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Introduction

This guide aims to assist adoption agency staff, children's social workers and other professionals in establishing good practice when they are involved in placing large sibling groups for adoption from the care system. It may also be useful reading for prospective adopters who are thinking of taking three or more siblings.

The guide examines how adoption agency staff and children's social workers handle the adoption process for large sibling groups, with an emphasis on practices and policies which may help or hinder prospective sibling group adopters and the children they wish to adopt. The objective throughout is to give professionals involved in sibling group adoptions clear indications of what constitutes good practice.

Although the guide looks at the decision to place siblings together or separately, it does not focus on the assessment of siblings and their relationships because this has already been covered in *Together or Apart? Assessing brothers and sisters for adoption* (Lord and Borthwick, 2008). Instead it focuses mainly on the recruitment, assessment and preparation of sibling group adopters, linking and matching, introductions, placement, support and the challenges and rewards of adopting a large sibling group.

While some of the recommendations will obviously have resource implications, it should be noted that many beneficial practices simply require a better understanding of what is possible and what is needed. Some aspects of best practice will be similar for all adoptions, but they may be critically important when placing three or more siblings because of the huge emotional, financial and practical commitment required of sibling group adopters. When complex issues could be addressed in various ways, the guide simply highlights factors that need to be considered by adoption agencies.

The guide is based on the findings of a unique study, *Adopting Large Sibling Groups: The experiences of adoption agencies and adopters*, which was undertaken by Hilary Saunders and Julie Selwyn at the Hadley Centre, University of Bristol, from 2009 to 2010, and was published by BAAF in 2011. This was the first study to examine the experiences of adopters parenting a large sibling group, and present the views of social workers engaged in recruiting and supporting such adopters. A key aim of the study was to identify what constitutes good practice in placing

large sibling groups for adoption, and the recommendations contained in this guide are largely based on the findings. However, the guide also takes account of other research on siblings, particularly research on siblings in the care system and in adoptive families. Where appropriate, references are also made to the 2011 Adoption Statutory Guidance (ASG) and Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS), the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (AAR) and the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (ASSR) and *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling delay* (published by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2012).