



## Adoption Eligibility Criteria

There is an expectation that applicants should provide accurate information and allow the agency to confirm this wherever possible by reference to third parties, statutory agencies, health professionals and others. Refusal to consent to such checks will result in the agency being unable to proceed with their application, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The following specific criteria must be satisfied to enable Nottinghamshire County Council to consider an adoption application:

### **Residence and location of applicants**

Applicants must be resident in the UK and expect to remain in the UK for the foreseeable future.

Applications will be considered from within Nottinghamshire itself. We may also consider applications from neighbouring authorities within a 25 mile radius of the county boundary, depending on the needs of children waiting.

In exceptional cases, applications may be considered from further afield, but only where applicants are looking to adopt children for whom fewer families come forward (e.g. older children aged 5 years and above, black and minority ethnic children, large groups of brothers and sisters, children with physical or learning disabilities and so on).

### **Age**

By law, applicants must be over 21 years of age to adopt.

There is no upper age limit, but age is one of the factors that will be taken into account when considering the suitability of applicants. The age of each applicant will be considered in the context of their general health, fitness and emotional well-being, as well as the age and needs of the child whom they are seeking to adopt.

### **Marital status**

Applicants may be single, divorced, married or in a civil partnership, or living together.

### **Length of relationship**

Couples who apply to adopt should be able to demonstrate that their relationship is stable and permanent. The length of their exclusive relationship with each other may be one indicator of this, but the quality and strength of the relationship will also be significant. Although there is no hard and fast rule about the length of a couple's relationship, it is unlikely that an application would be accepted within the first two years of the couple permanently living together.

### **Applicants with children**

First time applications will not usually be accepted where a child in the family is aged 7 year or younger. This is because:

- Nottinghamshire does not approve adopters for babies only, but for an age range of 0 – 5 years
- There should normally be a two year age difference between the age of a child in the family and the age of a child to be placed.

## **Second or subsequent applications**

If adoptive parents wish to make a further application for an unrelated child, the normal expectation would be that at least 12 months has passed since the previous child was placed. However, it will be necessary to have a discussion with the agency about the timing of a second application in terms of the impact on the child who has been adopted.

## **Diversity**

Applications are welcomed from a wide cross-section of society. People with disabilities will receive the same consideration as other applicants in terms of their capacity to parent an adopted child. Applications from black, Asian and inter-racial families are actively encouraged. A number of single people, as well as gay and lesbian couples, have been assessed and have successfully adopted through Nottinghamshire.

Nottinghamshire will consider applications from people of all religious faiths, or none.

In all cases, the deciding factors in accepting an application will be:

- the qualities and skills which people bring to the task of adopting a child from care
- the potential for promoting the welfare of the child throughout childhood and beyond.

All applicants are expected to recognise the diversity of modern society and to be able to promote values and attitudes which are not prejudicial or discriminatory.

## **Infertility**

Applicants are expected to have completed any ongoing investigations, treatment or counselling for infertility before proceeding with an adoption application. If applicants were to decide to resume treatment once their application is underway, the application would be placed on hold and only resumed if and when agreement is reached between the applicants, their social worker and the adoption team manager.

This is because experience suggests that people need time to address their loss before they can fully embrace the positive benefits of adoption.

Any other reasons for not having birth children will be fully explored during the application.

## **Pregnancy**

If applicants become pregnant during the assessment process, it is likely that the agency will wish to withdraw their application for the time being. Applicants may choose to apply again in the future and, if so, the agency will give due consideration to taking up a new application at that stage.

If pregnancy occurs after the adopters have been approved by the adoption panel, it is likely that the agency will seek to withdraw their approval. It would not be considered appropriate to proceed to the placement of a child for some time following the birth of the expected birth child (see Applicants with children above). Prospective adopters whose approval has been withdrawn may choose to apply again in the future and, if so, the agency will give due consideration to taking up a new application at that stage.

## **Health**

The agency will need to be satisfied that each applicant's state of physical and mental health is such that there is every possibility that he/she will be able to care for an adopted child throughout childhood and beyond. The medical adviser will be expected to make whatever enquiries are considered appropriate in order to obtain information about the health of applicants, and any health risks, including those associated with life-style.

The views of the medical adviser will be given careful consideration in each case.

## **Smoking**

Smoking not only affects the health of applicants, but also the health and well-being of any child placed with them. Applicants who smoke should understand that this will restrict the age and type of child who may be placed with them.

The agency has a smoking policy which is available on request. Research evidence has concluded that children, particularly those aged under 5 years, are more likely to suffer health problems if they live in a household where people smoke. It is therefore unlikely that a child aged under 5 years will be placed with applicants who smoke, or live in a household where there are other family members or regular visitors to the home who smoke.

Smoking may also prevent the placement of children of any age with certain health histories or medical issues such as a respiratory condition (e.g. asthma), heart condition or inner ear problems (e.g. glue ear).

The views of the medical adviser will be given careful consideration in each case. For further advice, please read the factsheet '*Smoking advice for prospective foster carers and adopters*'.

### **Pets**

Pets and domestic animals are often an important part of family life. Safety and hygiene will always be taken into account when there are animals in the household.

Some children are also allergic to pets and prospective adopters may need to consider strategies to manage potential incompatibility between a child and the animal. The potential risks from any animal will be considered and included in the home study report.

### **Accommodation**

The assessment of the accommodation will take into account the safety of the child likely to be placed and whether there is sufficient space for all the family, recognising that many adoptive children may need a bedroom of their own.

A health and safety check will be carried out by the assessing social worker with the applicants to identify any potential risks from activities, accommodation, environment, hobbies and garden.

### **Work commitments**

As a basic requirement, the adoptive parent, or one of the adopters if a couple, is expected to take a period of time off work (equivalent to the nine months paid statutory adoption leave) immediately after the placement of a child, to allow relationships to develop. Each case will be different, depending on the age and needs of the child placed, and the adopter's circumstances. This will be discussed with the applicants at an early stage of the assessment process.

### **Openness and contact**

There is an expectation that all prospective adopters will support the need for openness and share information about the child's background and history with their adopted children in an age-appropriate way.

Prospective adopters are expected to have a one-off meeting with birth parents, if this is deemed appropriate by the agency. They may also be asked to facilitate some form of ongoing contact with the birth family, if this is considered to be in the child's best interest. This requirement is essential for any applicant seeking to adopt a child who has siblings living elsewhere. Support for all contact arrangements is available to Nottinghamshire adopters through the agency.

### **Offences**

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are carried out on applicants and any other adult member of their household (i.e. aged 18 and above).

Applications will not be accepted if applicants or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for, or convicted of, certain specified offences, which relate to abuse or violence towards children. For the purposes of adoption no offences are considered 'spent'. Offences other than specified offences will be considered in the context of the total application.

### **Employees of Nottinghamshire Children and Young People's Department**

Nottinghamshire will not accept applications from enquirers who are employees of the Children, Families and Cultural Services Department, if they are directly involved in child care social work which might compromise their confidentiality, or that of any placement. Any such enquirers will be given information on other adoption agencies and advised to contact an agency in the Consortium.