



# National Adoption Recruitment Criteria

July 2020

These criteria are endorsed by the Department for Education, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Adoption UK, CoramBAAF, RAA Leaders Group and the Consortium for Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

## Recruitment Criteria

1. All adopters must be willing to put the child and his/her needs first and foremost in all decisions affecting the child's welfare.
2. All adopters must be able to provide a loving, calm, emotionally stable environment for the child.
3. All adopters must be healthy and fit enough to keep the child safe, care and play with the child as they grow and support them into adulthood.
4. All adopters must be able to provide a stable, safe home with room for the child to play and sleep.
5. All adopters must be willing to respect the child's birth culture and family origins as an important part of the child's identity, providing information to the child as he/she grows up to explain their early life.
6. All adopters should be supported by family, friends or community who will welcome the child and support the adopter/s.
7. All adopters must be financially able to provide for the child's needs. If both parents work this includes one parent taking time from work in the first year to settle the child into the family.
8. Adopters must be legally resident in the UK for 1 year before becoming an adoptive parent.
9. Adopters must be over 21 years old.
10. Adopters and those sharing their home must have no convictions for sexual offences or crimes against children.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Housing - Do I need to own my own property? Do I need a spare bedroom to adopt? What if my extended family live with me?**

It is not essential to **own your own property** but if you don't then you will need to evidence that there is a reasonable lease or tenancy agreement on the property that you live in and that you have the means to access another property should that end.

Ideally you would have a **spare bedroom** for an adopted child. This is particularly important when adopting a slightly older child as relationships with existing children in the family can take time to settle down. It may be possible however to consider the placement of a very young baby with a family with no additional bedrooms (sharing with parents) so long as there was a clear plan to provide the child with a bedroom of their own or with a sibling in the future.

Living with **extended family members** can be beneficial and supportive for new parents but it will be essential those family members are a part of the assessment process and that they understand the needs of adopted children. This may mean that they attend a course for family members adopting and make themselves available for the time when the child will be introduced to the family.

### **What if my UK residence status is uncertain?**

We welcome enquiries from people who are UK residents, or who are domiciled in Britain. To adopt in England you must be legally resident in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, and have been so for at least 12 months. UK citizens living abroad cannot adopt a child from the UK.

EU nationals can consider adopting a child in the UK so long you or your partner have a fixed and permanent home in the UK and that you (and your partner if you have one) have lived in the UK for at least 1 year.

### **Infertility treatment – do I need to have finished treatment to start my adoption journey?**

People adopt for many different reasons and it is not essential to have explored having a birth child prior to adopting however for those who have embarked on fertility treatment first then the following advice is given.

It is important that if you have had fertility treatment that it has come to an end before starting your adoption journey. Adopting a child needs to be your priority and that will require you to have finally accepted that having a birth child is no longer an option. Many people who come to adoption due to infertility have accessed counselling following fertility treatments and this is viewed positively. Once treatment has ended we recommend that you take some time to come to terms with the fact that it has not resulted in a birth child. Some people can be ready to adopt within a few months and for others it will take longer. We would encourage you to discuss this with your adoption agency who will advise you on this depending on your personal circumstances.

### **Do I need to speak English?**

It is advisable for adoptive parents to be reasonably fluent in English so that they can advocate for a child once that child is placed and so that the concepts of adopting a child can be fully understood. We would recommend that you attend one of the readily available English courses prior to enquiring about adoption.

### **Can I adopt if I have a faith or follow a religion?**

Yes. Adopters can be of all faiths and none. Research has shown that faith and its inherent altruism and care for the vulnerable, is a great motivator for people to adopt.

Children who need to be placed for adoption come from many different cultures, backgrounds and religions and it is good if the family they are placed with reflects that. That means that adopters are welcomed if they have a faith or are from a variety of cultural and / or religious backgrounds.

Children needing families from certain cultural backgrounds wait longer than others for adoptive families and we would encourage adopters to consider adopting a child from an ethnicity, culture or religion other than their own.

### **Does it matter what my marital status is?**

Adopters are welcome whether they are single, married or in a long-term live-in relationship. We would expect that if you are in a relationship that you have lived together for at least 1 year at point of application and for there to be evidence that it was a stable and enduring relationship. Adopted children have often experienced considerable disruption in their lives and ensuring that your situation is stable is an important part of the assessment. Placing a child can challenge any relationship so there would need to be evidence that you have managed a variety of situations together. We also welcome applications from single people who have support from family, friends or communities.

**Will my sexuality or gender affect my chances of adopting?**

Adopters are welcome regardless of their sexuality or gender. The same criteria would apply as to heterosexual couples. We would expect the live-in relationship to have a duration of at least 1 year at point of application and for there to be evidence that it was a stable and enduring relationship. Adopters may also have transitioned in terms of gender. It would be important that the applicant was established in their gender identity and had a secure sense of self prior to application.

**What if I have a mental health condition?**

Many people have short periods of stress, depression or anxiety in their lives and whilst there would need to be discussion about how this has been managed this is unlikely to prevent you adopting a child. Some people have longer term mental health conditions which are well controlled with medication. There would need to be discussion about this and a medical would provide the agency with medical advice in relation to your ability to adopt a child. The main considerations will relate to the frequency with which you are unwell, how that manifests itself and who is there to offer support at such times. The focus for the adoption agency will always be to assess your ability to meet a child's needs in a consistent way and to consider how the stress of adopting a child will affect your mental health. There may be times when the agency feels that some one's mental health is not stable enough to parent an adopted child but that would be considered early on in the process with the input of medical professionals and the people who know you well.

**Can I adopt if I have health problems?**

Many people who adopt have medical conditions. Medical advice will be sought in relation to all medical conditions and the focus of discussion will relate to how well you are able to care for a child throughout childhood, the sort of support you have from a partner or other close family members or friends if you are unwell and consideration about the long term prognosis of your condition. The focus will be on considering how you can consistently meet the needs of a child throughout their childhood.

**Can I adopt if I have a disability?**

Many disabled people adopt a child successfully. The early part of the process of becoming an adopter will involve all adopters having a medical and the adoption agency would rely on that medical advice alongside consideration of your personal circumstances in determining your ability to consistently and safely parent an adopted child throughout their childhood.

**Can I adopt if I am overweight?**

Many adopters who are overweight successfully adopt children, but we do need to be sure that adopters are likely to remain healthy enough to parent a child into adulthood and that the child will have a healthy lifestyle too. This can be a sensitive issue, but it is one we will discuss with you and one that the medical you have will comment upon. Being considerably overweight presents higher than average risks to your long-term health and we would encourage you to actively seek help to lose weight in such cases, but the focus of the discussion will be about your ability to remain physically well and active enough to successfully parent an adopted child into adulthood.

### **What offences might prevent me from adopting?**

There are a limited number of offences that prevent you from adopting and these are offences against children and sexual offences. There may also be other offences that cause extreme concern depending on when they were committed, the severity of the offence, the circumstances and the current attitude to those offences. We would encourage you to be honest about any offences and discuss them openly with the adoption agency.

Many adopters are approved who have committed more minor offences. These may have been many years previously in youth or be a one off in a particular set of circumstances. Again, we encourage honesty about all offences committed so that these can be discussed fully. In the main they will not prevent people from adopting.

### **Can I adopt if I have pets?**

Yes, many adoptive parents have pets and there are known benefits to having pets in a family. The exception would be in relation to dangerous dogs and on rare occasions the number or type of pets in the household may require further consideration. There will be a need to determine that your pet is safe to be around children.

### **Finance – how long will I need to be off work after adopting a child? Can I adopt if I have debts? Can I adopt if I am unemployed?**

We recommend that at least one adopter has time off work following the placement of a child. A child will need time to build a relationship with their new family and it will take time for them to feel safe and secure. It is difficult to say how long this will take but 12 months is not unusual. If an older child is being placed and attends school then after a period of settling in it may be possible to work and still be there for the child at either end of the school day. On occasions a child may need a parent to be off work longer and financial support may be available from the placing local authority in such circumstances. For people who are self-employed and not entitled to adoption leave allowances then we would need to have a discussion about how to balance the need for work and offering a child the stability that they need early on in the placement.

Adopters may have **debts** but so long as these are understood and repayments can be managed alongside living expenses then this shouldn't be a problem.

We would encourage adopters to have considered how they will manage financially whilst taking time off work.

It is possible to adopt and be in receipt of unemployment **benefits** or other benefits and in some circumstances financial support may be available from the agency placing the child. There would need to be evidence of a stable lifestyle and the ability to manage on the income coming into the household.

Openness and honesty about financial pressures is encouraged right from the outset of your application.

**Am I too old to adopt?**

The only restriction on age is a lower age limit in that you have to be at least 21 to adopt. Other than that, the consideration will be your ability to parent a child into adulthood based on your health and the health of a partner if you have one.

**Can I adopt before considering having birth children? Can I adopt if I have birth children?**

You can adopt a child if you have birth children or before you consider having birth children. If before then it would be important for the adopted child to be settled before considering having birth children. If you already have birth children, it is usually the case that an adopted child placed would be the youngest in the family by around 2 years at the point the adopted child is being placed however there may be exceptions to this so we would encourage you to discuss your situation with the adoption agency.