



# Eligibility Criteria for Prospective Adopters

Document Title	Eligibility Criteria for Prospective Adopters
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## **1. Informed by Adoption England National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG)**

Adopt North East undertakes an annual review of the criteria that it uses to determine whether or not a person is eligible to adopt. It does so against the criteria agreed by the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group (NASRG) established by Adoption England. Whilst the Agency is not bound by the NASRG criteria, the criteria established by Adopt North East is heavily influenced and informed by the work of NASRG. Variation from the criteria recommended by NASRG is usually the result of local learning, need and context and developed to reflect the particular needs of the children and community that Adopt North East serves. It also takes into account the need for accessible and commonly understood phrasing to ensure clear communication to potential adopters.

## **2. Accurate at the time of Upload**

Adopt North East reviews its eligibility criteria on an annual basis. It reserves the right to make changes to the eligibility criteria at any point in time.

## **3. Accessible and Transparent**

The criteria are published on the Adopt North East website.

## **4. Core Eligibility Criteria for Prospective Adopters**

An individual or couple cannot apply for an assessment of their suitability to adopt unless they meet, or would meet, the core eligibility criteria to apply for an Adoption Order. The criteria are that:

- The prospective adopter(s) is at least 21 years old;
- At least one of the couple or the single prospective adopter is domiciled in a part of the British Islands or both of the couple or the single prospective adopter have been habitually resident in a part of the British Islands for a period of not less than one year ending with the date of the application for an adoption order; and
- Neither prospective adopter(s) nor an adult member of their household has been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence.

Applications will be considered from married couples, civil partners, unmarried couples or single people. In the case of joint applications, there is no minimum requirement on the length of the marriage/civil partnership/relationship, but the assessing social worker and Panel will need to be satisfied about the stability of the relationship.

## **5. The Criteria in Practice: Answers to Questions**

There are five 'Categories' that help organise the Frequently Asked Questions that articulate the eligibility criteria of Adopt North East. These are:

- **Home and Family Circumstances**
- **Identity**
- **Work and Finances**
- **Health**
- **Maintaining Relationships**

### **a) HOME AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES**

I live in rental accommodation?

You do not need to own your own property to adopt. You will need to be able to evidence that your landlord will allow you to care for a child/ren in your home and that, so far as is possible, your tenancy is secure to enable you to offer a stable home environment to an adopted child.

### **my home is not very big?**

You will need enough space to accommodate an adopted child. This is to ensure that an adopted child has their own space in order for them to feel settled and secure. This is usually their own bedroom. Where an adoption involves sibling children, the Agency may agree to the children sharing a room, dependent on age and stage of development. If you are unsure whether your home is big enough, do contact us to discuss this issue.

### **other adults live within my home?**

There can be many advantages to living with extended family or other adults. Adopt North East will need to meet with and discuss adoption with all the adult members of your household to understand the advantages and challenges for a child. We would want to make sure that a child would be able to build safe, positive and secure relationships.

### **Before I consider having a birth child?**

The most important consideration is that you and your family give the emotional space and time needed to settle an adopted child into your family before you try for a birth child.

### **I already have children that I care for?**

Many people applying to adopt have children that they already care for. Adopters with previous or current experience of caring for children have many of the skills required. Where an applicant has care of a child or children, Adopt North East will assess not only the suitability of the adopter but also the potential impact of adoption on child/ren already in their care.

### **I have adopted another child previously?**

Many applicant adopters have previously adopted. Where an applicant has care of a child or children, Adopt North East will assess not only the suitability of the adopter but also the potential impact of adoption on child/ren already in their care.

### **I have a pet?**

Pet owners can adopt. Adopt North East will however need to be sure that any pet that you own does not pose a threat to a child's health or safety. A report from a vet may be requested. You might also need to be willing to make changes to the routines and care that you have established with your pet/s to meet the needs of a child.

### **I am in a new relationship?**

Adopt North East requires that a couple relationship be a minimum of 12 months duration at the point of application. This enables the applicants to evidence that their relationship will provide a reasonable expectation that it will provide an adopted child with stability and consistent care.

### **I am single?**

Single people can adopt; many children are successfully parented by a single parent. A significant proportion of adopters are, for a range of reasons, single. Adopt North East will work with applicants who are single to identify who is within their support network and the contribution that the network would be able to make to the care of a child.

### **a relationship I was in has recently ended**

Adopt North East requires that you have stability in your personal life so that you would be able to provide an adopted child with the stability and consistent care that they need. If you are unsure, then do ask Adopt North East for advice.

### **I am in a couple relationship but not co-habiting**

Adopt North East requires that you have stability in your personal life so that you would be able to provide an adopted child with the stability and consistent care that they need. If you are in a non-cohabiting relationship, Adopt North East would be happy to discuss with you whether, for the purposes of assessment for adoption, the circumstances of your relationship mean that you should be assessed as a solo adopter or assessed as a couple.

## **b) IDENTITY**

### **I am not British?**

You do not need to be a British national to adopt. You can adopt if you can evidence that you have been legally resident in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for at least 12 months. If you are unsure, then do contact us to discuss this in more detail.

### **English is not my first language**

You will need some English language skills to be able to access services and advocate for an adopted child in your care. We would therefore strongly advise that you seek support to become reasonably fluent in English before applying to adopt. Adopt North East will support applicants who require help to understand some of the technical language involved in the adoption process with translation and interpretation.

### **I am LGBTQ+**

LGBTQ+ people are welcome to adopt. Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters, irrespective of your sexuality or gender identity. For applicants who have transitioned or are transitioning, Adopt North East requires that applicants have an established gender identity so that a child would have the

stability and consistency necessary to form attachments. We would be happy to discuss in confidence with you any issues of identity that may be relevant to adoption.

### **I am a person of faith?**

You can adopt if you are from a faith community. Children who need to be placed for adoption come from many different cultures, backgrounds and religions. Your adoption assessment will help you to explore whether you feel able to adopt a child who reflects a different faith, ethnicity or culture to your own.

### **I have a criminal record?**

There are a few very serious offences that if you have a criminal conviction or caution for, you are legally prevented from being able to adopt. However, most criminal offences do not automatically rule you out from being suitable to adopt. Adopt North East will check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and any recorded offence or relevant police investigation will need to be discussed with you. You will be expected to be open and honest.

### **I am an older person?**

There is no legal upper age limit to becoming an adopter. More mature applicants often bring the strength of life experiences to adoption. Adopt North East will require that you to have the health and vitality required to meet the needs of a child in your care through to adulthood.

### **I am under 21 years old?**

Legally, those under 21 years of age cannot adopt.

### **I want to adopt a child who is from another country and not living in the UK?**

Adopt North East partners with the Inter-Country Adoption Centre (IAC) and have experience and expertise to help and support this specialist adoption journey. There are a range of fees associated with this route to adoption.

### **I cannot drive?**

You do not need to be able to drive in order to adopt. It may be that you have someone in your support network that could provide you with transport when needed. Adopt North East will assess your individual circumstances. However, you will be expected to be able to meet the travel needs of any child in your care.

### **I don't have any qualifications?**

You do not need any formal qualifications to become an adopter. Many successful adopters have no formal qualifications. Adopt North East are looking for people with skills and knowledge based on lived experiences rather than particular qualifications. Nevertheless, as part of the assessment process, your educational and vocational journey will be explored to understand how you will promote learning and engagement with the educational opportunities available to a child in your care.

## **c) WORK AND FINANCES**

### **I have debts?**

Adopters may have debts and as long as these are understood, and repayments can be managed alongside living expenses then this should not be a problem. We would also encourage adopters to have considered how they will manage financially whilst taking time off work. Adopt North East always considers the financial circumstances of an applicant adopter. The Agency will support an applicant to explore what benefits or tax credits they may be entitled to.

### **I am unemployed or on a low income, or worried about the cost of living?**

Being unemployed or on a low income does not automatically rule you out of being an adopter. You can be an adoptive parent if you are on benefits. Adopt North East always considers the financial circumstances of an applicant adopter. An adopter will need to evidence that they can meet the costs of caring for a child. The Agency will support an applicant to explore what benefits or tax credits they may be entitled to. There are also some circumstances in which there may be additional financial support for a child where the child has assessed additional and complex needs.

### **I work full time?**

Being in full time work does not automatically rule you out of being an adopter. Adopt North East always considers the employment circumstances of an applicant adopter. An adopter will need to evidence that their employment gives them the availability and flexibility to care for a child, including the provision of Adoption Leave. The Agency will support an applicant to understand their rights as an employee.

### **I will only have limited adoption leave from my work?**

An adopter will need to take some time off of work to support a child to move into their care. A child will need time to build a relationship with you and to feel safe and secure. Many adopters have to balance the need for work and the need to offer a child the availability and consistency they need early on. It is difficult to say how long an adopter needs to take off from work, but six to twelve months is not unusual. We would be happy to discuss this further with you.

## **d) HEALTH**

### **I have had or have a serious physical illness?**

Many people who adopt have medical conditions. Adopt North East will ask you to consent to the disclosure of your medical records so that it can obtain an expert review of the impact of the illness on your suitability to become an adopter. This is to ensure that you can meet the needs of an adopted child and that adoption would not impact your own health.

### **I have had or have mental health issues?**

Mental health issues in adults are more common than you may think. You will not be automatically be ruled out as an adopter because you have experience of or currently subject to mental health issues. Adopt North East will ask you to consent to the disclosure of your medical records so that it can obtain an expert review of the impact of your mental health on your suitability to become an adopter. This is to ensure that you can meet the needs of an adopted child in your care and that adoption would not impact your own mental health.

### **I am disabled?**

Many disabled people adopt a child successfully. Adopt North East will ask you to consent to the disclosure of your medical records so that it can obtain an expert review of the impact of your disability on your suitability to become an adopter. This is to ensure that you can meet the needs of an adopted child in your care but and that adoption would not impact your own health or disability. Even if you believe that you might need some additional assistance to adopt, it may be that this support can be made available.

### **I am overweight?**

Adopt North East seeks medical advice on all applicant adopters and this includes an understanding about current and future health and wellbeing. Adopt North East will therefore obtain an expert review of the impact of your weight upon your suitability to become an adopter. This is to ensure that you can meet the needs of an adopted child in your care.

### **I have had recent unsuccessful fertility treatment or the loss of a pregnancy**

Many people come to consider adoption following unsuccessful fertility treatment or the sad loss of a pregnancy. Some people can be ready to start their adoption journey within a few months and for others it will take longer. We can sensitively help you to work out the best approach and timing for you. 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 accepted that having a birth child is no longer an option. Once treatment has ended, we recommend that you take some time to come to terms with the fact that it has not been successful.

### **I smoke or vape?**

Adopt North East will not approve someone as suitable to adopt if they are not able to evidence that they have ceased smoking or vaping for six months prior to the date you register your interest. The only exception to this rule is where an applicant is seeking to adopt a child already in their care. Applicants using nicotine patches or other substance-based alternatives to smoking, including chewable tobacco, will be strongly advised by the Agency to end their use prior to applying to adopt – however, they will not be precluded from registering their interest with the Agency.

## **e) MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **I do not want to have contact with the birth family of an adopted child?**

Research tells us that adopted children benefit from contact with their birth family and other people important to them when it is safe to do so. This helps adopted children develop a healthy sense of their identity. That is why Adopt North East requires all adopters to be open to promoting some form of contact with important people to the child. This could be sending and receiving messages on a regular basis, meeting on a virtual communication platform or, for some children, meeting face-to-face. Contact arrangements are carefully planned and supported by Adopt North East.