

# Coram Capital Adoption Information Pack



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# Who can adopt?

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## *Our criteria*

The Coram Capital Adoption Service aims to offer loving and secure families to children in care who cannot live with their birth parents.

The following criteria for adopters has been drawn up to ensure that the children's needs are the first consideration in the adoption process.

### **We welcome applications from people who are:**

Living within a **35 mile radius** of our offices in London. This is so our social workers can offer the appropriate level of support.

**Single adopters or couples** whether you are in a civil partnership, married or cohabiting, and whatever your sexual orientation. Couples must have lived together in a stable and committed relationship for at least three years.

**Already parents, or those without children.** Adopted children are likely to have additional needs which may have an impact on children already in the family—an adopted child would usually need to be at least three years younger than the youngest child already in the family.

**Homeowners, or those renting;** though you must have a **spare bedroom** to accommodate a child.

**Aged over 21;** legally, you must be over 21 to adopt. There is no legal upper age limit, however applicants should have the potential to care for a child throughout their childhood and offer support for some years beyond.

**Non-Smokers.** A non-smoker is classed as anybody who has completely stopped smoking for a period of at least six months before starting the adoption process. This includes any e-cigarettes. We can only consider non-smokers as we know that Local Authorities will prioritise non-smokers for vulnerable children.

At the end of **fertility treatment.** Families must have completed any investigations or treatment at least 6 months before starting the adoption process. Infertility treatment is stressful and you will need a break before applying to adopt.

In addition, applicants will not be considered who have criminal convictions, or cautions, in respect of offences against children.

# Who can adopt?

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## *Further things to consider*

### Health

It is a statutory requirement for adoptive applicants to have a medical with their GP, which is considered by the Coram Medical Advisor. Both physical and mental health will be considered.

Adopters need to be able to care for their adopted child throughout childhood and to continue providing support into young adulthood. In relation to weight, potential adopters must have a BMI under 40. If a BMI is over 30, the Medical Advisor will consider any potential implications for adoption.

**Find out more here:** <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx>

### Work Commitments

Any child who has been placed with a new family needs a period of time to settle down and build relationships with his or her new parent/s. We normally expect that one parent will be at home for at least the first six months, and longer if at all possible, in order to spend time with the child.

### Finances

Whilst adopters do not need to be 'well off', you must be able to demonstrate that you can support a child financially. Financial support may be available for some children, usually because they have additional needs. Adoption Leave, including Shared Parental Leave and Statutory Adopter Pay is now available to those who are in employment.

**Find out more here:** <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/adoption-support/adoption-leave-pay>

### Criminal Offences

Applicants will not be automatically excluded if they have a criminal record but we need to understand the circumstances at the time and any likely implications in the future. We are required by law to discuss with applicants if they have a criminal record and whether this raises concerns about their suitability to be a parent through adoption. All applicants and any other adults living in the family home are required to have police and other checks.

**Find out more here:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

### Safety Issues and Pets

We need to be sure that any pets which applicants may own do not pose a threat to a child's health or safety. A report from a vet may be required.

# Coram's Adoption Service

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## *Why adopt through Coram?*

### **Coram's vision**

Coram is a children's charity committed to improving the lives of the UK's most vulnerable children and young people. Our vision is that every child has the best possible chance to lead a fulfilling life. Prioritising the needs of the child is central to everything we do.

### **Who we work with**

Coram runs one of the UK's largest and most highly acclaimed independent adoption services with an excellent success rate. We have been helping children find new parents through adoption for more than 40 years.

We are able to work with every local authority across the UK in order to help the children who need a permanent home through adoption find loving families. All the children we place are looked after by local authorities.

We also have placement partnerships with London Borough of Harrow, London Borough of Redbridge, Thurrock Council and City of London.

Coram is member of both the South London and West London Adoption and Permanence Consortia, which let us know about children waiting in these areas.

### **Adoption support**

Our adoption support is a factor in the success of our adoptions. In 2014-15, we experienced no adoption breakdowns compared with 3% nationally.

We have a dedicated adoption support team of experienced social workers who will help you to build strong family relationships throughout childhood and adolescence. We are able to offer you support of various kinds, including art and music therapy for adopted children and young people, parenting skills groups, regular workshops, social events and support groups.

Adoption support is available to all Coram families for as long as they need it. This includes the provision of direct services such as parenting courses and also support with referrals to other services.

# Hearing from our adopters

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"We adopted two beautiful boys through Coram. They have a safe, secure, loving home and my husband and I can pour all the love we have stored up on them".

*Coram Adopter*

## Suzanne's Story

"Friends had warned me that the adoption process could be slow and stressful, but with Coram the process was very smooth. My social worker arranged for me to meet some parents who had already adopted, which helped me feel at ease. I talked to them about the kind of issues that can arise with children who have been in care. Basically, you learn what you're letting yourself in for!

Three years on, Maria is happy and thriving. Adopting her has made me so happy. Being a single mum makes me want to **tell the world 'yes, single mums can do it!'** I see Coram as a family. They have been so supportive and available when I



"Coram wants the best for the child. They want to make it as seamless as possible that this child is going to have a great time and going to be in a really good home"

*Coram Adopter*

## Danny's Story

Julie & Danny adopted a three-year old boy through Coram.

"We were approved as adopters within a year, and matched to Thomas, our son, who was three years old. He had been living in care for three years with a foster family. Our Coram social worker really got to know us, and the match was excellent. Thomas had lived in a rural area with female siblings, and had always liked animals and had lots of pets. We also live in the countryside and have a daughter, Emily. Thomas loves walking the dogs and playing outdoors and he has a great relationship with our daughter.

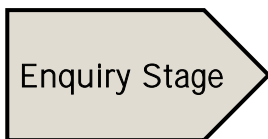
The thing that is so reassuring is that we know we can contact Coram with any issues we have, and that they will support us **and our little boy in the future. They have been brilliant**".

# Adopting a child

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## *The process*

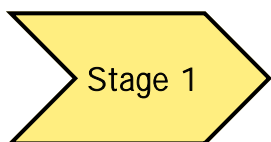
Find out more about the adoption process: <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/the-adoption-process>



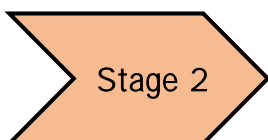
If you decide you are interested in adopting through Coram, you can come along to one of our Information Meetings—[the dates are here](#). You may also wish to have a telephone conversation with one of our Duty Social Workers. If our Duty Social Worker believes you meet our criteria, an initial face-to-face interview will be carried out at our offices. This will usually last about two hours and is a great opportunity to ask any other questions you may have.

Following the initial interview you will be given a Registration of Interest (ROI) Form—this is the formal application form to adopt through Coram.

We will let you know the outcome of your ROI within five working days.



Stage 1 lasts about two months, although it may be longer if checks and references take more time to be returned. A social worker will be allocated to work with you and will visit you at home. Statutory checks will be taken up, including medicals, DBS checks and personal references. You will also attend the first two days of our adopter training. When all of your references and checks have been returned we will review them. If everything is satisfactory we will formally agree that you can proceed to Stage 2.



Stage 2 lasts about four months. At the start of Stage 2 there is an Assessment Agreement Meeting with your allocated social worker to plan the work needed to complete the assessment—usually six meetings are required at weekly intervals. During Stage 2 you will attend a third day of training.

Once the assessment meetings are complete, your social worker will write your Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR).

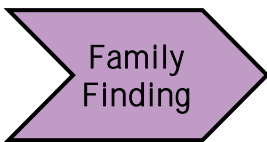


# Adopting a child

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Your PAR will be considered at Coram's Adoption and Fostering Panel, which you will be invited to attend. The panel's role is to decide whether or not to recommend your approval as a prospective adopter. You will be informed of the panel's recommendation on the day. The Managing Director of Adoption is the Agency Decision Maker, who will then consider the report together with the panel's recommendation and will make the decision whether to approve you as a prospective adopter. You will be notified of the decision in writing within five working days of the decision being made.



Once you have been approved, the family finding stage will begin. The length of time it takes to be linked with a child varies but usually adopters are linked within six to 12 months of being approved. Your social worker will offer you a lot of support and help in identifying children that may be a good fit with your family.

In the event that you are still waiting to be matched with a child a year after being approved, your approval will be reviewed in line with the regulations.

When a possible child is identified for you, Coram will ensure that you receive all the information that is available about the child. You will also meet the child's social worker so you can discuss the child's needs and what you can offer as parents. There will be lots of opportunities to ask questions.

Once you, the local authority and Coram have agreed that this is a good match, the local authority will draw up a support plan for you and the child. The proposed link between you and the child has to be considered by a matching panel run by the local authority with responsibility for that child.



Once the placement has been agreed, there will be a meeting to plan the child's move, and to ensure that everyone receives appropriate support.

The next step is the introductions. This is when you meet your child for the first time and start to get to know them. The length of the introduction process between you and the child varies according to the child's age and needs.

When the child is placed your Coram social worker will continue to visit and be available to offer support. The child's social worker will regularly visit after placement as well.



# Early Permanence

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## *Concurrent Planning*

All children benefit from being in **a permanent family which provides love and security** from as early in their lives as possible and this is especially true for children when it is not safe for them to stay with the family they were born into. Finding a family where these children can feel safe and cared for is essential to enable them to develop their potential. Coram is committed to promoting early permanence for this reason, and has been doing so for nearly 20 years. There are two main ways that Early Permanence for children who are in the care system can be achieved.

### **Concurrent Planning**

Young children, usually under 2 years, are placed with carers who are approved both as foster carers and prospective adopters, called dual approval, while the courts decide whether is right for the child to return to a member of their birth family or to be adopted. When the children are placed **the carers will act as the child's foster parents**. Placements are selected on the basis that return to their family is unlikely in view of the history, but is still a possibility and the first option would be to support the child's parents if they are able to demonstrate that they can care for the child and keep him or her safe. During this phase, the carers will need to be supportive of the birth family's efforts to regain the care of their child, and they will probably need to bring the child to Coram regularly for contact meetings which are carefully supervised.

If the courts decide that the birth family has shown that they are capable of meeting the needs of the child, the baby will be returned to their care. If another close relative comes forward and wishes to care for the baby they will be assessed and the baby may go and live with them. If that does happen the concurrent carers will have the satisfaction of knowing that they gave these children love and security when they needed it, and helped them to settle into their permanent family.

**However, the majority of the children are not able to return home. If the court's decision is that there is no one in the wider birth family able to provide the security and care that is needed, the children will remain with their concurrent carers and be adopted by them.**

The great advantage for the children concerned is that, if they cannot go back to their birth family, it will prevent them having to suffer the upset and loss of moving from a foster home where they have settled to an adoptive family. They will be able to put down roots and bond with their new parents from a very early stage, and the carers will have helped them through the early, unsettling months when plans were still uncertain.

We expect that many of the concurrent carers will go on to adopt the children they have cared for. They will be in the very special position of having established a relationship with the child's parents so that they can understand the difficulties that their child's birth families faced. *Concurrent carers need to be able to respect and work with children's birth families. Concurrent planning puts the needs of the vulnerable babies first and asks the adults to manage the uncertainty involved.*

Find out more here: <http://www.coramadoption.org.uk/about-adoption/concurrent-planning-faqs>

# Early Permanence

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## *Foster for adoption*

Foster for adoption is another way of achieving the earliest possible placement in a permanent family for a child and is used with children of all ages in a variety of circumstances. The court may not have formally decided whether the child can remain with the birth family but the local authority for the child will have completed all the assessment of the parents and any possible family members known to them who might be able to care for the child. The Local Authority will be as sure as they can be that the outcome of the



court hearing will be that the child needs to be adopted and that it would therefore be in the **child's interests to move to their prospective adopters as soon as possible as foster children whilst** the court process continues. These foster placements are usually of short duration, and the carers can be given temporary approval as foster carers for a particular child by the Local Authority if they have not already been dually approved as adopters and foster carers. Once the Court makes the decision that the child is available for adoption, the Local Authority will be in a position to formally place the child for adoption.

Local authorities are increasingly keen to place children in families that are likely to be permanent and if you are able to consider having a child join you earlier in the legal and administrative process you will have something very valuable to offer. Foster for adoption families will always be asked to consider individual placements on a case by case basis and will be given whatever information is available to assist in making a decision as to whether to accept a particular placement or not.

All early permanence placements carry a risk that the child will not remain with their carers. The risk is a small one, but for the families whose foster children return to birth families, it is hard. Nevertheless many families feel that they can manage this knowing that they are putting the needs of children first. If you are interested to know more, we will discuss this with you and give you an opportunity to meet with an experienced foster for adoption family.

### **What we offer:**

- Special training—two days of tailored workshops in addition to the general adoption preparation groups.
- Intensive and high quality support
- Fostering allowances paid by the Local Authority during the foster care period
- **Supervision of visits with the children's birth families**

# What now?

*Are you ready?*



There are a number of things that you can be doing whilst you consider starting the adoption process.

- Double check our **eligibility criteria** on page 3.
- Read all about the process on **First4Adoption**: [www.first4adoption.org.uk/](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/)
- Build your knowledge with '**First Steps**' e-learning: [www.irststeps.first4adoption.org.uk/](http://www.irststeps.first4adoption.org.uk/)
- Go to **CoramBAAF** to see the range of materials available: [www.CoramBAAF.org.uk](http://www.CoramBAAF.org.uk)
- Get some **childcare experience**—we advise that our prospective adopters all have a good level of childcare—this may be with relatives, community groups, or through work. If you currently don't have any experience, begin looking for ways you can volunteer.

**Once you've gone through the above...**

- Fill in the **Contact Form** on the Coram Adoption website.
- Come to a Coram Adoption **Information Meeting**.