you will see kupu Māori (Māori words) used and hear it in our korero (conversation) space.

Kupu we'll use

Pēpi	Baby
Tamariki	Children/Young People
Tamaiti	Child
Whānau	Family/Family Group
Oranga	Wellbeing



Introduction

Placing your tamaiti for adoption is a big decision to make.

Adoption is a permanent legal arrangement, which involves relinquishing your legal parental relationship so that the adoptive parents will have full and exclusive parental rights and responsibilities of te tamaiti.

Whichever option you choose for yourself and your pēpi, it is important to be well informed of your options.

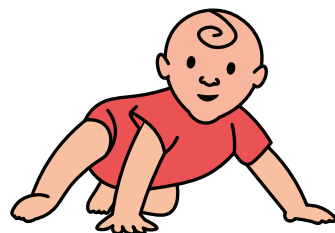
You have a right to help and support through this time. We encourage you to involve anyone you trust throughout this process.

You can change your mind at any time until the signing of consent and take as long as you need to make the decision. We are very happy to discuss all parenting options with you.

If you do not already have a social worker from the adoption service working with you, your first step should be to contact us.

Call 0508 326 459 and ask to be put in touch with an adoption social worker near you.

Your social worker will be able to answer your questions and provide further information and support.



About Oranga Tamariki

Oranga Tamariki is the government agency involved in the adoption process to ensure the best interests of tamariki are upheld and to safeguard the rights of tamariki.

We have statutory and professional obligations to promote the wellbeing and interests of te tamaiti. We do this by working with you and your whānau relationally and inclusively.

We have a practice framework which encourages advocacy, facilitates best practice and holds us to account for our professional obligations.

Our Guiding Values



WE PUT TAMARIKI FIRST
We will challenge when things aren't right for the child.

WE BELIEVE AROHA IS VITAL
It keeps us focused on what is right.

WE RESPECT THE MANA OF PEOPLE
We listen, we don't assume, and we create solutions with others.

WE ARE TIKA AND PONO
We do what we say we'll do.

WE VALUE WHAKAPAPA
Tamariki are part of a whānau and a community.

WE RECOGNISE THAT ORANGA IS A JOURNEY
We understand the long-term impact of our actions today.

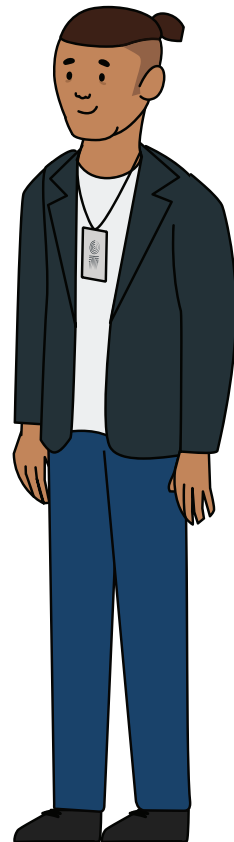
Working with your social worker

What can you expect when working with your social worker?

Your social worker will talk with you about your options and what support is available. They will encourage you to take your time to explore all options open to you, your family and whānau, and your pēpi.

You'll discuss what adoption involves, the adoption process and what you might expect should you proceed with an adoption plan. You will be provided with the opportunity to explore how adoption will affect you, your pēpi and your relationship with each other in the future.

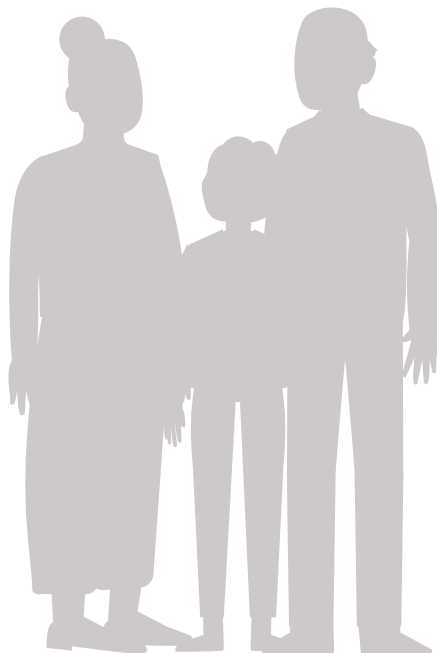
You are in control of the decision-making process and we won't act without your knowledge or consent. The decision to proceed with an adoption plan can only be made by the parents/legal guardians of te tamaiti. We will support you to consider your options, involve your family, whānau, hapū and iwi, and to make well-informed choices.



What do we need to do?

We must:

- support you to make well-informed choices about the future care arrangements for pēpi
- ensure the range of options for the care of your pēpi is fully explored
- involve both parents and wider family, whānau, hapū and iwi in decision-making and planning wherever possible
- discuss the short and long-term implications of each parenting option for all parties concerned – particularly the long-term impact on pēpi.



What will we kōrero about?

Your social worker will talk with you about:

You and your family or whānau circumstances:

- pregnancy and health
- antenatal classes
- accommodation and income support
- personal plans and aspirations
- personal reasons that have led you to consider adoption
- family, whānau, hapū and iwi relationships, involvement and support
- relationship between parents and respective family, whānau, hapū and iwi.

The options of permanent care for pēpi, including what adoption means:

- the relevance of whakapapa and whanaungatanga
- your reasons for considering adoption
- the option of care with either parent's family/whānau, hapū and iwi
- key differences between parenting options
- the future needs and interests of pēpi and effects of adoption
- lifelong and intergenerational aspects of adoption
- common emotional responses experienced by parents after childbirth.

The adoption process:

- the understanding of different decision points
- gathering of family history and/or whānau whakapapa
- how adoptive whānau or family selection works
- care of pēpi when born
- consulting a lawyer – signing consent to adoption
- meeting with adoptive applicants and possible agreement for future contact
- what happens when pēpi is placed with their adoptive parents
- grief and loss after pēpi moves to their adoptive parents
- post-placement support
- access to information and the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985
- the implications of DNA on the confidentiality of family information in the future.

Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to Adoption

Promoting Openness

Most adoptions in Aotearoa New Zealand today are 'open adoptions'. This means that information is shared and both birth and adoptive parents (and wider family and whānau) maintain an ongoing connection and relationship.

In many situations birth parents continue to have a part in the life of te tamaiti. The nature of the relationship is set out in a contact agreement. Your social worker will talk with you about contact agreements which are not legally binding.



Frequency of contact

Open adoption is now usual practice. The frequency of contact ranges from exchange of information to regular visits with you, extended family, siblings and relatives.

This means that:

- **adopted tamariki grow up remaining connected to their birth families, maintaining meaningful relationships and have ongoing access to important information about themselves**
- **the identity of adopted tamariki is strengthened by seeing and relating to people of similar origins**
- **adopted tamariki can obtain direct answers from their family and whānau as to why they were adopted**
- **adoptive parents can obtain important health and background information and strengthen their ability to provide for the identity needs of te tamaiti**
- **parents know what has happened to te tamaiti and maintain a connected relationship if visits are regular.**

Choosing adoptive parents

Parents choose the whānau or family who will adopt their pēpi.

You'll be given information about a variety of families who have all been to our adoption education and preparation programme, and who have been assessed as having the ability to provide a loving and safe home for your pēpi.

Prospective adoptive parents prepare profiles of themselves containing full information which you will have the opportunity to view at a later stage in your decision making. When considering adoption, there is much to talk with your social worker about, prior to this step.

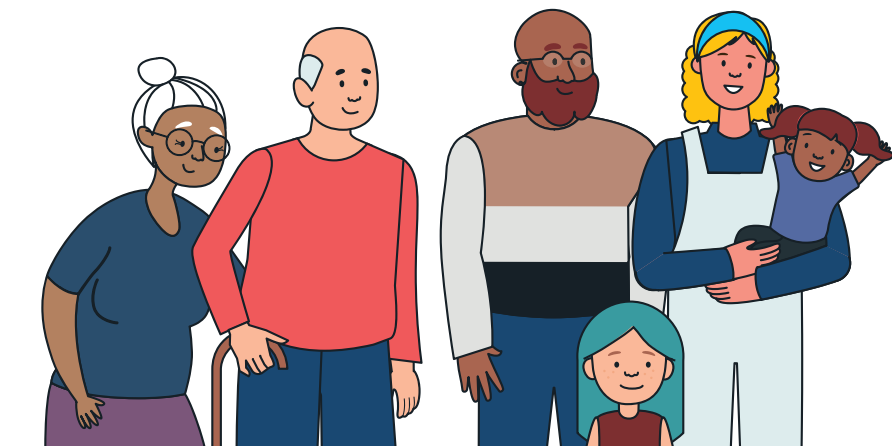
You'll be given plenty of time to look carefully for a family that feels like the best fit for your pēpi. You're advised to involve your own family, whānau and friends in this important decision.

Support when meeting prospective parents

You'll be supported to meet with the family or whānau you select after your pēpi is born.

Giving birth can be an overwhelming experience and you're likely to need time and emotional space to consider your parenting options at this time.

We know that once pēpi is born, this is often a time of reconsideration of any plans that may have felt firmly made prior to the birth. At this stage no consent has been legally signed and all parenting options remain available.



Working with parents, wider family and whānau

A decision to place your pēpi for adoption is a life determining one for te tamaiti, you as the parent, wider family, whānau, hapū and iwi, and generations to come.

Adopted adults have told the Adoption Service that being open about the identity and the circumstances of both parents and conception is less detrimental to the adopted person than withholding this information or creating stories that may not be true.



Working with the birth father

You may be unsure about who the father of your pēpi is and may have difficulty talking about this. Your social worker will need to ask you to provide information about the conception circumstances of te tamaiti.

If either parent does not want personal contact with the other, the social worker can assist with contacting the other parent directly. The social worker can work with you both separately, helping you to navigate through issues as they arise.

If you are the mother, you may be reluctant to disclose information about the father of your pēpi for a number of reasons. Encouragement is given to provide any information possible about the father. This information will form the birth history of te tamaiti. If information is not provided about the father, this may delay or jeopardise the adoption process and create uncertainties about the long-term care of te tamaiti.

If there are safety concerns or difficult dynamics regarding either parent or wider family members

it might be hard talking about your experience, however if we are aware of the circumstances, we can support you to work out a path forward, ensuring safety is maintained when needed.

Whether or not a father is a guardian, (see adoption requirements information) we must make every effort to involve him and his family in the planning for the future of te tamaiti.

The birth father or his family may wish to parent te tamaiti or participate in decision making about the future permanent care of te tamaiti.

If you are the father of te tamaiti and your name has not been included in the birth registration process, your involvement in decision making will still have long term advantages for your pēpi. We encourage your participation in decision making about te tamaiti which may include consenting to the adoption if this is your decision.

Whānau support

We encourage and support parents to involve your whānau or family when considering adoption. They can provide you with emotional and practical support, and information about the whānau or family.

Wider birth family, whānau, hapū and iwi involvement contributes to more informed exploration of family, whānau, hapū and iwi options, better quality information for te tamaiti and opportunities to be connected as they journey through their lives if an adoption proceeds.

We will explore with you the benefits of a whānau or family meeting to consider planning for the care of pēpi.

Considering the views of the Adopted Person

Adopted adults are sometimes left with very little information regarding their whakapapa and early days of their life. They have told us that not having information or a connection to their history is a significant loss for them, leaving many unanswered questions as they endeavour to make sense of their history and journey.

We are listening to the voices of adult adopted people. Social workers have a responsibility to preserve the whakapapa of te tamaiti and record information about their whānau. We have learned that it is vital for adopted people to have access to knowledge about the genetic history of both parents and to know the circumstances of their parents' relationship and the decision making around their adoption.

This knowledge is personal to them.

Long term, as an adopted person, your tamaiti is considered to have rights and entitlements to the information that will be recorded on ministry and court records.

This is their history.

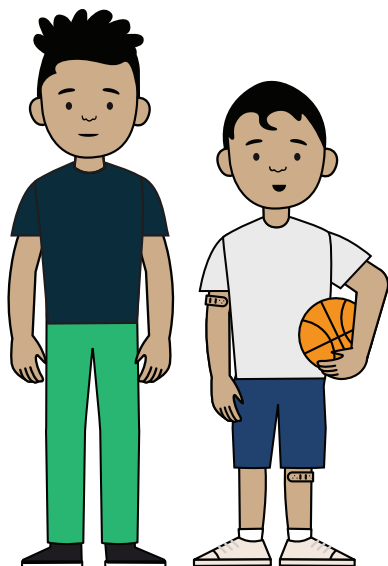


Adoption Requirements

Adoption should have the best interests of te tamaiti at its centre. This is consistent with the Children’s Convention and recognises the significant and permanent impact adoption has for te tamaiti.

The Children’s Convention, formally known as United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (or UNCROC), is an international treaty that sets out the rights of tamariki.

It highlights the rights of te tamaiti to identity, culture, family connection, participation, and information. It says that what is best for te tamaiti should be the first and most important thing to think about when making a decision about te tamaiti.



Consenting to adoption

Both parents who are guardians of te tamaiti must give their consent to adoption (section 7 Adoption Act 1955).

A mother is always a guardian.

If the father of te tamaiti has lived with the mother at any time during the pregnancy, or if he has his name on the birth registration, he is also a guardian and needs to give his consent to adoption.

Where a mother has decided to place te tamaiti for adoption, the involvement of the father earlier rather than later provides more certainty for her and any future adoptive family. Regardless of the father's guardianship status, the Court may require the consent of the father.

Where a father is a legal guardian, he will have the same rights and responsibilities in relation to the care of te tamaiti as the mother. The mother is expected to act jointly with the father on guardianship matters such as care, decision making and plans for future of te tamaiti including any adoption plan (sections 15 and 16 of the Care of Children Act 2004).

Once the consent form has been signed, it's almost impossible to have the decision reversed. You can only sign a consent to an adoption once pēpi is at least 12 days old. Many parents take longer than 12 days to come to a decision.

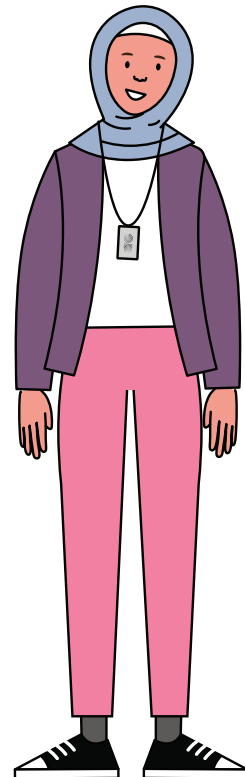
Social worker's responsibility

The social worker must provide an approval for te tamaiti to be lawfully *placed, received or kept in the home for the purposes of adoption* (except in certain specified cases).

Before giving approval, we consider all the relevant information about the situation and have assessed the applicants as eligible and suitable to adopt in principle. The parents will need to consent to the adoption prior to the approval being granted.

There has been increasing concern about adoption severing the links between tamariki and birth whānau. Whakapapa, whānau, hapū and iwi connections are considered to be fundamental to identity for Māori.

The Family Court will carefully examine how any adoption meets the cultural needs of te tamaiti and has an expectation that any tamariki Māori placed for adoption have their cultural identity acknowledged and supported.



Information-gathering and the Privacy Act 2020

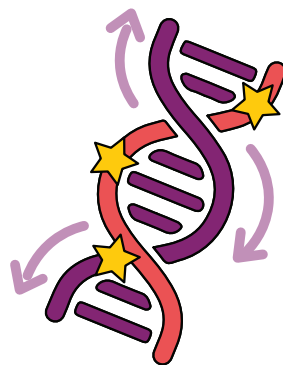
The Privacy Act, Principle 2 (1) states that where an agency collects personal information, it shall collect the information directly from the individual concerned. The information you share with us will be recorded indicating where this information has come from. Where we are provided with information about other people, we will record this information, indicating where it has come from.

We record all forms of information relating to our case work, including emails, text messages, phone calls and visual media such as photos.

Effect of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985

It is relevant for parents who place a tamaiti for adoption to understand that under the Adult Adoption Information Act:

- an adopted person is entitled to identifying information about their parents when they turn 20, such as their parents' names. They can also register a veto when they turn 19 to prevent parents from getting identifying information about them
- parents do not have an entitlement to place a veto of the release of their information – therefore there is no such thing as ongoing future confidentiality
- the availability of genetic information from DNA testing also means that adopted adults can increasingly gain identifying information about their genetic family.



It's your decision.

**Whatever you decide to do,
whatever others' opinions,
it's your decision to make.
No one has the right to
pressure you.**

Available Support Services

Having an unintended pregnancy can be distressing for some people, their partners or whānau. If you're worried about your safety, there are free support services that can help you. Please ensure your social worker is aware of any safety concerns you may have.

If you are in immediate danger, call 111 and ask for the police. The police can issue a temporary police safety order. This is for immediate, short-term protection.

If someone has been violent toward you or you feel unsafe, contact any of the following free support services.

Shine National Helpline

Free call 0508 744 633
24/7

Victim Support

Free call 0800 842 846
24/7

Women's Refuge

Free call 0800 733 843
24/7

Family Violence Information Line

Free call 0800 456 450
9am-11pm daily

Shakti

For migrant and refugee women

Free call 0800 742 584
24/7

OutLine Aotearoa

For all-ages rainbow community

Free call 0800 688 5463
6pm-9pm daily

Youthline

Free call 0800 376 633 or text 234
24/7

If you are less than 20 weeks pregnant, abortion is an option. We're unable to provide counselling about abortion. We will advise that all New Zealand residents access the free professional counselling, including pre-decision counselling, from their GP or from all abortion clinics. A referral from your doctor or family planning clinic may be required.

The place for information about abortion services in Aotearoa New Zealand is decide.org.nz.

They will be able to provide you with information about services, counselling, healthcare and the provider nearest to you.

You may also find the family planning website helpful [Abortion - Family Planning](#).

Having information about any benefits and payments you are entitled to through Work and Income, will be useful.

There will be other types of assistance from the community available, for example, through Plunket, mothers' groups, pre- and post-natal support, and in particular any specific support options relevant for Māori – especially Māori non-governmental organisation (NGO) agencies who provide support to expectant/new parents.

We can make referrals (or you can self-refer) to organisations that provide parenting support services in your area. Any referral that we make would be done with your knowledge and consent.

The Mental Health Foundation website is full of information and may help you locate services in your specific area.

To find a midwife in your area, check out FindYourMidwife.co.nz

National helplines

Need to talk? Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor.

Lifeline

0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or
free text 4357 (HELP)

Youthline

0800 376 633, free text 234 or
email talk@youthline.co.nz or online chat

Samaritans

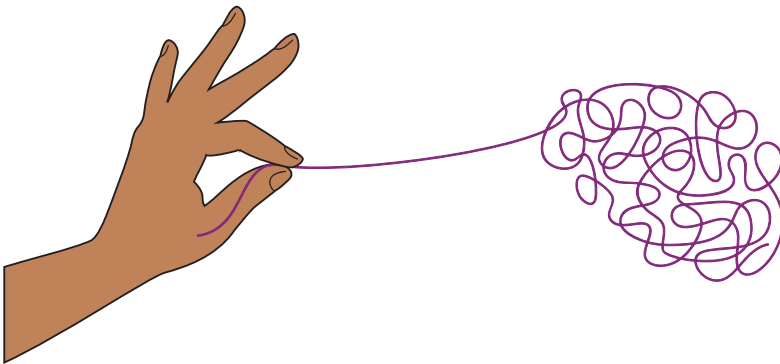
0800 726 666

Suicide Crisis Helpline

0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO).

Healthline

0800 611 116



Other specialist helplines

Alcohol and Drug Helpline	0800 787 797 or online chat
Are You OK	0800 456 450 family violence helpline
Gambling Helpline	0800 654 655
Anxiety NZ	0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY)
Seniorline	0800 725 463 A free information service for older people
Quit Line	0800 778 778 smoking cessation help
Vagus Line	0800 56 76 666 (Mon, Wed, Fri 12 noon – 2pm). Promote family harmony among Chinese, enhance parenting skills, decrease conflict among family members (couple, parent-child, in-laws) and stop family violence
Safe to Talk	0800 044 334 or free text 4334 for help to do with sexual harm. Available 24/7 and staffed by trained counsellors

Your social worker can make you aware of other services available in your specific area.

