

User guide

For adopters

Version 1.5 – May 2022

Link Maker Systems

support@linkmaker.co.uk

www.linkmaker.co.uk

0800 368 8549



Contents

Introduction.....	3
Before you start.....	4
Questions about access.....	5
Registering for a Link Maker account.....	7
Registering through your social worker.....	7
About your homepage.....	8
Managing your profile settings.....	8
Connecting social workers.....	9
Searching child profiles.....	10
Notifying a social worker.....	11
Showing interest in a child profile.....	11
Managing incoming expressions of interest.....	12
Using the 'Interest & discussions' page.....	12
Indicating that a case is progressing to panel.....	13
Indicating a match has been made.....	13
Deleting your adoption profile.....	14
Managing your alert settings.....	14
Managing your account settings.....	15
Using community features.....	15
Finding further help.....	15

Introduction

Link Maker increases placement choice for children awaiting adoption, creates a UK-wide pool of available adopters, and improves the use of data and collaboration between local authorities and independent adoption agencies. Family finding features are available to prospective adopters with a DBS check (or equivalent) from a UK agency.

This user guide is aimed at prospective adopters joining Link Maker, or existing adopters who already have a Link Maker account. It gives a quick overview of the features Link Maker has to offer and how it might support your family-finding.

As a prospective adopter, you can use Link Maker to create and manage an adoption profile that can be made available to social workers across the UK. You can work in tandem with your agency to identify possible matches by connecting your account to your social workers.

Link Maker provides a safe and secure environment to search child profiles and start enquiries; you can show interest in potential placements and start discussions.

You can use Link Maker's community features to get advice and support from other adoptive families and social workers and you'll have access to the Adoption UK forums.

The features discussed within this user guide are the full family-finding features of Link Maker. A small number of agencies do not provide these features for their adopters, and in these cases the the features can be purchased individually with a one-off payment. To find out more please [contact us](#).

For further help and support, view contact us via our [contact page](#), or call our support team on 0800 368 8549.

Please note that all names and images shown in this user guide are purely fictional and are used for training purposes only. Any resemblance to actual persons, is purely coincidental.

Before you start...

Link Maker is designed to help adopters be involved in family-finding, but 'adopter-led' matching isn't for everyone. Sometimes the process can be frustrating and draining, and you may prefer your social worker to use Link Maker on your behalf – they can do everything you can.

Plan your family-finding with your social worker. Make sure you understand each other's expectations, to avoid any frustration and misunderstanding. As well as general points (such as how often you will meet together), we suggest the following topics in relation to family-finding on Link Maker:

- **Your profile.** Review your profile together - is it a good representation of you? Your social worker has the advantage of seeing other families' profiles, and can help make sure yours covers all of your strengths.
- **Showing interest.** Is your social worker happy for you to show interest in profiles yourself, or will they do this on your behalf? Do they expect you to inform them before you show interest? How many expressions of interest do they feel it is appropriate for you to have at one time (up to the limit of 5 on Link Maker)? There is no 'one-size-fits-all' with any of these questions, and your social worker's advice might change over time... keep talking.
- **Contacting children's social workers.** Make sure that you know your social worker's preference - they may be happy for you to have direct contact, but will often prefer to have a discussion themselves first. Children's social workers will have their own views - some will be glad to talk directly to you, while others will only want to talk to your social worker. Make sure the right people are in touch, but only discuss a child if you know that both social workers are comfortable with this.
- **Chasing for updates.** Once a discussion is underway, weeks or even months can go by before you receive an update. There can be a lot of complex issues holding things up; medical assessments, legal processes, ongoing discussions with other families. It is reasonable that you should be kept in the loop, and your social worker will advise you on how soon and how often to ask for an update, and whether you or they should do this.

In any situation, if in doubt, ask your social worker. They are there to support you.

Questions about access

Why can't I see more children?

Adopters do not see all children on Link Maker. Family-finders carefully decide which adopters should see each profile for two main reasons:

- a. To prevent a large number of adopters hoping for a match with the same child, when all but one family will be disappointed. The matching process is difficult enough, and the more often hopes are raised and dashed, the harder it is for adopters.
- b. To ensure they can properly consider the adopters who show interest and respond to them in a considerate way. There are only so many adopter profiles a family-finder can, or needs to, consider in order to move towards an appropriate match.

Doesn't this limit choice for children?

No, family-finders can always search all adopters based on anything in their profiles, according to what they think is important for the child. They may approach any number of adopters of their choice, regardless of whether the child's profile is advertised.

Doesn't this cause delay for children?

There is no reason that profiling a child cautiously at first should cause delay. Adopters typically show interest quickly when a profile is made available, and if enough potential links have not been found then the search can be widened instantly.

What determines which adopters can see a child profile?

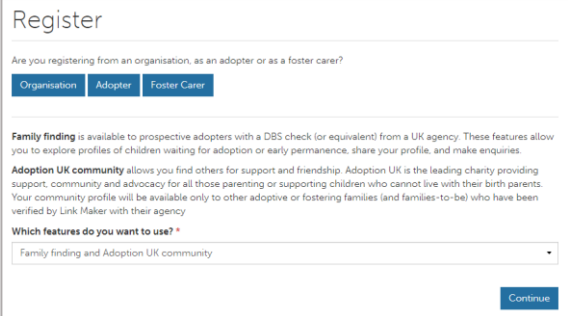
This depends on what a child's social worker thinks is most important for the child. Family finders avoid making profiles available to adopters that they are not yet ready to consider, as it creates unnecessary work and upset.

With this in mind, there are several ways to choose which adopters can see a profile:

- Where a child might attract a great deal of interest, their profile may be kept completely hidden. The family-finder would make their own selection of adopters they would like to consider.
- In the first few days of a search, a family-finder may make a profile available only to adopters that meet certain criteria. They may want to initially consider families that can meet certain needs, or that reflect a child's ethnicity for example.
- Profiles can be shown to adopters based on where they live. For example, a match might ideally be sought within a 50 miles radius for support reasons, or avoided in certain areas where a security risk may exist. These boundaries can be adjusted quickly where appropriate to avoid delays in finding a match.
- A child might initially be profiled to adopters within their own agency, where applicable.
- Some agencies work in collaborative groups, and a profile may be made available to adopters from certain agencies as a step towards a wider search.

Registering for a Link Maker account

Creating a Link Maker account is easy. Visit the [Link Maker website](#) and click the 'Register' button in the top right-hand corner. Click the 'Adopter' button and select which features you would like to use in the drop-down. To register for family finding, select 'Family finding and Adoption UK community'.



The screenshot shows the 'Register' page. At the top, it asks 'Are you registering from an organisation, as an adopter or as a foster carer?' with three buttons: 'Organisation', 'Adopter', and 'Foster Carer'. Below this, there is explanatory text for 'Family finding' and 'Adoption UK community'. A dropdown menu is labeled 'Which features do you want to use?' and currently shows 'Family finding and Adoption UK community'. A 'Continue' button is at the bottom right.

Next, enter basic details to create your account, including your name, email address, chosen username and password. You will be sent an activation link through email, to ensure the email address you supplied is correct.

Continue to enter your personal details to create your account. If you are an adopter in the approval process, you may not yet be approved for specific needs. In these instances, choose 'No preference' or 'Would discuss', whilst creating your profile, where applicable. The profile can then be amended at a later date.

Once you have created your profile, your account will need to be verified with your LA/agency. This process can take up to five working days. During this time, you will still be able to access community features ([see later section](#)). Once your account has been verified you can begin using Link Maker's family finding features.

Registering through your social worker

Your social worker can create your adoption profile for you, saving you time. You will receive an email asking you to register for a Link Maker account, which will be directly linked to your adoption profile. As your social worker has invited you, your account will be automatically verified, meaning you can start using Link Maker's family finding features straight away.

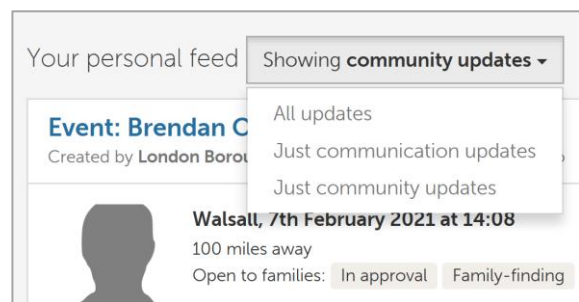
Being connected to a social worker enables you to communicate about potential matches, and notify them of any child profiles that interest you ([see later section](#)).

About your homepage

You have access to a number of features and quick links from your homepage. A prominent aspect, at the top of your homepage, is the 'Featured children' section. Certain hard to place children are 'featured' here by Link Maker admins.

Below the 'Featured children' section, you can find your homepage feed. The homepage feed provides up-to-date information on community and communication updates, as well as any Link Maker announcements that may concern you.

Use the homepage feed filter to determine what information you would like to see. Communication updates show recent activity for your cases. You can also find recent news and updates from Link Maker here. To return to this page from any other pages, click 'Home' in the top menu.

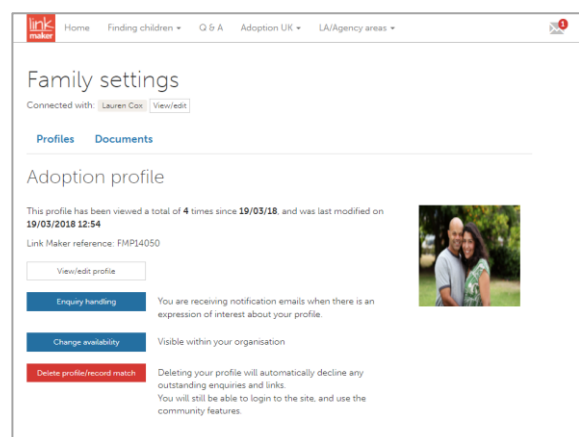
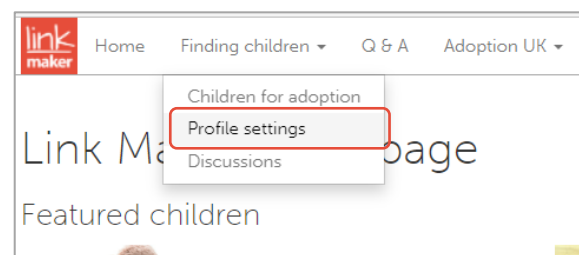


Managing your profile settings

All settings relating to your adoption profile can be found in one place: your family settings page.

To manage your settings, go to the 'Finding children' menu and choose 'Profile settings'. Here, you can view and edit your profile, manage your availability and find any documents linked to your case. You can also see how many views your profile has had since its creation.

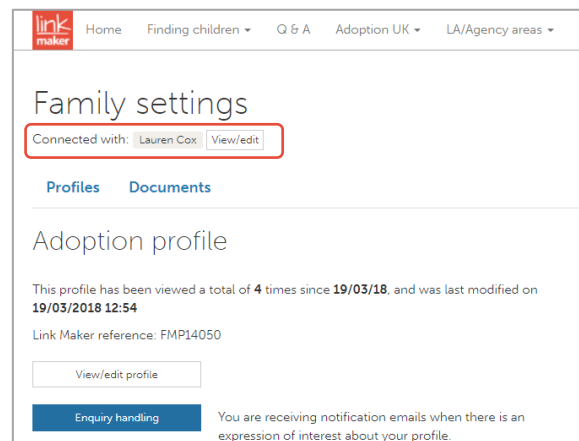
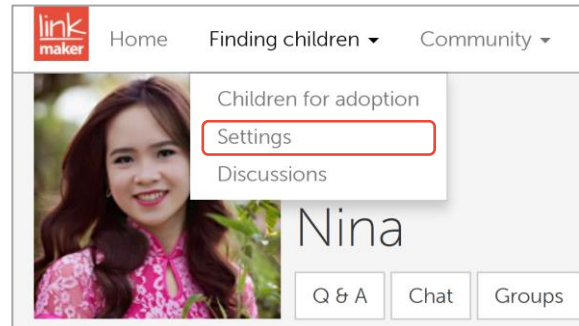
You can connect a social worker to your account and manage their settings from this page ([see next section](#)).



Connecting social workers

Through Link Maker, you can communicate easily and effectively with your social worker in a safe and secure environment. Social workers from your LA/Agency can be connected directly to your adoption profile, enabling you to notify your social workers of any child profiles that you are interested in ([see later section](#)).

To connect a social worker to your account, go to the 'Finding children' menu and select 'Profile settings'. Next, click the 'View/edit' button next to the 'Connected with' section at the top of the page. If you were invited to register by your social worker, you may find that they are already connected to your account.



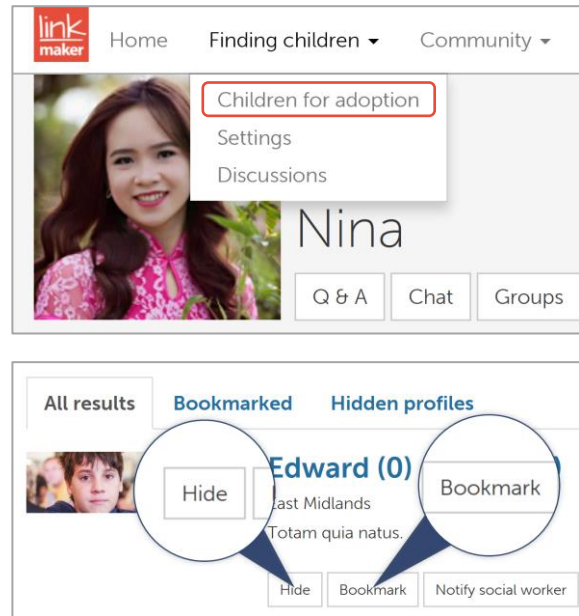
Searching child profiles

Once your account has been activated and verified, you can begin searching child profiles for potential matches. In the 'Finding children' menu, choose 'Children for adoption'. Here you will find your search dashboard where you can search child profiles by certain criteria, see newly added profiles, bookmark profiles you are interested in and hide those you are not. Your best potential matches, based on your profile, will appear first in this list.

To bookmark a profile, click the 'Bookmark' button on either the search results page, or the child profile. You can find your bookmarked profiles in the 'Bookmarked' tab.

Alternatively, if you know you are not interested in certain profiles, you can click the 'Hide' button. Hidden profiles will no longer show in your search results, but will still be accessible in the 'Hidden' tab if you wish to revisit them.

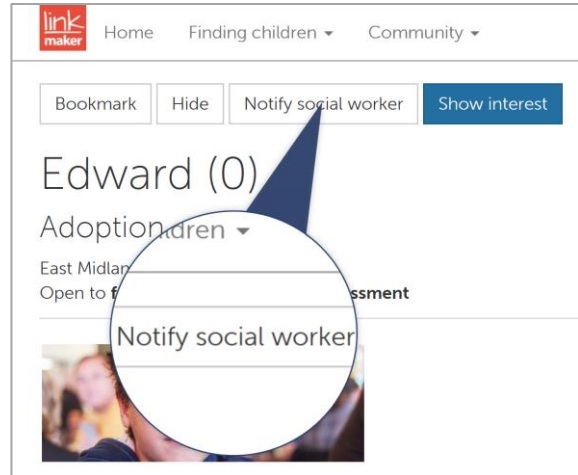
If you are connected to a social worker, you can notify your social worker about a child profile you are interested in ([see next section](#)).



Notifying a social worker

If you have connected a social worker to your account ([see previous section](#)), then you can communicate with your social worker directly about child profiles.

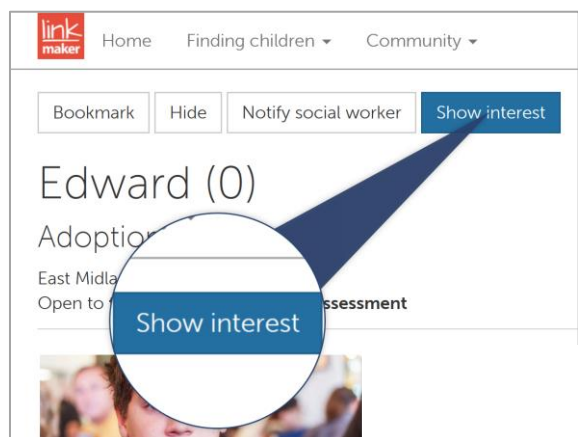
To notify your social worker of a child profile you are interested in, click the 'Notify social worker' button on the profile and choose a connected social worker from the drop-down list. This social worker will be notified and will be able to view the child profile and express interest on your behalf.



Showing interest in a child profile

Once you have found a child profile you are interested in, click the 'Show interest' button found on the child profile.

Showing interest in a profile will invite the social worker for the child(ren) to view your profile. They will have the option to start a discussion with you to exchange messages and documents. Please ensure you have the support of your LA/agency before showing interest in profiles.

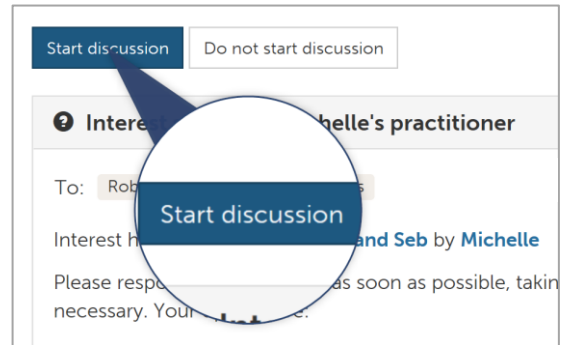


Once interest has been shown, it will appear on your 'Interest & discussions' page ([see later section](#)). You can withdraw your interest by clicking 'Withdraw interest' in the discussion itself. The child(ren)'s social workers will be notified of this change.

You can show interest in up to five profiles at one time. If you have not received a response within two weeks, you and/or your social worker will be able to contact the social worker for the child directly for an update. From that point, it will no longer count towards the limit of five profiles.

Managing incoming expressions of interest

If your profile has been made available to other social workers, you might start receiving incoming expressions of interest. You have the opportunity to view the child profile and can choose whether to start a discussion by clicking either the 'Start discussion' or 'Do not start discussion' buttons.

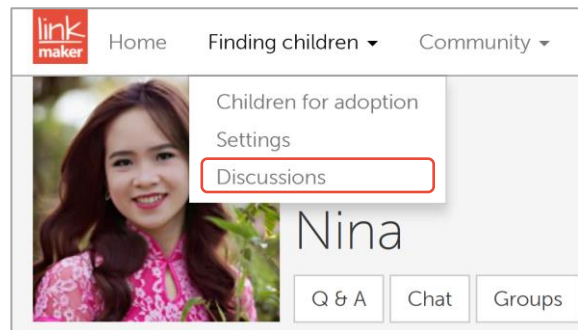


If you choose not to start a discussion, you will be asked to provide some feedback. Alternatively, if you choose to start a discussion, you will be able to exchange messages and documents with the child(ren)'s social workers.

Using the 'Interest & discussions' page

The 'Interest & discussions' page is a dashboard of all your enquires, meaning you can manage all discussions in one place.

To access the 'Interest & discussions' page, go to the 'Adoption' menu and select 'Discussions'. Alternatively, click the envelope icon shown in the right-hand corner, next to the 'Account settings'. This icon may appear with a red circle, indicating that you have discussions requiring your attention.



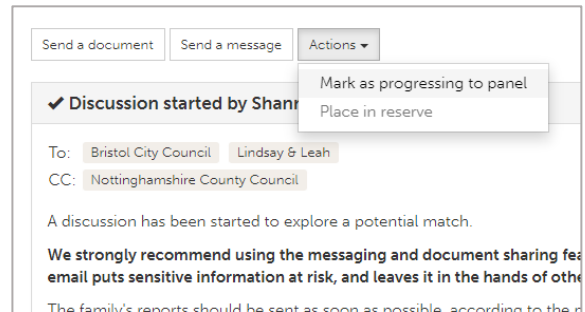
The page is separated into five tabs: 'Needs attention' for discussions that require an action; 'Discussions' for active conversations; 'Outgoing' for outgoing expressions of interest; 'Incoming' for incoming expressions of interest, and 'Past' for previously closed discussions.

On the 'Interest & discussions' page, you can see all active discussions separated into four tabs: 'Needs attention' for those discussions that require an action; 'Discussions' for active conversations with children's social workers; 'Outgoing' for outgoing expressions of interest, and 'Incoming' for incoming expressions of interest. You can find all your previously closed discussions in the 'Past' tab.

Indicating that a case is progressing to panel

After a discussion has been started between you and a potential child(ren)'s social worker, the match may progress to matching panel.

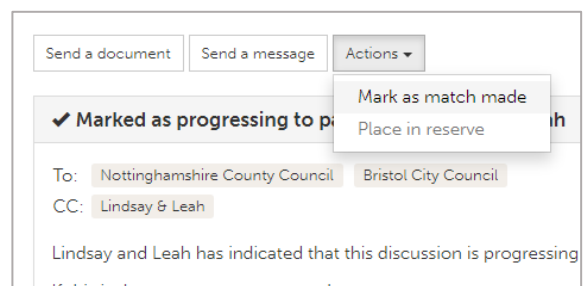
You can indicate this within the discussion by clicking the 'Actions' button and selecting 'Mark as progressing to panel'. The child(ren)'s social worker will be notified of this and your discussion will be updated.



Indicating a match has been made

Once a match has been made, simply go to the relevant discussion and click the 'Actions' button and select 'Mark as match made'.

If you are sure you are matched, your adopter profile will be deleted and you will no longer have access to Link Maker's family-finding features. You will still be able to use the community areas of the site, including the Adoption UK forums.



Deleting your profile will remove all enquiries and links and is a permanent action. Within 20 days of the match being confirmed by both parties, all identifying information held on your profile will be deleted and only statistics on how our system performed will be retained.

Deleting your adoption profile

Deleting your adoption profile will automatically decline any outstanding enquiries and links, and will permanently remove your profile. You will still be able to login to the site and use the community features including the Adoption UK forums, but you will no longer be able to use Link Maker's family finding features.

To delete your family finding profile, go to the 'Finding children' menu and select 'Settings'. On this page, click the 'Delete matching profile' button.

Alternatively, go to the 'Account settings' menu and select 'Delete information', which will also give you the option to delete your profile. Please be aware that deleting your profile is a permanent action and cannot be undone.

Managing your alert settings

You can receive your Link Maker notifications, as well as new child profile alerts, through email or SMS. To manage your alert settings, go to the 'Account settings' menu and select 'Manage alert settings'.

You can be alerted via multiple email addresses, including your primary email address. To add additional email addresses, click the 'Manage email alerts' button and enter the required details. To enable SMS alerts, enter the applicable telephone number(s) and choose which alerts you want to receive via SMS, click the 'Manage SMS alerts' button.

You can receive alerts when new child profiles become available to you. You can tailor these alerts to meet your needs, to ensure you are only being alerted to profiles that are relevant to you.

To enable profile alerts, on the main 'Manage alert settings' page, choose 'enabled' for the 'Alerts for child profiles' field. Fill in criteria for the profiles you are interested in and save your settings to begin receiving alerts.

Alert settings

Family-finding - children

Use this page to control the email alerts you receive when new children's profiles are added to the site. Please set the parameters to below to govern which profiles you would like to receive emails for. You will need to set the criteria to cover the requirements of all of the families you are managing. If you do not want to use one of the fields, simply leave it blank.

Alerts for child profiles *

Only include children from

Min age

Max age

Managing your account settings

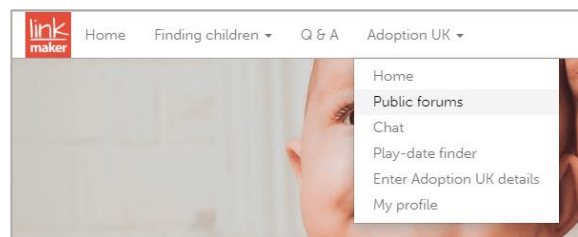
All settings relating to your account, rather than your profile, can be found in the 'Account settings' menu.

You can change your password, username or PIN, manage the agencies you are connected to, delete your matching profile ([see previous section](#)), manage your alert settings ([see previous section](#)), view our security information or logout of your account.

Using community features

With a Link Maker account, you can access Link Maker's question and answer boards, and the Adoption UK community. You can create a community profile and interact with others in all stages of the adoption process.

The Adoption UK community features include an extensive Adoption UK forum, a community chat section and a play-date finder. The Adoption UK community features can be accessed through the 'Adoption UK' menu.



Finding further help

For further help and support, simply click the 'Help' button in the top menu, next to the 'Account settings' menu. You can also seek advice and guidance from other adopters with our community features ([see previous section](#)). Alternately, call our support team on 0800 368 8549.