



Policy on 'former partner checks' in prospective adopter assessments

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1. As part of the assessment process, Adopt London will routinely undertake checks with former partners. There is an expectation that people seeking to become prospective adopters will work with the agency to provide details of relevant former partners and that all applicants are informed of this at all stages of the adoption process, from initial enquiry through to panel presentation.
2. These checks will be undertaken where:
 - The applicant has lived with a partner in a significant couple relationship, whether or not that has involved jointly caring for children, and whatever the time period of the relationship.
 - The applicant has been married to, or parented a child, with a former partner, even if they were not living together at the same address.
 - The applicant has had a significant non-cohabiting relationship.
3. Consideration can be given to waive the requirement for completing a check in some circumstances. This can only be made following discussion with the assessing social worker but at the **discretion of the Recruitment & Assessment Team Manager** in the following contexts:
 - When the applicant has been an approved foster carer or adopter at some point since the end of the relationship, and the relevant fostering or adoption agency can confirm that they completed a satisfactory check with the former partner.
 - When contacting a former partner could put someone at risk of harm, for example when there was domestic abuse in the relationship. Where a decision is made to waive a former partner check for reasons relating to risk such as domestic abuse, efforts will be made to seek independent corroboration of the abuse sensitively.
 - When the former partner cannot be located despite reasonable efforts having been made to do this.
 - When the manager decides, having considered the information available, that a non-cohabiting relationship was not 'significant'. When making this decision they should consider how long ago the relationship was, the length of relationship, the quality of information received from other former partner checks, and the availability of

information from other sources such as referees to triangulate information provided by the applicant.

4. Checks should not be waived based on applicant preference because of a relationship ending acrimoniously or secrecy about adoption plans.
5. In any case where there is either a decision not to undertake a former partner check for reasons related to risk, or where a former partner does not engage with a reference request, an additional reference from a third party who has known both the applicant and the former partner should be sought to corroborate the information shared by the applicant.

6. The checking process

- Applicants to provide contact details, last known addresses, third party details or social media handles as most appropriate for making contact
- CoramBAAF have a Former Partner check template. This allows the former partner to request a conversation with the assessing worker.
- In most cases, a brief written response will be sufficient but further information may be requested if required via a phone call, virtual meeting, or in-person visit etc.
- If the partner cannot be traced, the assessing worker will try to verify the relationship and the reason for separation with at least one third party in order to triangulate the information provided by the person being assessed.
- Efforts to trace former partners, or a decision to waive a former partner check, should be recorded in section 5 of the Prospective Adopter Assessment.
- Former partner checks should be recorded in part 2 of the Prospective Adopter Assessment (*Other checks completed e.g. overseas checks where relevant*) and noted as CLEAR, or an outline of concerns provided.
- Applicants should reasonably be expected to proactively assist the assessor. This message should be clear from the point of initial contact with the agency.

7. Checks for relationships that ended a long time ago

Whilst it is reasonable to suggest that relationships from years ago are less relevant than more recent ones as people grow and change, this does not mean that the information held by a former partner for many years ago is irrelevant. Key areas to note are that:

- Arbitrary time periods do not promote safe practice and social worker judgement is necessary.
- Individual and/or group supervision should explore any possible anomalies and record why a reference is not sought if this is the agreed decision with the Team Manager.
- The reasons for not seeking a former partner check should always be recorded in section 5 of the Prospective Adopter Report.