Adopting with Coram Voluntary Adoption Agency



Coram is the first and longest standing children's charity in the UK. Established as The Foundling Hospital in 1739, today Coram is a vibrant group of specialist charities and organisations' supporting hundreds of thousands of children, young people and families every year.

Coram Voluntary Adoption Agency has over 50 years' experience of finding permanent loving homes for children who need adoption. We have also been awarded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in 2024 and five consecutive inspections since 2012.

We operate within the current legal framework for adopting a child in England. As part of our Regional Adoption Agency we have partnership arrangements with nine local authorities: The LondonBoroughs of Harrow, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Hillingdon, Bromley, the City of London, Westminster Council, Slough Borough Council, and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. The children our families adopt can come from any of these local authorities or anywhere in England.

Coram Adoption's focus is to find adoptive parents for a wide range of children waiting for adoption. There are currently children of all ages waiting within our partner agencies and nationally.

No two children are the same, but what all the children have in common is that they have had unsettled, difficult early lives and need a family that can provide them with love, security and stability through to their adulthood and beyond and the resilience to persevere through difficult times.

Coram welcomes applications from people from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences who can support the needs of children waiting for adoption.

We are particularly keen to hear from people who would consider becoming parents to children who may miss out on a permanent family. These include sibling groups, children aged four and over, children of Black and mixed ethnicity and children with additional needs or disabilities. We also encourage all families who are considering adoption to think about providing an Early Permanence placement for a child whose plan is likely to be adoption.

Coram Adoption offers comprehensive training during the assessment process to prepare families for parenting a child who has an unsettled early start. Our Adoptive families tell us that what they learned during this process has been invaluable in preparing them for parenting an adoptive child.

In Coram we provide a wrap-around service with support and advice available every step of your journey from initial enquiry through to your child reaching adulthood and beyond. In addition to a team of experienced Social Workers who are always available, we offer a range of support services including parenting skills courses, support groups, monthly Stay & Play sessions, life story workshops, mindfulness courses, coffee mornings, support with access to therapeutic packages and a regular newsletter to keep you updated about adoption matters. We also host an annual family picnic, which is a great opportunity to meet other adoptive parents.

You do need to consider what adoption will mean for you as a family. Becoming an adoptive parent is a permanent and legal commitment to a child who is unable to live with their own family.

There will be bumps along the way, but we are here to support you and our families report that the rewards of becoming an adoptive parent are numerous. "We had a great experience adopting through Coram. It was a rigorous process but it made us feel safe and supported going through this journey with an organization that has so much history and that leads the way in the adoption world. We still get support, six years into our adoption. We love being adoptive parents to our son and watching him grow and develop."

We are delighted when families come forward to adopt and are committed to working closely with you throughout the assessment process to understand your unique circumstances. This is a thorough, two-stage process designed to prepare you for adoption. As part of this, we will ask questions about personal aspects of your life and family experiences. At times, we may need to explore certain areas in greater depth, but this will always be approached with care and sensitivity. Throughout the process, we will provide training and ongoing support, keep you informed of progress, and listen to your views. To help you get the most out of the process, you will also have the opportunity to hear from experienced adopters who can share their insights into the assessment, training, and the relational engagement that the assessment involves. Our aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of you, so we can help prepare you for becoming an adoptive parent and ensure the most suitable and supportive match between you and a child.

If you have any questions, please give us a call on 020 7520 0383 or email adoption@coram.org.uk
Best wishes,

Caroline Keane
Head of Coram Voluntary Adoption Agency

Adoption Criteria for Adoptive Parents & Early Permanence Carers

Coram Ambitious for Adoption aims to offer loving and secure families to children in care who cannot live with their birth families. We are looking for a variety of adoptive parents who can offer a child love and support throughout childhood and beyond.

We welcome people with a whole range of backgrounds and life experiences, who are able to reflect and support the needs of the children waiting for adoption.

Our criteria for Adoptive Parents are designed to ensure that the children's needs are paramount in the adoption process.

To adopt a child in the UK you need to be the following:

- Over 21 (there is no upper age limit but wewill expect you to have the health and vitality to see your child/ren through to an age of independence and offer support for some years beyond)
- 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. A court would not grant an adoption order to anyone who does not have 'leave to remain', or permission to stay in the country for a specific period of time, with your activities limited to the restrictions of a visa. For this reason we would not be able to accept an application before this matter is not resolved.
- Without any history of criminal caution or conviction for certain criminal offences against children or specified offences against adults.

You can adopt if:

- You are single or in a stable and committed long- term relationship (whether married, unmarried or in a civil partnership) and have shared a household together for three years minimum.
- You are heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
- You are from any ethnic or religious background.
- You, or your partner, are able to stay in the UK with no legal restrictions.
- You don't have children or if you are already parents. An adopted child would need to be at least three years younger than the youngest child already in the family. This means, your existing child would need to be at least four years old.
- You are employed or if not, you are financially stable and can support a family.
- You are a homeowner or living in stable rented accommodation, with a spare bedroom for a child (the adopted child will not be able to share a bedroom with an existing child and we do not recommend that parent(s) make the living area their bedroom. This is rooted in everyone's welfare and practical family dynamics.
- You are a non-smoker, or have given up at least six months before starting the process – this includes e-cigarettes.
- You have undergone fertility treatment, as long as it has finished and you have had at least 6 months to recover.
- You have not had a significant losses in the past six months.
- You have direct child care experience with vulnerable young children.



Other considerations

Your Health

Adoptive Parents need to have patience and energy and to have the expectation of being able to care for their adopted child throughout childhood and to continue to provide support for them into young adulthood and beyond. Parenting adopted children is frequently stressful and demands particular resources and resilience thus an applicant's medical history will be important in considering any application.

There is a statutory requirement for prospective Adoptive Parents to have a medical assessment, which is considered by our Medical Advisor. All issues regarding physical health, lifestyle and mental health will be considered. If there is a significant risk that an applicant may not be able to care for a child throughout their dependent years or that their health may impact on their availability to parent, the Medical Advisor may need to seek further information. Your consent will be sought for further information. The Medical advisor will advise the Adoption Panel about the medical issues and the possible implications for a child's future care and security.

Smoking

Given the known medical risks of second-hand (passive/involuntary) smoking for young children we are unable to progress enquiries if you are currently smoking, including e-cigarettes.

Research has shown that;

- Young children are particularly susceptible to the effects of second-hand smoke as their lungs and airways are small and their immune systems immature
- Children under two years of age have more than double the risk of cot death if someone in the home smokes (even if they don't smoke indoors).
- Children of all ages whose parents smoke have a risk of up to 50% more chest problems including infections, wheezing and asthma; they have 35% more risk for middle ear disease (ear infections) and double the risk for bacterial meningitis.
- Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of smoke especially those with heart disease or glue ear.
- In the UK, 9500 children under the age of 5 are admitted to hospital every year with illnesses related to smoking.
- Children are known to model their own behaviour on that of their parents, thus growing up in a household with parents who smoke increases the risk by three times of the child becoming a smoker at a later date.

For these reasons Local Authorities will generally choose non-smoking adoptive families for children who need families in preference to smokers, which includes e-cigarettes. Coram will priorities applications from non-smokers because of the ongoing health risks. A non-smoker would be any applicant who has completely stopped smoking for a period of at least 12 months before being presented to the Adoption Panel, which means stopping smoking at least six months before a Registration of Interest can be accepted and maintaining complete cessation during the adoption process.

Fertility

Applicants should have completed investigations and treatment before applying to adopt a child. This is because of the emotionalstress involved in fertility treatment and the need for applicants to be ready to devote their energies to adoption by the time they make their application. We advisethat there is a break between the ending of fertility treatment (or the realization that applicants will not be able to conceive or the decision not to undergo treatment) and starting the adoptionprocess, to give people time to process this loss and come to a considered decision to build a family by adoption. Our current advice is to wait for a periodof at least 6 months.

Mental Health

One in four people will experience some kind of mental health problem in a year. It is important that applicants are open about any mental health issues they may have. It is not so much the diagnosis which is important but the applicant's ability to parent and meet the needs of a child. Further information may be sought from specialists involved in the care of the applicant.

Work Commitments

Any child who has been placedwith a new family needs a periodof time to settle down andbuild relationships with his or her new parent/s. We normally expect that one parent will be at home for the first 12 months in order tobe available for and to support the child. For early permanence carers, werequire one carer tobe at home full time for up to 12 months.This commitment can be shared between two carers.

Adopting a child: The Process

The Adoptive Parent Assessment framework is a two-stage approval process, used in all adoption agencies.



Enquiry Stage

Initial enquiry to Coram Ambitious for Adoption via website or telephone. Read the online information pack and attend an Information Meeting. You request a detailed information form (DI) and you can request a follow up call with an experienced adoption social worker if you wish to discuss a personal matter in more details first.

Initial Interview, after sending us your DI, we will review and if you meet the adoption eligible criteria's, we will offer you the opportunity to attend an initial interview. **In this meeting, we will discuss a range of topics relevant to the adoption assessment in order to determine your readiness to progress with an application to Coram.** If you do not meet the eligible criteria, we will advise you accordingly about any next steps.

You will be informed about the outcome of your initial interview no later than ten days. A Registration of interest (ROI) will be sent to you by the duty manager if it is felt that you meet the eligibility criteria and are able to consider the children we are family finding for. If you are happy to proceed, you should submit the ROI form. Once this is returned, the duty manager will confirm receipt of this in a letter outlining the next stages of the process. Provided your circumstances remain unchanged, you can submit the ROI form up to three months after the initial interview meeting. However, if circumstances do change before submitting the ROI form, those changes will need to be discussed with you.

Stage 1

A Social worker will be allocated who you will meet with during **Stage 1** and complete the **Stage 1 Agreement**. All statutory checks taken up including medicals and DBS checks, and personal references and where necessary oversea checks. Day1 and 2 Preparation work undertaken and worksheets completed.

Stage 2

Stage 2 commences (subject to satisfactory checks and references received in Stage 1). If not, a letter giving the reasons for not proceeding and an opportunity to meet with a manager will be offered. You can also request a break for up to six months between stage 1 and stage 2 if necessary due to personal circumstances; this to be discussed and agreed with your social worker/ their manager.

Stage 2 Agreement Meeting with your allocated social worker to plan the work needed to complete the assessment – we usually complete 7/8 meetings at weekly intervals.

Adoption Preparation Training and further checks such as with your employer, school (if you have children), and your social worker will meet with your referees.

Second Opinion meeting with a manager or another social worker if required. You **read and sign your Prospective Adoptive Parent's Report (PAR)** and make corrections. If you wish to submit your own additional comments, you have up to 5 days to do so.

Approval

Your PAR goes to the **Adoption Panel** for consideration. You are invited to attend the panel. The Panel recommends whether or not to recommend your approval as an Adoptive Parent.

The Managing Director of Coram, Ambitious for Adoption who is also the Agency Decision Maker, considers the report and Panel's recommendation and makes a decision within 10 days of Panel. You will then be notified of the decision in writing within 5 working days.

Family Finding

Family finding commences and this will be discussed with you. How long it takes to be linked with a child varies, but most of our Adoptive Parents are linked within 6 months of their approval. 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 adoption regulations.

When a possible child is identified for you, you will receive full written reports and meet the child's social worker and other professionals who work with the child to discuss the child's needs and what you would be able to offer as (a) parent(s).

Once you, the child's 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.You will have the chance to comment on the support plan.

The Local Authority will draw up an Adoption Placement Plan to plan the introduction and placement in consultation with you and your Coram social worker. You will be given this to read and comment on. The proposed match between you and the child has to be considered by a matching panel usually run by the local authority/RAA who has responsibility for the child. You will be invited to attend the Panel.

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 Panel's recommendation regarding the match of particular child/ren with you will be considered by the Local Authority's Decision Maker.

Placement

Introductions – the length of the introduction process between you and the child before the child comes to live with you varies according to the child's age and needs.

When the child is placed, your Coram social worker will continue to visit to support you; the child's social worker will visit the child regularly after the placement. The timing of the legal adoption proceedings depends on how long it takes for you to feel ready for this important step. At this time, we will also contact your referees again to ask them for their views of how you and your child have settled.

The child has to have lived with you for a minimum of 10 weeks. You will submit your adoption application to the court and at this point, some birth parents may apply to the court for leave to contest the making of the Adoption Order. This is rarely granted, but can cause delay.

After the adoption order is made, we offer any help we can – at your request. We will give you details of our post-adoption service and you will be entitled to request an assessment for support from the local authority responsible for the child or after three years from the local authority where you live.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption
VAA commissioned Regional Adoption Agency

Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency is made up of Coram and 9 LocalAuthorities to recruit families across the region, as well as across London and areas ofthe home-counties within ourreach. Coram Ambitious for Adoptionhaspositive relationships with local authority family finding teams across the UK andwe place children from all Local Authorities across England and Wales.



Preparation andApproval Programme

This section provides general information about the whole process of preparation and approval. You may alreadyhave some of this information or it may all be new to you dependingat what stage of the processyou are.

Assessment Framework for Prospective Adoptive Parent

It is important that the pace of the assessment is right for you and we discuss this with you. When you start your adoption journey, we expect that you are preparedand have time and flexibility to be fully engaged in the process.Once your assessment is completed and you have been approved as an Adoptive Parent(s); the expectation is that you will be ready for a child to join your family. Finding the right child can happen quickly, within a few weeks, or may take considerably longer. It is important that children do not wait an unnecessarily long time to be adopted, so we expect AdoptiveParents to be ready to considerchildren as soon as they are approved.

Initial Enquiry

During your first telephone conversation with one of our Duty Social Workers, you willlearn about the adoptionprocess, discuss the criteriaand your individual circumstances, and hear more about the childrenwhowe are looking to place for adoption. This is a good opportunity to ask any specific questions you may have.

If you decide that you would like to go ahead and start the process, you canattend an information meeting and attend an initial interview with a social worker.

During the initial interview, the social worker will ask you about your personal circumstance, details of your experience of caring for children (including as a parent, step parent, child minder or prospective adopter) and your capacity to provide for an adopted child's needs. The purpose of the initial interview is to provide information and to discuss your suitability to adopt. We work in accordance with GDPRprinciples - please refer to our Privacy notice enclosed in this pack.

Before an initial interview, please consider the following;

- Are you considering making any changes to you accommodation to make it more suitable for a child, for example moving house or making major alterations to you current home? We advise that this takes place before proceeding with an initial interview.

- Are you considering changing your employment? If you do this, you will need to wait until this change is completed, so that you feel settled at work and do not have to make another change early in a child's placement with you.

- If you have plans to travel, for example to see family that livesabroad or for work, and this will take longer than a couple of weeks; you will need to do this before you start the assessment process.

- Would you benefit from gaining child care experience and more understanding of the needs of vulnerable children so that you feel more confident as a new parent? You can discuss with us how this can be achieved and we may advise that you identify voluntary childcare opportunities before commencing to an initial interview.

- 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. A court would not grant an adoption order to anyone who does not have 'leave to remain', or permission to stay in the country for a specific period of time, with your activities limited to the restrictions of a visa.

Registration of Interest (ROI)

After the initial interview, you will be sent a "Registration of Interest Form" (ROI) with advice about timescales for submitting it. This form asks for all the information required to collect your statutory checks and references and for Coram Ambitious for Adoption to set up a secure electronic file for you as required by legislation. The ROI is a lengthy form and if you need to discuss completing it, you are welcome to speak to an administrator or the Duty Manager and ask for any advice or clarification that you need.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption will have 5 working days to let you know whether your ROI has been accepted. If it is accepted, we will write to you with all the details of what you need to do in order to start Stage 1 of the assessment process.

Stage 1

At the beginning of Stage 1 you will be allocated a social worker to support and advise you. You will meet your social worker early in Stage 1 and s/he will help you to understand what needs to be done during the two months of Stage 1.

This will include completing all the statutory checks and undertaking social media and internet searches in the public domain. It will also include completing materials in the Stage 1 pack, such as providing information about your extended family and support network, and worksheets about various topics. The materials are designed to assist you in understanding more about being an adoptive parent. It is important that the materials in the Stage 1 pack are completed in a timely way and your social worker will be able to provide you with guidance about this.

It is important that you do all you can to ensure that any checks are done promptly and this will include completing an online Disclosure and Barring Service Check and making arrangements for your statutory adoption medicals with your GP as soon as possible. The DBS certificate is sent to the Prospective Adoptive Parent and not to the Coram office. You will need to provide evidence of the certificate to your social worker.

If because of the DBS checks, the adoption medicals, or other statutory checks, information is received which would make it inappropriate to proceed with your assessment, we will discuss the issues with you. We will give you the opportunity to explain the circumstances, or to challenge inaccurate information. If there are medical concern is raised, Coram Ambitious for Adoption's medical adviser may need additional information from your GP or hospital consultant, and your social worker may need to meet with you to explain any concerns.

If, after such discussions we have concerns, about proceeding, we will explain the reasons and end your assessment. If you do not feel that this is fair or reasonable, you can make a formal complaint to Coram Ambitious for Adoption.

In addition to statutory checks, Prospective Adoptive Parents will be expected to participate in Preparation Groups during Stage 1 to learn more about what is involved in adopting a child who is in the care of the Local Authority.

Stage 1 will usually be completedwhen all the necessarychecks and references have been returned to Coram Ambitiousfor Adoption and when any other work that you have agreed to do has been completed. If there are delays in receiving checks your allocated social worker and his/her manager will consider whether you can proceed to Stage 2 without this information. This decision will be made on a case-by-case basis; however we will always require a DBS check, a medical with our Medical Adviser's comments and advice as well as former partner references where appropriate before we are able to proceed to an adoption panel. You will receive a Stage 2 Application Form to complete, which will need to be acceptedbefore you are able to proceed to Stage 2.

At the end of Stage 1, the regulations allow prospective Adoptive Parents to take a break of up to 6 months in the process before they start Stage 2. If you are considering taking a break, we ask you to discuss the reasons for this with your social worker. If the break is for longer than 6 months, you will need to start the process again from the start

Referee

As part of your ROI, you will need two referees who are not members of your family, and one who is a family member.Where a couple is applying, we ask for a family reference from both sides of the family. It is important that the referees are able to give a good insight into each applicant as a possible parent, as well as into how the couple work together (in cases where couples are applying). At least two referees need to know the applicants as a couple (where couples are applying). Your referees will need to have known you for at least three years. Coram Ambitious for Adoption will write to your referees during Stage 1 and ask them to complete a questionnaire. Your social worker will also speak to the referees during Stage 1. There will be interviews with referees, usually in Stage 2, and then later when AdoptiveParents apply to the court for an adoption order Coram Ambitious for Adoption will need to contact your referees to confirm their views again. It is helpful if your personal referees live locally to you. If you identify referees who live a distance away, we may wish to discuss this with you.



Former partner references

We are required under the adoption regulations to take up references from all former partnersif you have livedwith and/or co–parented a child together. In addition, we will alsorequest references from formerpartners if youhave been married or in a civil partnership; and allformer partners if you livedtogether for three years or more.

Preparation Groups

Preparation groups are held in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment process (two days each); and there are additional training groups for Early Permanence and adopting siblings. It is anticipated that preparation groups will be held at the Coram campus; and you will receive dates for the Stage 1 trainingwhen you start the process.

The content will cover a wide range of issues including:

- The backgrounds of children who need adoption
- The impact of separation and loss on a child's emotional development
- Building attachments with a child
- Helping an adopted child develop a positive identity
- Helping a child to understand their story
- Talking to a child about adoption
- Managing different kinds of contact with people from a child's past
- Developing parenting skills

Evaluating the Groups

Preparation and training for Adoptive Parents are an essential part of the processand are generally completed by all Adoptive Parents. Applicants complete a brief evaluation sheet on each session attended, which helps your social worker to know what you found useful and where further discussion is needed. Facilitators will note any issues that may need further discussionwith the applicant or particular strengths observed during group.

Stage 2

Stage 2 begins with an Assessment Agreement Meeting. At this meeting you will agree what work needs to be completed including setting dates for meetings with your social worker, usually weekly, and other work that you may need to complete. You will also agree a date for your report to be considered by the Adoption Approval Panel.

Stage 2 should be completed in 4 months; however, you will have the opportunity to discuss timescales in the agreement meeting, as we know that this may be insufficient time for some people and we do not want you to feel rushed or under pressure.We want to give prospective Adoptive Parents every opportunity to be successful adoptive parents, and for some people this may mean taking more time to completeStage 2.

The assessment process is also an opportunity for the applicants to think in more depth about the kind of issues they feel able to help children to cope with. Children needing adoptive families have complex and distressing backgrounds and part of the AdoptiveParent's task as a parent, will be to help their child make sense of his or her story as they grow up, at the child's pace, and to help the child develop feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.

Children have been neglected and/or abused and will need time and patience to learn to trust that adults can be caring and reliable.Some may not yet have reached their developmental milestones, and will need to be nurtured and need help to make up for the early experiences they missed, before being ready to 'grow up' and catch up with their age group. Many of the children will need support with regulating their emotions.

Many of the children will need additional help at school, and parents who are willing to liaise with the school and who are able to be home with their children during holidays and after school, will be best placed to support their children.

All these issues need to be considered, including the needs of children at different ages, and how these fit with the skills and experience of applicants.

During the course of the assessment, applications are discussed regularly between the social worker and his/her manager and then once within a case discussion group.This is to ensure that we do not overlook issues that may be raised at Panel and so that the assessment is not dependent on only one social worker's point of view.

A Relationship of Trust

We aim to communicate openly and honestly with applicants, and to build up a relationship of trust. If applicants want to have anything clarified or to know why we need to ask certain questions, we hope they will feel free to do so, and we will do our best to explain. If we have any concerns about applicants, we will discuss them and try to find a way forward.

Our first responsibility is always to the children as they are our priority. There may be times when we have to put the needs of the children who wait above those of the adults who would like to adopt them. We need to be as sure as possible that those who are approved as Adoptive Parents have the skills and understanding required to parent children with complex trauma.

Meetings during Stage 1 and 2 will be in office hours. Coram Ambitious for Adoption social workers are all supporting families with children in placement before and after they are adopted as well as assessing prospective Adoptive Parents. Often this work needs to take place in the evening and sometimes at weekends.We therefore ask prospective Adoptive Parents to be available during the day.

Second Opinion Meetings

During the assessment there may be a discussion about whether it will be helpful for applicants to meet with a manager or with another experienced team member to discuss any issues that have come up and need further consideration. This meeting is called a 'Second OpinionInterview' and ensures that more than one professional's perspective is taken into account in writing the assessment report.

Concerns

If the social worker has concerns about proceeding with an application, they will discuss this with the applicant. If these cannot be resolved, a meeting with the social worker's manager will be offered. If following such a meeting (or meetings)it is our view that we are unlikely to be able to place children with particular Adoptive Parent/s, we will explain this and put our reasons in writing. If the applicant/s wishes, this matter can be referred to the 'Coram Ambitious for Adoption'Adoption Panel. When Panel meets, the applicants will be invited to attend (if they wish), to answer any queries, or to add to the information that has been written.

The Panel will consider all the information provided, and will either recommend that Coram Ambitious for Adoption completes a full assessment and bring it back to Panel once the assessment has been completed; or the Panel may feel it is not appropriate for the assessment to continue. Whatever the Panel recommends, the relevant reports together with the recommendation will go to Coram Ambitious for Adoption's Agency Decision Maker. If the Decision Maker is minded to decide that Coram should not complete a full assessment, the applicants have 40 days within which to decide whether to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for the decision to be reviewed.Alternatively, they could ask the Panel to reconsider the application.

The Independent Review Mechanism

A separate leaflet is available which gives full information on the IRM. The IRM is a statutory body, run by the Coram Children's Legal Centre on behalf of the Department for Education. It has established independent panels which are set up completely independently of Coram or any other AdoptionAgency, in order to review recommendations by agency Panels. All the original paperwork will be submitted to the IRM, together with any additional information from the Agency or from the applicant/s. Both Coram Ambitious for Adoption and the applicant/s will be invited to attend the IRM.

The IRM's recommendation will be sent back to Coram Ambitious for Adoptionfor the Agency Decision Maker to reconsider all the information. The Agency DecisionMaker's decision at this stage is final.

The Prospective Adoptive Parents Report

Once the assessment interviews have been completed, the social worker will write the Prospective Adoptive Parent's Report. When the report has been written, applicants have the opportunity to read it. If there are inaccuracies or points for clarification, we will make corrections and clarifications in the report. Applicants have 5 days within which to write anything, which they would like to go to the Adoption Panel alongside the Prospective Adoptive Parent's Report if they wish to do so.

The Adoption Panel

The Prospective Adoptive Parent's Report is considered by a Coram Ambitious for Adoption Panel in London. The Adoption Panel's membership includes an Independent Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, an independent member, a social worker with knowledge of adoption, one or more adoptive parents and a MedicalAdviser. The Panels' membership also includes others with specialist experience and expertise to offer.The Adoption Panels are also attended by the Coram Ambitious for Adoption.

Panel Adviser who is there to give professional advice to Panel as required

The RAA Panel functions as both an Adoption and a FosteringPanel for carers who are going to be dually approved for Early Permanence placements.

Panels will be run virtually. Applicants are invited to attend Panel, although attendance is voluntary. The assessment is based on the work of the social worker and the applicants as reflected in the Prospective Adoptive Parents Report. The Panel is not part of the assessment process. Panel members discuss their recommendation; either to approve the applicants as Adoptive Parents, to not approve the applicants, or to defer the recommendation in order that the Social Worker can gain further information as requested by the Panel.

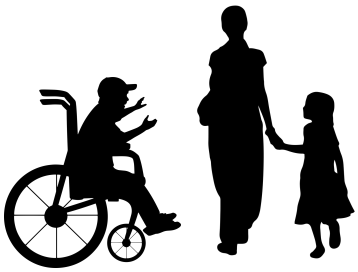
In addition to making a recommendation as to whether applicant/s should be approved or not, the Adoption Panel will give advice as to the children who the applicants would have the appropriate strengths and experience to parent – e.g. the children's age range, whether one, two or more children would be appropriately placed, any particular special needs that the applicant would be able to meet.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of the Panel informally by the Panel Chair on the day of the Panel. If the applicants do not attendPanel, then they will be informed by telephone within 24 hours. If there are any difficulties, or if the Panel has recommended that an application should not approved, the social worker and manager or the Panel Chairperson or the Medical Adviser (as appropriate) will meet with the applicants to explain the reasons for the recommendation as soon as possible, but usually within 48 hours.

It is important to stress that because we work openly and honestly with applicants, it is very rare for applicants to be turned down at this stage. By far the majority of applicants are recommended for approval by Panel.

The Decision Maker

All the reports that are submitted to the Panel are sent to the Coram Ambitious for Adoption Decision Maker, together with the Panel minutes.The Agency Decision Maker will consider all of this information and may consult the Panel Adviser or other senior members of staff who is not a member of that particular Panel, before making their decision as to whether the applicants should be approved as AdoptiveParents. They may also give advice about the AdoptiveParents' strengths in relation to the needs of waiting children. Applicants will be informed of their decision in writing within 5 working days.



Matching of Adoptive Parents with Children

When the applicants have been approved, or sometimes prior to the panel date, we begin considering referrals of children who need families and who may be a suitable match. There are a number of routes, which can be used to find appropriate matches:

Coram Ambitious for Adoption is a RegionalAdoption Agency with the following members; Coram, the LondonBoroughs of Harrow, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Hillingdon, Bromley, the City of London, the City of Westminster, Slough Borough Council, and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, and is responsible for finding Adoptive Parents for children from these Local Authorities who need adoptive families;

Coram Ambitious for Adoption receives telephone and email enquiries about children needing families and works close with local authorities all over the UK to identify potential matches for our families;

Coram Ambitious for Adoption uses LinkMaker to exchange information with Local Authorities about children waiting to be adopted;

Adoption Activity Days and exchange events are organised by CoramBAAF and other agencies regularly and these give prospective Adoptive Parents the chance to view profiles or meet children (with placement orders) who need adoptive families.

We actively seek appropriate matches for all our approvedAdoptive Parents via the various methods outlined above. Most Adoptive Parents identify a child/ren within 6 months of being approved, however timescales will vary.

Annual Review

If Adoptive Parents are still waiting to identify a suitable child a year after being approved, the Adoption Regulations require us to review AdoptiveParents' approval. If significant changes of circumstances arise which might affect Adoptive Parents' approval (e.g. serious illness, bereavement in the family or pregnancy), a review can be held at an appropriate time. Reviews will be carried out by the social worker, a manager and the Adoptive Parent.

Notes of the matters discussed in the review will be added to the Prospective Adoptive Parents Report. Only in rare cases where there is some reason to reconsider applicants' approval, will reviews be sent to the Adoption Panel. If reviews are submitted to Panel, the Adoptive Parents will be invited to add their own written comments (within 5 days),and to attend Panel.If Panel does not recommend extending the applicants' approval, and if the Decision Maker is minded not to decide to re-approve the applicant/s, s/he or they will have the option of applying to the IRM in the same way as if their approval had been rejected earlier.

Annual reviews are shared with Local authorities in the matching process when approved Adoptive Parents who have been waiting for 12 months or more since their approval.

Equal Opportunities Guidelines

The aim of Coram Ambitious for AdoptionRegional Adoption Agency is to place children in permanent families and so enable children and adults who seek our services to have a positive experience of family relationships which helps redress past traumas and losses. We achieve this by enhancing their sense of identity; respecting their personal histories and culture.

Meeting Children's Needs

The child is always our priority and we aim to enhance children's sense of their identity and heritage by valuing their race, religion, ethnic and cultural background and language. We seek to provide a service for all children in Care for whom family placement is appropriate, and not to exclude any group on the grounds of race, religion, ethnic or cultural background, disability, gender or sexual orientation. We aim to place children in families who share or who can actively promote their heritage. We look to the child's new parents to value and support all aspects of their identity.

Where children have disabilities we aim to find families who will value them for their unique qualities and help develop their strengths so that they maximise their capacity to enjoy an independent lifestyle.

We believe it is important that our Adoption and Fostering Panels and our staff group should reflect the different groups from which the children we work with come.

Bringing up Children in a Multi-racial, Multi-cultural Society

There are many minority groups in our society where children and their families suffer discrimination because of their race, religion, ethnic or cultural background. We believe all children should be valued and given access to opportunities to develop their skills and talents. We expect all Coram Ambitious for Adoption's Adoptive Parents and carers, of whatever background, to take a positive view of bringing up their children in a multi-racial and multi- cultural society. This will involve actively discouraging any racism and racist name-calling. It will also involve taking opportunities to develop our own understanding of other groups to appreciate and celebrate diversity.

Qualities We Seek in Adoptive Parents/Foster Parents

In seeking families for the children who are waiting, we aim to be open-minded and not to exclude anyone on any criterion that is not relevant to the child's best interests. We believe it is important to match children and families in terms of race, religion, language, ethnic and cultural background where this can be achieved without undue delay for the child. We believe caring and competent parents may be found amongst single persons, couples who are married or unmarried, those who are physically able, those who suffer from disabilities of various kinds, people at different income levels, including those on income support, and people of different sexual orientations. In selecting families for children we aim to find those families who can best meet particular children's needs. This does not mean that we will always accept people from any of the groups listed above, but that they will be considered in relation to the needs of children who need families.

We do exclude from consideration:

- People who have a history of criminal offences against children and some other offences of a sexual or violent nature
- People who adhere toracist and discriminatory views
- People whose health or health history indicates that they may not be able to providea secure home fora child throughout his/her childhood. (We are guided by our Medical Adviser in considering the implications of health problems.)
- People whose accommodation and lifestyle would make it difficult to provide and ensure a secure future for a child

People who adopt/foster children in Care need to understand that they come from a wide varietyof backgrounds. It is important to view childrenas individuals and value them. It is equally important to try to understand their circumstances of their parents and what has led to their child being adopted as childrenwill need to be helped to make sense of their background as they grow up.

Adoptive children have a dual identity,and when they grow up, some may want to find out more about their origins. Some young people may want to make contact with their birth family. Adoptive Parents/foster parents need particular qualities of open-mindedness and flexibilityifthey are to help their children grow up feeling confident in whom they are, and that they will always beloved and protected.



Social media and internet searches

- As part of the assessment process the adoption agency will routinely undertake social media checks and internet searches that will consist of using social media platforms to enter the name of applicants.
- These checks may be expanded depending on any information that emerges from the initial checks or in relation to any other information that has become available in the course of the assessment.
- Checks will only be undertaken in relation to the public domain on the internet and social media platforms. If information of concern emerges, this will be discussed with applicants to seek their views before any judgements are made about suitability to adopt. The only exception to this will be in situations where safeguarding matters arise in which case child protection procedures will be followed.
- The nature of the checks undertaken and the outcome will be recorded and made available within the assessment report. In addition the agency will provide advice and information about the safe use of the internet as part of preparation to adopt.

Guidance on safety issues regarding dogs in adoptive family home

Coram Ambitious for Adoption recognises that dogs and other pets can be a very special part of family life for many families and that they can bring fun, companionship and reassurance to children. For some adopted children who have had difficult experiences with parents in the past, it may be easier in the early days to learn to trust and confide in a dog who is a loyal companion than in new parents. In such families dogs may act as a 'bridge' into the family.

At the same time we are aware that there are occasionally incidents where children are attacked by family pets, even where pets have been a trusted part of family life for a period of years. We also know that children placed for adoption may be more prone to tantrums, unpredictable outbursts and also to teasing pets than children who have always lived in their own family are likely to be. This behaviour might be misinterpreted by a dog, who might react aggressively. Obviously when children are placed with Adoptive Parents, the Local Authority needs to know that the Adoptive Parents have thought about relevant safety issues for their children. This note is written to help prospective Adoptive Parents to think about how they can go about doing this if they are dog owners.

There is obviously a need to plan the introduction of children placed for adoption to any family dogs carefully, and to teach the children how to treat animals. Careful thought needs to be given to supervising adoptive children when the dogs area round. However no one can supervise children 24/7, and we have identified these guidelines to help families know Coram Ambitious for Adoption's views about how best to minimise any possible risks.

Given that it is not possible to be sure exactly how a situation may develop once children join their adoptive family, it would be helpful if applicants could give thought to what contingency plans they may have if the a pet presents more of a problem regarding the children than had been expected, for example re-homing the animal.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption recognises that whilst families can take measures to minimise risk, we cannot totally eliminate all risk. All the issues outlined in this note will be considered at Panel aspart of the assessment of prospective Adoptive Parents. Other animals which potentially pose risks to children will also be considered during the assessment process.

- Dogs are pack animals, and it is essential that they understand their place in the pecking order. All family members (including all children) must be above the dogs in the pecking order. The adults in the family must be completely confident of managing and controlling the dogs.
- For larger and stronger breeds, including German Shepherds, Rottweilers and Dobermans, we would generally expect that the parent/s and dog/s had attended training/obedience classes. In most such cases we would also expect that for at least the first 6 months of a placement at least one of the prospective Adoptive Parents would be at home when the children and dogs were there (i.e. not leaving a babysitter or grandparent in charge). Exceptions might include rather elderly dogs, or a grandparent who was also very competent as regards managing the dog/s.
- Where there are more than two dogs we have been told that that constitutes a pack, and the dogs may be less willing to accept control from their owners at times of stress. Where this is the case, Coram Ambitious for Adoption will consider each situation individually, taking factors such as the size, temperament and training of the dogs into consideration.
- For larger and stronger breeds of dogs we may require a letter from a vet giving an opinion as to the dog's temperament and also stating whether s/he is confident that the owner is sufficiently aware of the safety issues and in control of the dog.
- The amount of exercise dogs get on a regular basis is important not only for their welfare, but to use up energy and ensure they are more content and manageable. This is particularly important for the larger breeds.

How to complain if you're not happy with our services...

Coram Ambitious for Adoption wants to ensure that all those who use our services receive a courteous and professional response and one that is appropriate to people's needs regardless of sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, religion, age or disability.

We hope you will have no reason to complain. However, if you feel dissatisfied with any aspect of the contact you have with us then we welcome the opportunity to rectify the situation. We take complaints seriously because they highlight any problems with our services and what we should do to improve things.

If you want more information about our complaints procedure, please ask for a copy of the full procedure. If you feel your complaint has not been satisfactorily dealt with after going through Coram's complaints procedure, you may contact the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills Ofsted:
https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-form

Please talk to someone in the service first. If you wish, you may contact:

Caroline Keane – Head of Adoption – Caroline.Keane@coram.org.uk
Stef Ahlemann – Adoption Duty Manager – Stefanie.Ahlemann@coram.org.uk
Hannah Moss – Adoption EP Manager – Hannah.Moss@coram.org.uk
Heather Atkinson – Adoption Manager – Heather.AtkinsonSL@coram.org.uk

coram ambitious for adoption