



Document Title	Eligibility Criteria for Prospective Adopters
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## 1. 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 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, Adopt North East requires that a couple relationship – marriage, civil partnership or cohabitation be a minimum of two years duration and the couple must have lived together for at least 12 months duration. This enables the applicants to evidence that their relationship is enduring and provide a reasonable expectation that the relationship would provide an adopted child with stability and consistent care.

## 2. The Criteria in Practice: Answers to Questions

### Can I adopt...

#### ... if 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 a minimum continuous period of twelve months at the point of an Adoption Panel consideration of their application.

This means that to make an application with us you need to have stopped smoking and vaping for at least six months.

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

If you have or have had a serious illness you will not be automatically be ruled out as an adopter. 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.

### **... if 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.

### **... if I am overweight?**

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters. You will not be automatically be ruled out as an adopter because you are overweight. 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 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.

### **... If 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.

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

Adopt North East requires that a couple relationship – marriage, civil partnership or cohabitation be a minimum of two years duration and the couple must have lived together for at least 12 months duration. This enables the applicants to evidence that their relationship is enduring and provide a reasonable expectation that the relationship would provide an adopted child with stability and consistent care.

### **... if 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.

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

Legally, those under 21 years of age cannot adopt.

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

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters. You can adopt if you are from a faith community.

### **... if I am in a same-sex relationship?**

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 gave same sex couples the right to adopt. If you are in a same sex relationship, whether you are married, in a Civil Partnership or cohabiting you are able to adopt.

### **... if I am a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.**

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters.

### **... if 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.

### **... if I am disabled?**

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters. Being disabled does not automatically exclude you from becoming an adopter. Many adopters have a disability. 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.

### **...if I have had recent IVF?**

Many people will have had IVF treatment prior to applying to adopt. It is important that you have taken time to grieve and accept this loss before starting on the adoption journey. A period of six months since your last IVF cycle is required before you can apply to us. We would be very happy to talk to you about adoption before this period so that you have full information about the process and we can offer you advice.

### **... if I am not British?**

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters. 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 I am British but live abroad?**

UK citizens living abroad cannot adopt from the UK.

### **... if 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) who have experience and expertise to help and support this specialist adoption journey. There are a range of fees associated with this route to adoption.

### **... if I am not of White British ethnicity?**

Adopt North East is committed to the equal treatment of all potential adopters. Many children needing adoption are not White British. Adopt North East requires more adopters from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. It is likely that there is a child with your ethnic background, cultural heritage requiring adoption. BAME adopters can also be matched with a child who does not share their ethnicity and cultural heritage.

### **... if I am unemployed or on a low income?**

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.

### **... if 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.

### **... if 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. Where Adopt North East approve adopters who have children in their care, Adopt North East will ensure that there are at least two calendar years

between an adopted child and children already in the adopters care, unless the adopted child is a sibling of a child or children in their care. An adopted child would need to be younger than the pre-existing child.

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

Many applicant adopters have previously adopted. Adopt North East requires that there must be a minimum period of two years from the date of placement of the previous child/ren with the prospective adopters to the date of the approval decision as to their suitability following reassessment. This policy enables re-assessment by Adopt North East to fully consider the impact of the adopted child/ren on the adopters' suitability to adopt a further child/ren and, critically, the impact of further adoption upon the child/ren already in their care.

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

Adopt North East will check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) any member of your household living in your home over the age of 18 years old, including your adult children. If an adult within your home has a conviction or a caution for a few serious offences, you may be legally prevented from being an adopter. However, most criminal offences committed by a member of your household will not automatically rule you out from being suitable to adopt.

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

Adopt North East requires that you can evidence that you have the space or have a reasonable plan to get the space to accommodate the child or children you plan to adopt. Ordinarily, the Agency will only approve you where you can give a child their own space. We believe this is best for an adopted child. However, where an adoption involves sibling children, the Agency may agree to the children sharing a room, dependent on age and stage of development. The Agency will look at the specific circumstances around the physical size of the home.

### **... if I live in rental accommodation?**

As long as your home is big enough to enable an adopted child to have their own room you do not need to own the property.

### **... 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.