



North East Secure Start Package Pilot

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Context

Since 2022, there has been a sustained reduction in prospective adopters coming forward nationally, with some regions particularly affected. This has created a growing gap between the number of children requiring adoption and the number of adopters available, leading to delays in children achieving permanence and reducing the quality and choice of matching.

The North East has been especially impacted. While housing costs are lower than in some parts of the country, rates of children entering care are higher, and recruitment of adopters has declined. Evidence suggests that financial instability and lack of confidence about affordability, particularly since the cost-of-living crisis, may be contributing factors.

The North East Secure Start Package is a time-limited pilot, funded by The Department for Education, in conjunction with Adoption England, designed to explore whether providing additional practical financial support in the early stages of adoption helps more people feel able to come forward.

FAQs for Prospective Adopters

1. What is the North East Secure Start Package?

The North East Secure Start Package is a pilot initiative designed to support people who are considering adoption in the North East.

Adoption agencies across the region already offer emotional, practical and professional support before, during and after adoption. For some eligible families, the Secure Start Package provides additional one-off financial support to help with practical costs in the early stages of adoption, when pressures can feel greatest.

The aim is to remove unnecessary barriers so families can focus on welcoming a child into a safe, stable and loving home.

2. Who is the Secure Start Package for?

The Secure Start Package is intended for people who could offer a permanent, loving home to a child but may be hesitating because of practical or financial concerns.

It is aimed particularly at people who may need support with early costs or time away from work. The following three eligibility criteria apply:

- Low disposable income (<£1k gross monthly income)
- Modest savings (<£2.5k)
- Limited or no paid adoption leave (<£2.5k gross monthly income)

Eligibility is assessed carefully and forms part of the wider adoption process.

3. Does this mean people are paid to adopt?

No. Adoption is never about money, and people are not paid to adopt a child.

The Secure Start Package exists to help address practical start-up costs that can make adoption feel out of reach for some families. These costs might include preparing a home, buying essential items, ensuring suitable transport is available, or taking unpaid time away from work to support bonding and attachment.

All adopters go through a robust, in-depth assessment process focused on motivation, suitability and a child's long-term needs.

4. Will this affect how I am assessed as a prospective adopter?

No. The Secure Start Package does not change the adoption assessment process.

All prospective adopters are assessed in the same way, with a strong focus on:

- motivation to adopt
- ability to meet a child's needs
- long-term stability and support networks

Financial support is considered separately and does not override professional judgement.

5. What support is available alongside the Secure Start Package?

All adopters are offered a wide range of support, including:

- preparation and training
- assessment and guidance from experienced practitioners
- ongoing support after a child is placed

The Secure Start Package is designed to sit alongside this wider support, not replace it.

6. How and when is the financial support provided?

For eligible families, the Secure Start Package provides a one-off financial support package of £10,000.

Eligibility is determined 'in principal' during an Initial Visit /Meeting with a social worker, and assessed later as part of the adoption process. Support is confirmed and issued once a match between a child and adopter has been approved and is intended to help with the early stages of the adoption journey.

7. What can the Secure Start Package be used for?

There is flexibility in how the support can be used, recognising that families face different practical challenges. This might include:

- preparing a home for a child
- buying furniture, equipment or essentials
- having suitable transport
- making home adaptations
- taking time away from paid work to support bonding and attachment

Families are trusted to use the support in ways that best meet their circumstances.

8. What if I'm eligible but the funding has already been allocated?

The pilot is limited to supporting 20 families across the North East. These packages will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis to families who meet eligibility criteria 'in principal' and go on to submit a formal 'registration of interest' with a participating agency.

A record will be kept of a further five families who are eligible so that they may still receive financial support should any of the 20 families withdraw from the process.

Outside of the pilot, adoption agencies will continue to provide all other forms of support to adopt, as usual.

9. What happens if my circumstances change or the adoption doesn't go ahead?

If circumstances change before a child is placed, eligibility for the Secure Start Package may be reviewed.

If a placement does not progress, any unspent funds should be returned, but there is no requirement for families to repay funds that have already been used.

10. Have any external stakeholders been consulted on this project?

In addition to the working collaboration between participating adoption agencies, Adoption England and the Institute of Public Care, Adoption UK was consulted and facilitated a focus group with adoptive parents to gather feedback during the development phase of the project. The campaign to support the promotion of the pilot was also developed with professionals who have a personal experience of adoption.

Final note

This pilot is about learning what works to support more children into permanent, loving families. Financial support is one element of a broader system of care, assessment and ongoing support.