

Your guide to Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption



***“We cannot thank you enough for all you
have done for us. We feel so complete now”***

Coram Cambridgeshire Adopters

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Welcome to Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption

Thank you for expressing an interest in adoption

This brochure will give you a more in depth knowledge about adopting, such as: Why choose us? Who can adopt? How does it work? It also covers the support available to you and further information that we hope you will find really useful.

Our adoptive families provide a much needed family and home environment to some of the most vulnerable children. We hope this guide will give you a useful insight into the adoption process and help you to learn more about the challenges and rewards involved.

Families who adopt with Coram Cambridgeshire come from a wide range of background. So, if you feel you can provide a forever family for a child who needs a permanent loving home then please contact us today.

We know that lots of people think about adoption but never take that next step. Why don't you become one of those families who do!

What is Adoption?

Most children and babies who need adopting today are in care to their local authorities. There are lots of different reasons why children come into care. In most cases it is because they have experienced a very difficult start in life and are unable to continue living safely with their birth families.

Adoption is the legal procedure in which all of the parental responsibility for a child is transferred to the adoptive parents once the Adoption Order has been granted. An adopted child loses all legal ties with their birth parents and becomes a full member of the new family, usually taking the family's name.

Why adopt with Coram Cambridgeshire?

Giving a child a loving home, where they can feel part of a family is the most significant way to transform the child's life and can be hugely rewarding.

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption is looking for adopters who can offer consistency, stability and reassurance to children who often have a very difficult start in life and usually have additional needs. We also need to find permanent homes for sibling groups to prevent brothers and sisters being separated. We want to make sure that each and every child has the best possible chance of a childhood where they feel secure and loved.

Our friendly and professional team will support you during the adoption process. We aim to ensure stability and happiness of all our adoptive families. As part of that, we will be there for you during the period where you are getting to know the child who has been identified as a possible match for your family and help you to prepare to bring him or her home.

Once he or she is living with you, we will visit regularly during the process of settling in and becoming a family. Once the Adoption Order has been finalized, you are then the child's parents, and you will make the decisions for your child, but we are always interested to have news if you want to keep in touch, and we are also there to offer support at difficult times. See page 13 for more details of the Adoption Support we offer.

Don't let the myths put you off! See p.7 for all the different types of adopters we need.

***“Taking those first initial steps
when we first considered
adoption were nerve-racking but
immensely worthwhile”***

Coram Cambridgeshire Adopters



What is Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption?

We are a new voluntary adoption agency created by Coram working jointly with Cambridgeshire County Council, with funding from the Department for Education (DfE). We bring together the best skills and expertise from Coram and the local authority to help find adopters for the children in Cambridgeshire and elsewhere who need families so they don't experience drift or delay. We are based in Cambridge and Huntingdon and have a geographical reach to Norfolk, Suffolk, West Essex, East Hertfordshire and North East London areas.

What work do we do?

- Recruitment & Assessment of adopters
- Matching families with children
- Adoption Support for adopters and children at time of need
- Birth Records Counselling for adopted adults

Who can adopt?

There is no such thing as a typical adopter. Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption are looking for people who have amongst other things, patience, humour, insight and the energy to be a parent. Every year, dozens of ordinary single people and couples become new families via Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption and adopt children who can no longer be brought up by their own birth parents. We welcome a wide range of people from different backgrounds and experiences. People who adopt include those who are childless, as well as those who are already parents.

Whatever the reason you wish to adopt, if you believe you have the qualities to make an excellent parent, please contact us. The majority of people will make good adopters given the chance.

Over the years many people have found adoption to be an alternative way to have a family. You may think becoming an adopter is too difficult or that you will get turned down based on your age or particular circumstances. In reality, most people we assess go on to have children placed with them.

Can I still adopt if...? Some questions answered

Can I adopt if I am over 40?

YES - There are no hard and fast rules about the upper age limits. People of all ages can, and do successfully adopt depending on their health and the needs of the child. Adopters do have to be over 21 though.

Can I adopt if I have children of my own?

YES - Many people successfully parent both birth and adopted children together. Usually we would only place an adopted child who is younger than your birth child by at least two years.

Can I adopt if I do not live in Cambridgeshire?

YES - We are looking for people wanting to adopt who live in Cambridgeshire and the surrounding regions including Norfolk, Suffolk, West Essex, East Hertfordshire, and North East London.

Can I adopt if I am single, or living with someone but not married?

YES - We welcome applications from all people regardless of their relationship status, but if you are a couple, your relationship needs to be stable.

Can I adopt if I have had fertility treatment?

YES - Ideally you should have finished your last cycle of treatment, and we ask that you have left a gap of at least six months before considering the adoption process - BUT if you are currently undergoing or have just very recently finished treatment and would like an informal chat at this stage, we would be happy to talk to you.

Can I adopt if I smoke?

There are serious health risks for young children in a household where anyone smokes. We ask people wishing to adopt children under the ages of 5 years to give up smoking for at least 6 months before we accept them for assessment. Non-smokers will always be prioritised because of health benefits to you and to any child.

Can I adopt if I am gay or lesbian?

YES - We are primarily interested in what you have to offer a child who needs adoption, and are happy to accept applications from gay and lesbian adopters.

Do you have more questions?

You can visit our website for answers or give us a call, we're here to help: 0300 123 1093.

The Two Stage Adoption Process – Explained

There is a new, shorter, two-stage approval process for prospective adopters. The aim of this process is to enable prospective adopters to learn about adoption within the first stage, and then move into a more intensive assessment and preparation phase in the second stage. The expectation is that (in most cases) the new application and assessment process will be completed within 6 months in total, with **Stage 1** taking two months and **Stage 2** taking four months.

There is also a new fast-track process for second time adopters.

The Stages of the Adoption Process

Initial Enquiry

- Initial Contact with Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption
- Attend an Information Session – optional but very useful
- Initial Interview takes place
- Submission of your Registration of Interest (ROI)
- Registration of Interest accepted or declined

Stage 1

- Statutory checks and references
- Adoption Preparation Training

Stage 2

- Formal application accepted
- Adoption Assessment
- Adoption Panel

After Approval

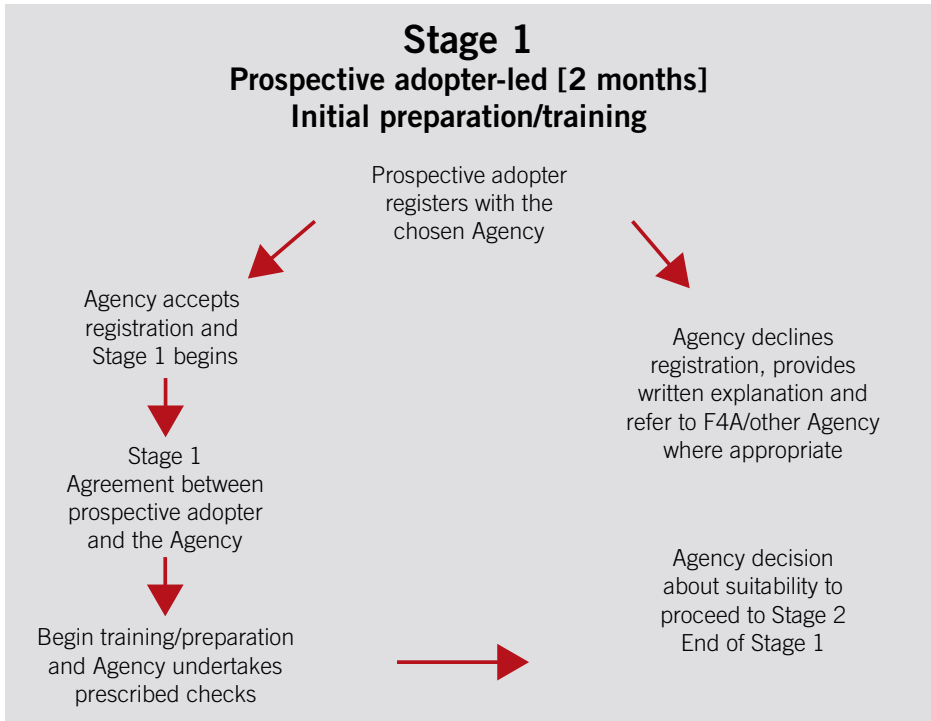
- Matching and Placement
- Introductions
- Regular visits to support you and the child
- Adoption Order granted

Full details of the **Stage 1** and **Stage 2** assessment process are available on our website: www.coramcambridgeshireadoption.org.uk or on the First4Adoption website. We will explain how it works and answer your questions when we meet with you. We summarise the process below.

Stage 1: Two months

Stage 1 begins when the agency accepts a prospective adopter's Registration of Interest; this stage should take no longer than two months. In **Stage 1**, the agency and prospective adopter will produce a written agreement which will set out the responsibilities of them both. Within **Stage 1** the agency will undertake police and health checks. The prospective adopter will need to give the agency the names of four referees, two family members and two not related to them (for single applicants we need three referrals, one from a family member and two not related). The agency will interview each referee and make a written report of the interviews with them.

At the end of **Stage 1**, the agency must inform the prospective adopter of their decision as to whether they can proceed to **Stage 2**. Prospective adopters must make an application within 6 months if they wish to proceed to **Stage 2**.

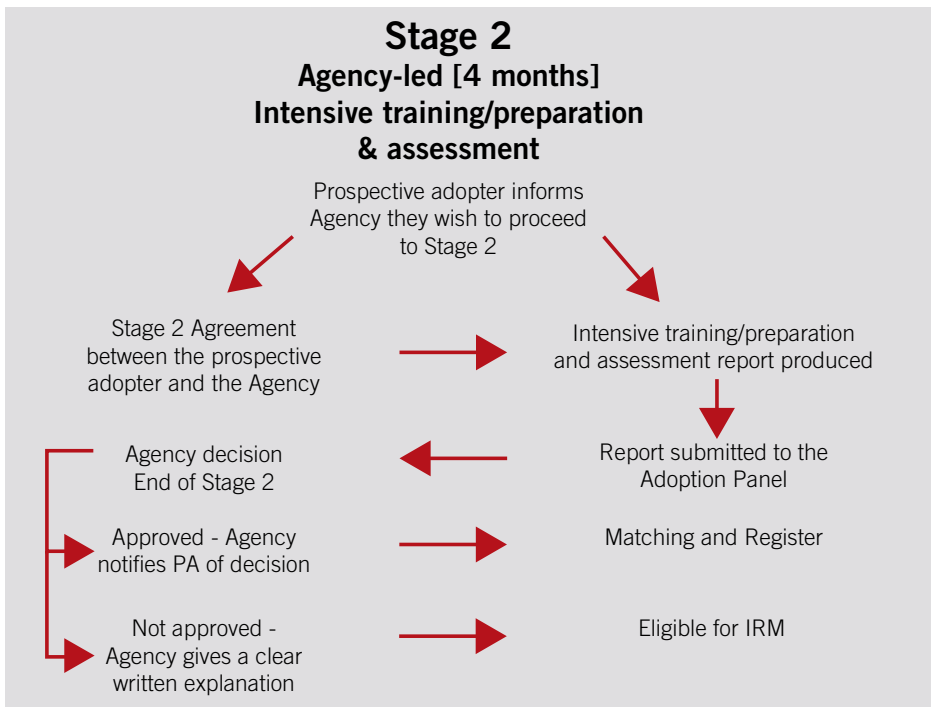


Stage 2: Four months

Stage 2 of the adoption process will only begin once the prospective adopters have completed **Stage 1**, and have notified their agency that they want to proceed to **Stage 2**.

Stage 2 will involve intensive training and assessment. The agency and the prospective adopter need to create an assessment plan; this would detail, for example, the dates of meetings/visits and agreed training. The timing of meetings should be arranged to suit the applicant and the process can be extended.

Stage 2 ends when the agency decides whether the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a looked after child.



Finding a child

All our approved adopters will have completed Coram Cambridgeshire's Adoption Preparation Training, a thorough training course designed to prepare families for adopting a child. Once you are approved, we then work hard to match children in care in Cambridgeshire or from other local authorities with you. We ensure that all our approved adopters waiting for children are regularly updated with information about potential matches, and we ensure that you are kept informed.

Concurrent planning

What is concurrent planning?

This is an innovative way to find families for babies and very young children to prevent delay! Some babies will return to their families, most will be adopted.

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption places babies and children under two years old with concurrent carers while plans for their future are being decided by the Family Court. During this time the children are fostered by their concurrent carers.

Most of the babies placed will need to be adopted, but where it is possible, the plan will be to return them to the care of their parents or relatives.

If the Court decides that the baby cannot go home, she/he will be adopted by the carers. This prevents babies from having delays and moves in care, and allows adopters to build attachments from an early stage of the babies' lives. This is a win/win scenario for the babies to have security from the earliest months.

Who can be a concurrent carer?

We are looking for families who are resourceful and emotionally mature, able to put the needs of babies and young children first, and who can respect and work with children's families in the early months.

Concurrent carers will be dually approved as adopters and foster carers.

What is the role of concurrent carers?

While caring for the child placed with them, the concurrent carers will take the baby for regular supervised contact with his or her parents several times a week. If the Courts decide that the birth parents have shown they can be reliable, able and loving parents, the babies will be returned to their care. The concurrent carers will have the satisfaction of knowing that they have given these children the best possible start in life by providing care and security from an early stage, and will help them settle back into their family. Most of the babies placed are likely to need adopting and will remain with their concurrent carer – adopter.

Real Life Stories for Concurrency

Sophie and Peter had been interested in adoption for some time when they heard about concurrent planning at an information evening. They thought long and hard about challenges and decided that becoming concurrent carers was a wonderful opportunity to give a baby a good start in life.



Sophie and Peter first heard about Rebecca two months before she was born. This gave them the chance to meet with the paediatrician and the social worker to discuss the background and any health issues. During this time a birth relative contacted and asked to be considered to care for Rebecca. This was a difficult few weeks for Sophie and Peter. However, after an assessment it was decided that this would not be a good plan for the baby's long term welfare.

Sophie and Peter were formally asked to look after Rebecca just six days before she was born and the social worker brought her to live with them when she was just three days old. At this stage they were foster carers for the baby, and the Court still had to decide whether Rebecca's mother could make the changes in her life to be able to care for her baby.

Contact with the birth family

Whilst long term plans were uncertain, it was important for Rebecca to see her mother regularly, as well as settling in her foster home. Contact with her mother was twice a week and was carefully supervised. Sometimes other birth family members accompanied the birth mother. Although Sophie and Peter found contact quite a difficult and emotional experience, they understood that it was part of the process and important for Rebecca's mother to be given the opportunity to see if she could parent her child.

Looking back Sophie would say that contact was helpful for her to understand the circumstances that led to Rebecca coming into care. She developed considerable empathy for the birth mother and thinks it will be good in the future to be able to talk to Rebecca about her, when Rebecca is at the age to ask questions.

Rebecca's birth mother enjoyed seeing Rebecca and although at times she was unhappy about what was happening; Sophie was able to maintain an amicable relationship with her and at the final contact was able to offer comfort and reassurance.

Developments in Court

Five months after Rebecca came to live with Sophie and Peter the Court considered all the evidence and decided that that her mother would not be able to make the changes necessary to provide the baby with a safe home to grow up in and that she needed the security of adoption.

Sophie and Peter were very happy although their happiness was tinged with sadness for the birth mother. Shortly after they submitted their adoption application to the court and Rebecca was adopted a few months later.

Rebecca continues to thrive in her adoptive home. She is a happy and healthy child who is now running around and keeping her parents very busy!

Adoption Support

Our team of dedicated social workers work closely with potential adopters, supporting them throughout the process.

Once an adoption order has been granted, our Adoption Support Team is available to support the child and their adoptive parents. The team can help with the adjustment to becoming a family and offers ongoing support as the child grows up. This support may include parenting training to meet the special needs of the child, helping parents answer a child's questions about their past, or counselling.

We have access to the services of an Adoption Clinical Psychologist who can provide specialist support, guidance and recommend the most appropriate intervention to meet the child's needs.

As adopted children grow up they need help to understand their background. We will help adopters to share information in a child friendly way.

Becoming a family takes a lot of work and patience, but we are always here to help achieve the best possible outcomes for adopted children and their parents. The role of a Social Worker is to support children and adoptive parents through the process of becoming a family and to help them deal with the challenges that adoption can bring as a child grows up.

Real Life Post Adoption Story



Ian and Trisha decided to adopt in their early 40's when Trisha's sons, from a previous marriage, had grown up and left home.

Ian and Trisha share their story: *"We first met our daughters five years ago, when they were eight, seven and four years old. They are sisters who needed a home where they could grow up together.*

"The journey to being approved as adopters and then finally being matched with the girls was long. There were many periods of waiting and uncertainty, so the day when we finally met was a huge event in all our lives. Ian and I were incredibly excited but

also very nervous just in case, for some reason, the girls wouldn't like us. In fact they were just very happy to meet their new family.

Becoming a family

"The introduction process was gradual and it was a week or so until the girls spent their first night with us. Then, at last, they moved in and our lives changed forever.

Dealing with the past

"Like a lot of adopted children, our daughters had a difficult start in life and there are still some uncertainties about their past. For example, we don't know the medical histories for them or their birth parents. It is also very sad that we don't have any baby photos of them which they can look at. We are very open with them about their adoption and always answer any questions they have.

Making it happen

"Our advice to any potential adopters is to be prepared for the very personal questions you and other members of your family will be asked during the approval process. You also need to be patient as things can move slowly. Finally, we recommend that you have a good network of family and friends you can turn to and employers who will be supportive and allow flexibility if you need it."

Next steps

Making it happen

Lots of people think about adopting but never take the next step.

Whether you need further information and advice, or are ready to make your application to adopt, Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption is here to help you.

Contact details

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption

Lincoln House
The Paddocks Business Centre
2nd Floor
Cherry Hinton Road
Cambridge
CB1 8DH

0300 123 1093

enquiries@coramcambridgeshireadoption.org.uk
www.coramcambridgeshireadoption.org.uk

For adoption enquiries about London, South East and the East Midlands please contact Coram Adoption visit www.coram.org.uk at adoption@coram.org.uk

Useful Websites

First4Adoption

This is a national helpline and website offering a first port of call for people considering adoption. They are able to help you locate adoption agencies in your area. You will find helpful information on the adoption process and what it is like to be an adoptive parent.

Tel: 0300 222 0022 Website: www.first4adoption.org.uk

CoramBAAF Adoption & Fostering Academy

Website: www.corambaaf.org.uk

CoramBAAF Adoption & Fostering Academy is the leading membership organisation for professionals dedicated to improving outcomes for children and young people in care.

CoramBAAF also has a wide range of books for adopters, foster carers and adopted and fostered children. See their online bookshop or book list at: www.baaf.org.uk/bookshop/cat or write off for it. Of particular interest are:

- The introductory guide on the subject of adoption '**Adopting a Child**'
- A book which outlines the why, when and how of telling the truth about an adopted child's origins '**Talking about Adoption to Your Adopted Child**'

Adoption UK

Adoption UK is a national charity run by and for adopters, providing self-help information, advice, support and training on all aspects of adoption and adoptive parenting. They also provide a library of books and DVDs.

You can download a membership form from their website, or call them.

Tel: 0844 848 7900 Website: www.adoptionuk.org

Criteria for Adopters and Carers

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption aims to offer loving and secure families to children in care who cannot live with their birth parents. The criteria for adopters are drawn up to ensure that the children's needs are the paramount consideration in the adoption process. We value enquiries about adoption and will respond promptly and courteously.

Coram Cambridgeshire can only accept Registration of Interest when we are confident that we will be able to place a child. As a children's charity our mission is to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

Type of Applicants

We welcome applications from people who are:

- Single and couples whether they are in a civil partnership, married or unmarried and whatever their sexual orientation. It is important that prospective adopters who are living as a couple can evidence stability of their relationship.
- Of any nationality, race, faith and cultural background.
- Parents, or those without children.
- Homeowners or renting their home as long as they have security and space to care for children as they grow. You will need to have a spare bedroom for a child particularly as children from a background of neglect and abuse may struggle to share a bedroom.
- Aged over 21. We do not have an upper age limit but applicants should have the potential to care for a child throughout their childhood and provide support into adulthood.
- At least one of the applicants (if a couple) or the applicant (if a single person) must be domiciled in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, or must have been habitually resident in the UK for at least one year. If in doubt applicants should check their circumstances with their social worker. Adopted children need a stable family life and future plans for where the family will live are also important.
- And who do not have any criminal convictions/cautions in respect of offences against children.

It is important that adopters can offer a safe, stable and loving home throughout childhood and beyond. To enable us to assess this we would need to discuss with applicants the following issues at an early stage:

Health

There is a statutory requirement for prospective adopters to have a medical, which is considered by our Medical Advisor. If there are significant concerns that a prospective adopter may not be able to care for a child throughout their dependent years the Medical Advisor will seek further information.

S/he will advise the Adoption Panel about the medical issues and the implications for a child's future care and security.

Smoking

We do not automatically exclude applicants on the basis of smoking but given the known medical risks of passive smoking for young children we discuss this with applicants and encourage them to give up smoking on the basis of the children's welfare. Research has shown that:

- children under two years of age are at more 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 more health problems including chest and ear infections;
- children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of smoke; and
- in the UK, 17,000 children under the age of 5 are admitted to hospital every year with illnesses related to smoking – BAAF Practice Note 51.

For these reasons Local Authorities will generally choose non-smoking adoptive families for children who need families in preference to smokers. Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption will prioritise applications from non-smokers because of the ongoing health risks.

Fertility

Prospective adopters should have completed investigations and treatment before registering their interest in adopting a child. This is because of the emotional stress involved in fertility treatment and the need for applicants to be ready to devote their energies to the adoption process. We advise that there is an appropriate period of time between the ending of fertility treatment and starting the adoption process to give people time to come to terms with being unable to have a birth child.

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 6 months, and longer if at all possible, in order to spend time with the child. In case of Concurrent Planning we require one carer to be at home full time for up to 12 months. This commitment can be shared between two carers.

Experience with Children

Prospective adopters need to be able to demonstrate an understanding of children's needs and to have significant direct experience with children, either within their family and friends network, through their work and/or voluntary work.

Support Network / Referees

Parenting an adopted child can be particularly demanding and it is important that prospective adopters are well supported by family and/or friends practically and emotionally. There is a statutory requirement for prospective adopters to provide referees who have known them for a significant period of time. It is helpful if the referees can comment on the prospective adopter's experience with children.

Accommodation

We expect that any major building work or plans to move home are completed in advance of the assessment process as trying to manage both at the same time can be demanding and stressful.

Finances

Prospective adopters do not need to be well off and may be on benefits but we would need to discuss finances with them and be sure they could manage the responsibility of a child. Financial support may be available for some children. Adoption leave and Statutory Adoption Pay is now available to those who are in employment. In addition Concurrent Planning carers will receive fostering allowances while the child is being fostered.
<https://www.gov.uk/adoption-pay-leave/eligibility>

Criminal Offences

We are required by law to discuss with prospective adopters if they have a criminal record and whether this raises concerns about their suitability to be a parent through adoption. All applicants have to have police and other checks. With their permission, we take up checks through the Disclosure and Barring Service, their local authority, and other agencies.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

Applicants will not be automatically excluded if they have previous convictions but we need to understand the circumstances at the time and any likely implications for the future.

Violent and sexual offences and offences against children will almost always disqualify applicants unless there are very special circumstances. We expect prospective adopters to tell us themselves if they have any police record, as this helps us to build a relationship of trust.

Safety Issues and Pets

We need to be sure that any pets which prospective adopters own do not pose a threat to children's health or safety. Pets can give children companionship and pleasure, but we do need to be reassured that there are no significant safety risks, for example with regard to dogs. A report from a vet may be required.

All these criteria are designed to protect the welfare of children. We want to be open with potential adopters about these criteria and we are always willing to discuss them with applicants and consider how they apply to individual circumstances.

Recruitment Area

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption recruits adopters from Cambridgeshire and the surrounding regions.

Prioritising Children's Needs

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption is a children's charity and it is our responsibility to use our resources of social work time to benefit children who need adoptive families. We therefore need to feel confident that we are likely to be able to place children with those applicants we accept for assessment and preparation. If we have concerns about the likelihood of a placement being made for any reason, we will explain this to applicants at an early stage. This depends on the children available for placement at any time as well as the circumstances of the applicants.