

Appendix V

Worksheets for adopters

Introduction for agency

These worksheets can be used with adopters to give them a structure for any written work you are asking them to complete. They can be used as individual sheets or given as a workbook, but it is important to ensure adopters do not feel overwhelmed by what they are being asked to do. You may decide some of the worksheets, e.g. *Becoming an adopter*, and *Understanding children's needs*, are better completed during Stage Two, with more guidance and input from the assessing social worker.

These worksheets can also be downloaded electronically from the members' section of the CoramBAAF website at www.corambaaf.org.uk.

Introduction for adopters

During Stage One of your adoption assessment, it is important that you begin to explore what adoption will mean for you and your family. In addition to any preparation and training you attend, it is helpful for you to start to think about the areas of your life that you will be asked to talk about and discuss with your assessing social worker during the home study assessment in Stage Two. Your agency may ask you to use these worksheets to start to record your contributions to this work and to help you reflect on what has brought you to the point of adoption and what you will be bringing to your role as an adoptive parent. There are no right answers, and your assessing social worker will be able to go over all this information with you during the assessment in Stage Two, so if you are finding some things difficult to write, make a note of them so you can discuss them with your agency. Your agency will discuss with you during the Stage One Plan what they would like you to do as part of your preparation for adoption.

The worksheets link to the sections of the assessment report that your social worker will complete at the end of your assessment. You may find that as you attend some training, your views may change, so you can always revisit or add to the worksheets before you share them with a social worker.

Your family

This worksheet focuses on your childhood experiences, how they have shaped you as a person and what you are bringing from these experiences into your role as an adoptive parent. (If a couple, to be completed separately by each of you.)

- Family tree/genogram – Complete a family tree/genogram using the template as a guide, going back to your grandparents (with dates of birth and whether family members are living or deceased), and including other significant family members.

- Where were you born and brought up?

- Give details of who was in your family and any other people who were important to you during your childhood and describe your relationships with them.

- Describe your experience of childhood – what are your positive memories and were there any periods of difficulty, e.g. periods of separation, illness, family breakdown, bereavement that impacted on you? How were these difficult times dealt with and who supported you through those times?

- What were your adolescent years like? What are your best and worst memories?

- How do you think your experiences as a child have shaped the person you are today?

- What is your relationship with your parents and any brothers and sisters like now? How supportive are they and what part do they play in your adult life?

- What has given you the greatest satisfaction in your life so far and what has been the biggest regret or disappointment?

- How would you describe yourself now – what are your strengths and is there anything you would like to change?

- How do you think other people who are close to you would describe you?

Your education

This worksheet looks at your experience of school and education, how this has influenced your views on the importance of education and how you will help a child reach their potential.

- List the schools and any further or higher education you attended. What were your exam results or qualifications?

- What are your best and worst memories of education?

- How supportive and involved were your parents in your education? Was there anything you wish they had done differently?

- Have you completed any education or training as an adult? Do you have any plans for further training or qualifications?

- What do you think are the most important things a parent can do to support a child's education?

- What hopes or expectations would you have of any child being placed with you in respect of their education? How would you support them? If you already have children, what has your experience been as a parent of the schools and teaching your children have received?

Your employment

When a child is placed with you, you may be balancing your work commitments with parenting or adjusting to not working. It is helpful for us to know what your existing work patterns are and how you expect these to change after placement.

- Give details of your current and previous employment from leaving school to the present day.

- Tell us about your experience of work – have you worked with children or in a caring situation? Have you had any periods of time when you were not working?

- What was your parents' attitude to work? How did this influence you?

- What are your future plans – are you planning to change your work patterns or leave work when a child is placed? How will this affect your lifestyle and any friendships or support you receive through work?

- If you are intending to continue work or change your patterns of working, what impact will this have on you and what plans do you have for covering child care during school holidays or when a child is ill?

- How will your work commitments fit with your role as an adoptive parent? Have you discussed this with your employer and are they supportive of your plans? What are your employer's policies on statutory adoption leave and statutory adoption pay and will you be able to make use of these entitlements?

Adult life – complete for each of you (if a couple)

Your health

Your views and attitudes to health as a parent will be important, as a child placed with you may have particular health conditions. This information will add to the information gathered as part of your adoption medical.

- What do you do to maintain a healthy lifestyle? Would you do anything differently if you had a child?

- Do you or any member of your family have any illnesses or health conditions, and if so, how does that impact on your/their life? Would these conditions have any impact on you parenting a child?

- What support do you have from other people to help you manage any ongoing health issues, including health professionals?

Any cautions and convictions

Previous offences will not prevent you from being an adoptive parent, but it will be helpful to understand the circumstances and your reflections now on what happened.

- If you have received any cautions or convictions during your childhood or as an adult, can you explain the circumstances that led to the incident/s, how they were dealt with and any sentences given through the court?

- How do you now reflect on the incident/s and what changes did you make following them?

- How would you explain this to any child placed with you and how would you deal with them if they became involved in any challenging or possibly offending behaviour?

Significant previous partners

Your experience with your previous partners may have influenced you in different ways and they may still have a role or some involvement in your life now, so it is helpful to have some understanding of any significant relationships and how you have reflected on them. Where there were children involved, it is helpful to understand your involvement with them then and now.

For each significant partnership

- Describe the relationship, how long it lasted and why it ended. What were the positives and were there any negatives about the relationship? Do you have any contact now with your ex-partner? What do you feel you learned from the relationship?

- If there were any children in or from the relationship, who did the children live with after the relationship ended and how was this decided? What contact was agreed and how does it work for everyone?

- How much do these children and their other parent know about your adoption application and what do they think about it? How will you make sure that you can meet these children's needs alongside those of the child/ren placed with you?

Your current relationship

Adopting a child, like parenthood generally, can add an extra dimension to your relationship and you will be a great source of support to each other so it is helpful to understand how your relationship has developed and how you work together as a team.

- Describe how, where and when you met and how your relationship developed.

- What do each of you feel makes your relationship work? What roles do each of you have in the relationship and in your household? How do you make decisions as a couple? Can you give some examples of this?

- What do you see as the strengths of your relationship? How has your relationship developed over time?

- What has been the most difficult thing you have been through as a couple and how did you support each other through this? Were there things you would change or have changed as a result of this experience?

- How do you think adopting a child will impact on or change your relationship?

- Where do you see yourselves in 20 years' time?

- If you are adopting alone but you have a partner, how much will they be involved with the child and how do they see their role?

- If you don't have a partner at present, how would you ensure that your adopted child was supported if you have any relationships in the future?

Members of your household

Other adults living in your family are likely to play an important role in the life of your adopted child so we need to understand something about them, their views about you adopting and how involved they will be with a child. Any children you have will have their lives changed by a new brother or sister joining the family and it is helpful to know more about them and how you have prepared them for these changes.

- Are there any other adults living in your home? If so, give details of who they are and your relationship with them. What role would they have with your child?

- If you have any children living with you or living elsewhere, describe their personality and character, interests and talents.

- What is their relationship like with any brothers and sisters they have? How might this change if another child/ren joins the family?

- How are they doing at nursery/school/college?

- What do they understand about adoption and why children need to be adopted?

- If any of your children are adopted, what has been their experience of adoption? How do you think they will cope with any differences in the circumstances of another child joining the family, e.g. different contact arrangements, family backgrounds, etc?

- How have your children been involved in your plans to adopt? What have been their views and have these changed over time?

- How do you think they will benefit from an adopted child joining the family? Are there any areas where they might be vulnerable, and if so, how would you manage this?

Your support network

Adopting a child will bring some challenges, and there are times when having support from family and friends, both practical and emotional, can help adopters have time for themselves and each other or talk through things that are happening and how they are feeling. It helps to think through who will be available to offer you this support and how much you will involve them in learning and understanding about what adoption is going to involve.

- Ecomap – Complete an ecomap/diagram based on the template provided, showing all the people you know who you think will be offering you emotional or practical support. You may want to include membership groups, churches or professionals who you think will be a support to you.
- Tell us something about the main people who you think will support you and what kind of support they will give you.

- Are there times when you have needed to call on them for support in the past – can you give some examples of this?

- What do your family and friends think about you adopting? Are there any family members or friends who have expressed concerns about you adopting a child? Have you thought about how you will manage this so it does not have a negative impact on you or your child?

- Are you involved in any local groups or organisations? Are people there aware of your plans to adopt and how do you feel they will support you?

- Do you know any other adopters, foster carers or people who are adopted? What support might you receive from them? Would you think about using support groups for adopters before or after your child is placed with you?

Your home

- Describe your home and any garden or play areas and the space you have for a child joining your family.

- Do you own your home or is it a rented property? If rented, how secure is your tenancy and is the landlord aware of your plan to adopt? How long you have lived here?

- Are there any changes you need to make to your home so it is suitable for children? If so, what is your timescale for getting these done?

- Use the health and safety checklist provided to think about any further changes you will need to make to your home in preparation for a child being placed with you.

- Have you any plans to move house in the future? What would the implications of this be for a child being placed with you?

- If you have pets tell us about them, how they respond to children and any issues you think might arise for your child or your pet with a child joining the family. Your agency may ask you to complete a questionnaire to help you think about this.

Your local community and leisure interests

- Tell us about your town, village and the area that you live in and what is available for children in your area (e.g. schools, health, leisure facilities). If any of these are not within your local area, where can they be found and what transport is available?

- How involved are you in your local community? Do you attend local groups or activities? What makes it a suitable area for children?

- What interests or hobbies do you enjoy? How much time does this take up? Do you do any of these with your partner (where applicable) and are there some activities you would want to involve a child in? Will you need to make any changes to these after a child joins your family?

Your lifestyle

These prompts are to help you think about your life as it is now and how it is likely to change when a child joins your family.

- Describe a typical weekend in your household. Describe your routine during the week.

- How do you think a child joining your family will impact on the things that you and any other family members are involved in? What might need to change?

- Who does what in your family, e.g. cooking, cleaning, etc? Are these roles important to you?

- Are there any "house rules" that exist in your home or that you think you would introduce for a child joining your family?

- What is your attitude to food and mealtimes? How would you manage a child who had difficulties with food?

- What leisure activities do you and any other family members enjoy individually and as a family?

- Are there any religious or cultural practices that are important in your household? How would this change when a child joins your family?

- How do you celebrate special occasions (birthdays/religious festivals/Christmas/anniversaries)?

- What kind of holidays do you enjoy? How might this change when a child is placed?

Becoming an adopter

Deciding to adopt can be the result of a journey for many people, which may involve decisions about whether or not to have children, having medical interventions such as infertility treatment and coming to joint decisions about adoption if you are a couple. If you find it hard to write about, then this is an area that you can explore further in discussions with a social worker, but these questions will help you to think about how you have reached a point where adoption is the right way for you to have or complete your family.

- How long have you been thinking about adopting a child? Whose idea was it, what made you think about adopting and why do you feel now is the right time for you?

- (If a couple) Have there been difficult times in this "journey" for each of you and how have you supported each other through this?

- Have you involved other people in your decision to adopt and how have they supported you?

- If you have been involved in having any infertility treatment, how did you deal with the emotional and physical impact of this individually and as a couple? How did you reach the decision to stop any treatment you were having?

- What has been the process of coming to terms with not having a child of your own? Why do you feel that now is the right time to adopt?

- Have you thought about the fact that some feelings around infertility may arise again in the future at different times? How do you think you would deal with these feelings?

- If you have a birth child/ren, what has led you to decide to add to your family through adoption?

- Do you plan to have more children of your own in the future and, if so, when and how many?

- What do you feel are the issues that might be raised by having both birth children and adopted children in your family?

The child/ren you hope to adopt

We know that people's ideas about the child or children they may adopt can change during the time they are learning more about adoption and hearing about the children who need adoption, but it is helpful to know about your initial thoughts and if those change as you go through training and assessment.

- Do you have an idea of the age, sex and number of children you hope to adopt?

- How have you come to this view? Have your thoughts changed about this over time?

- How would this fit into your current family situation?

- Have you thought about adopting siblings or a larger sibling group? What do you see as the benefits and any drawbacks?

- Could you consider a child whose development is uncertain or who has specific learning difficulties or a physical disability? Could you consider a child with ongoing health issues? Give some examples of things you feel confident in managing, or would need support with, or feel you couldn't manage.

- Is there any behaviour that you would feel unable or unsure of managing (e.g. relationship difficulties, aggressive behaviour, sexualised behaviour)? Do you think this would change if you were able to receive training and support in these areas?

Understanding the needs of adopted children and becoming an adoptive parent

This is an area that you will be learning about through training and the discussions you will have with social workers but you may have already started to read and explore your ideas and understanding, and can add to these as you go through the assessment.

Your experience of caring for children

- Thinking of your own experience of being parented, what would you change and what would you repeat as a parent yourself?

- If a couple, did you have different experiences of being parented? How will you agree on how you will parent together?

- What experience do you have of looking after children – as a parent, a foster carer or adopter, or looking after other people's children or professionally? Give details of some of the children and situations where you have cared for children.

- What do you think are your strengths in caring for children – give examples of these. How do you think your family and friends would describe your strengths as a potential parent? Are there any examples of when you have helped children cope with big changes in their lives and how did you do this?

- Are there any areas of adoptive parenting that you think you might find difficult and what support might you need?

- What do you think would be the positives and challenges of adopting siblings? How do your own experiences influence your thinking on this? How would you manage their differing needs if you had siblings placed with you?

- Can you give examples of how you have managed difficult behaviour from children? How do you/would you encourage positive behaviour?

- How would you encourage play, hobbies and activities for children? How would you build up a child's self-esteem and make them more resilient?

- If you are already a parent, what does being a parent mean to you? How did you adjust to becoming a parent? What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses as a parent?

- What do you think have been your biggest rewards and challenges as a parent and how have you dealt with these?

- If a couple, are there particular parenting roles that you each take?

- How will you balance meeting the needs of the children already in your family with a child/ren being placed with you? What difficulties do you anticipate and how will you manage these?

Identity and bringing up a child

- How would you describe yourself and your own identity (i.e. in terms of your gender, sexual orientation, language, ethnicity, disability, class, culture and spirituality)?

- How do you view the UK today in terms of the mix of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups within the population? What is the ethnic mix of your own local area?

- Do you follow any particular faith? If so, how important is this to you and how is this incorporated into your lifestyle?

- Have you ever experienced any discrimination, prejudice or bullying?

- What contact have you had with friends or through working with people of other ethnicities, people who are disabled or gay or lesbian? How has this contact influenced your views?

- If you have children, how have you raised your children in relation to these issues? Can you give examples of how you have talked to them about these things?

- How would you help your adopted child have a positive sense of their own identity?

- If you are considering adopting a child from a black or minority ethnic background or from a different country, what issues in relation to their identity and self-image do you think they might have to deal with? How would you help them with this?

- How would you help a child deal with racism or discrimination of any kind?

UNDERTAKING AN ADOPTION ASSESSMENT

- If you are considering adopting a disabled child, how would you promote a positive sense of identity for them?

- How would you feel if your adopted child disclosed that they were gay or lesbian? Is there anyone in your family or support network who might find this difficult? How would you deal with this?

- Do you understand that children may come from backgrounds where their own families held and expressed discriminatory views and they may have absorbed some or all of these attitudes and values? How would you deal with this? How could you help a child develop a positive view of the UK as a multiracial/multicultural society?

Expectations of children and understanding of the lifelong nature and impact of adoption

- What do you think might be the differences between being a parent to birth children and being an adoptive parent to a child who has experienced abuse or neglect during their childhood?

- What resources have you consulted, e.g. books read, DVDs watched, people talked to? How has this helped you?

- Do you know or have you met any experienced adopters? What have you learned from them?

- Do you understand the importance of telling a child about the reason they were adopted, at different ages and stages of development? Have you thought about how to do this and what support might you need?

- How do you feel about meeting a child's parent/s for a one-off meeting? What do you understand to be the benefits of this for you and the child?

- What do you understand about the importance of contact with birth family members (e.g. parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents) of a child placed with you through "letterbox" arrangements or direct contact?

- What level of contact do you feel you could support with different family members if it was important to the child? Do you expect that this might change over time?

- Have you had any involvement with contact arrangements as a child or a parent which could help you understand and deal with the emotional and practical implications?

- During adolescence there are many challenges, but we are increasingly aware of adopted children using social networking websites to make contact with members of their birth family. Have you thought about how you might make them aware of the risks involved in this?

- When your adopted child becomes 18, they will be entitled to see their adoption records and could decide to make contact with birth family members. How would you prepare them for this before they reach 18?

UNDERTAKING AN ADOPTION ASSESSMENT

- What do you understand about the adoption support that will be offered by your agency? What is your view about using the support services available after a child joins your family and through to 18 and beyond?
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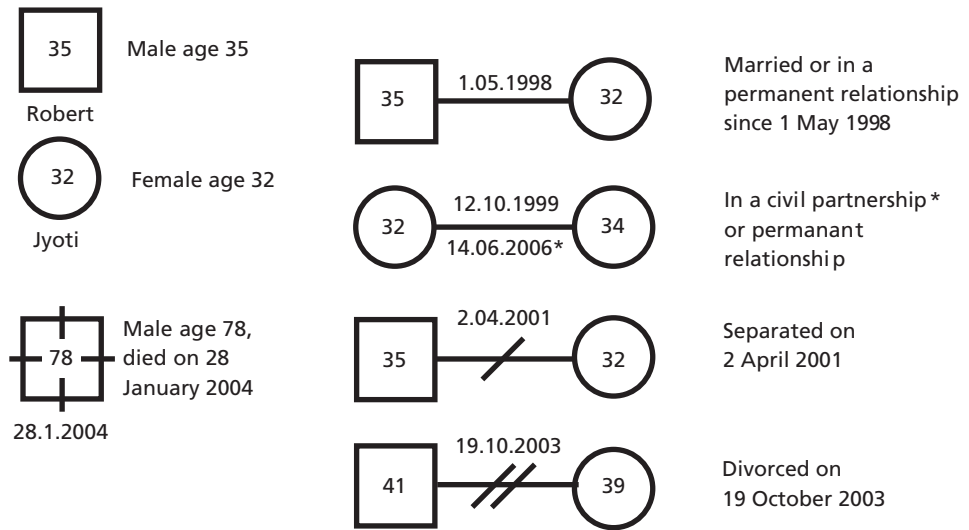
Understanding the role of a concurrent planning/FfA carer

(see Appendix VI)

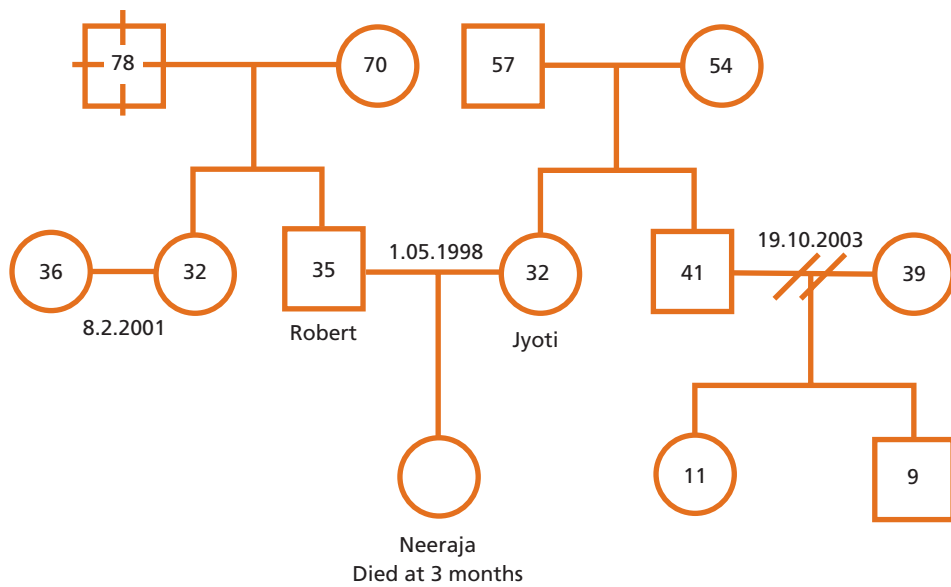
Potential testamentary guardians

- Have you thought about who you would choose to be a testamentary guardian for a child placed with you in the event of your death? Have you discussed this with them? What are your reasons for choosing this person?
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- What support would there be from other members of your family and what financial arrangements would you make to support this arrangement?
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Exemplar for family tree symbols



Robert and Jyoti's family tree



Example of an ecomap

Below is an example of a completed ecomap.

