

Information for Adopters



Information for **Adopters** about:

Applications & Assessment • Eligibility
Approval • FAQs

Am I Eligible to Apply?

The assessment process is your chance to convince us that a child (or children) placed with you will grow up in a suitable, safe and healthy home environment.

Unfortunately, Lambeth has limited resources to devote to adoption. For this reason, we can only assess you if we believe there is a reasonable prospect that you will be approved, and a child placed with you. And, we need to reassure ourselves that you can commit fully to the adoption process.

There are two simple criteria that you have to meet to qualify for assessment:

- you must have permanent residency
- you must have accommodation with room for a child.

We're keen to stress that you cannot be excluded automatically on grounds of age, health or other factors, except in the cases of certain criminal convictions. However, these factors will be considered in terms of your ability to look after children in a safe and responsible way.

We've listed a number of reasons why we could conclude it inappropriate to proceed with an application. However these are only examples. If something here raises doubt in your mind about applying, please feel free to contact us first to discuss it (this can be done in complete confidence). You will also find more information in the frequently asked questions section.

- Age: where there is reasonable cause for concern that you may not survive through all the years of the child's dependence, or retain sufficient energy and vigour to meet the child's needs during it.
- Health: where your medical or psychiatric history or current state of health gives reasonable cause for concern about your future health prospects.

- Work/Lifestyle: where your work responsibilities or leisure interests constitute a genuine risk to your life or health.
- Alcohol/substance abuse: where consumption of alcohol and/or other substances constitutes a serious risk to your life or health.
- Character: whether you have a criminal record (either current or 'spent') of offences, which calls into question your suitability to parent through adoption.
- Housing: where your current accommodation is temporary or insufficient or unsuitable for the placement of a child, or contains domestic animals that may endanger the health or safety of the child.
- Relationship: in the case of a joint application, that there is a stable and committed relationship of a reasonable duration.
- Parenting: where your child has been the subject of care proceedings or child protection proceedings giving reasonable cause for concern, or there have been serious concerns about your care of children by other agencies or employees.
- Infertility: where you are still undergoing fertility treatment, or there is less than 6 months since the ending of fertility treatment.
- Bereavement: where you are still in the process of recovering from a major loss or bereavement.

If anything comes to light that is likely to prevent your ultimate approval to adopt, we reserve the right not to proceed (or later not to continue) with your application. This is particularly pertinent where these factors were not disclosed at the outset; or in the unfortunate event that an irretrievable breakdown occurs in our relationship with you.



Judging your Suitability

Providing a permanent family for a child and bringing them up to independence is far from easy for anyone. And as an adoptive parent, you face challenges over and above those of a birth parent - which is why we have to assess your suitability so vigorously.

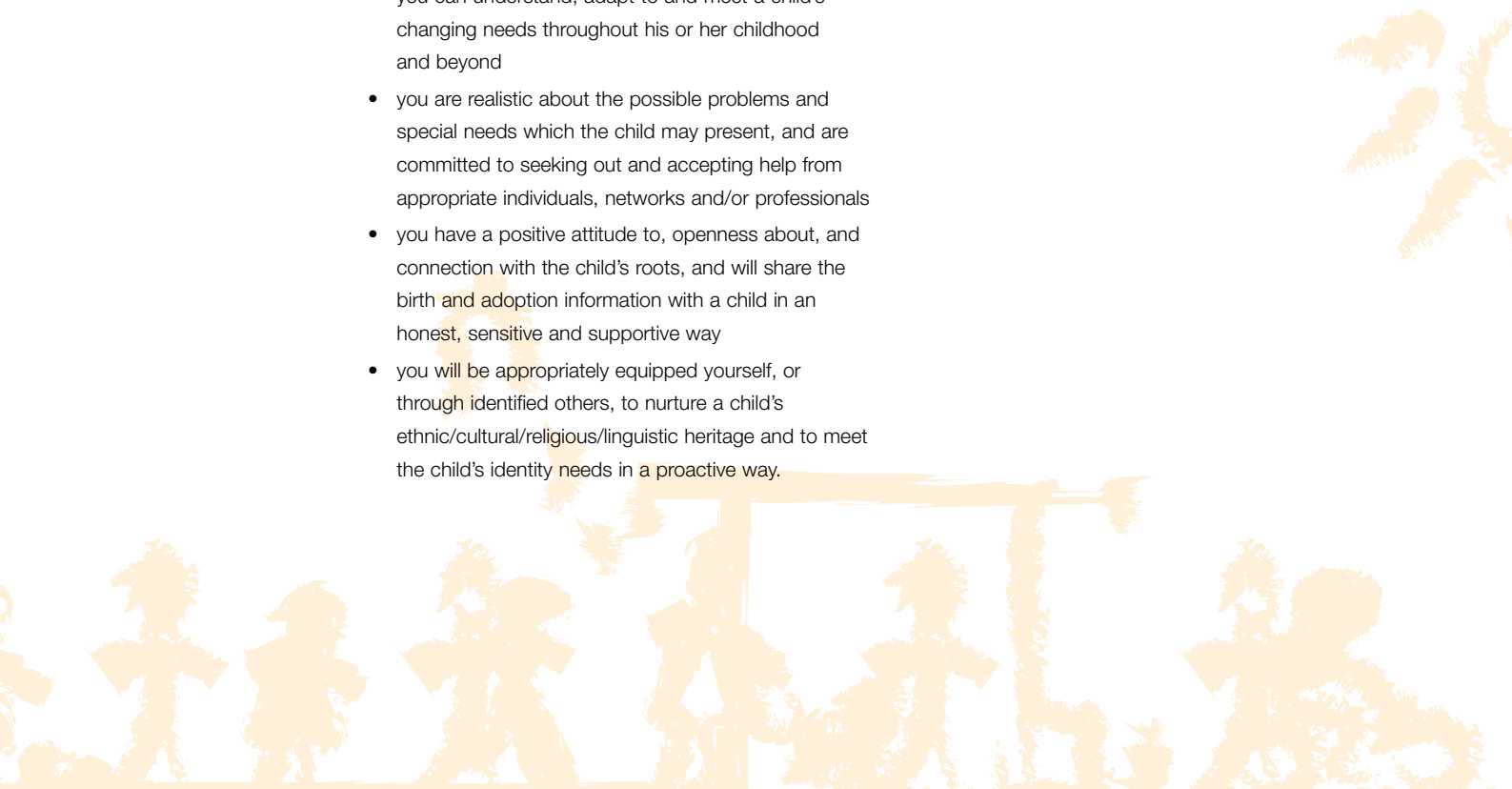
We base our assessments on the rights and needs of children, and take into account what we have learned from the outcomes of previous adoption placements. Like every prospective adopter, you will have different strengths and areas of vulnerability in relation to adopting a child. We'll look very carefully at all of them.

It's important for you to know that we have no "blue print" for a suitable adoption. However by the end of the assessment we expect you to have demonstrated that:

- you will have sufficient time and space in your life to devote to the parenting role
- you have the emotional capacity to bond with, care for and nurture a child unconditionally
- you can understand, adapt to and meet a child's changing needs throughout his or her childhood and beyond
- you are realistic about the possible problems and special needs which the child may present, and are committed to seeking out and accepting help from appropriate individuals, networks and/or professionals
- you have a positive attitude to, openness about, and connection with the child's roots, and will share the birth and adoption information with a child in an honest, sensitive and supportive way
- you will be appropriately equipped yourself, or through identified others, to nurture a child's ethnic/cultural/religious/linguistic heritage and to meet the child's identity needs in a proactive way.

Preparation and assessment is very much a process of self-examination, learning and growth. So, we also take into account the extent to which you have been:

- willing to commit yourself to the assessment process, and to assume personal responsibility for your growth and development
- open to considering the potential stresses and setbacks, alongside the rewards and joys, of adoptive parenting.



The Application & Assessment Procedure

There's no denying that the whole application and assessment process looks complicated - fortunately, it is much more straightforward than it seems at first.

Here we will go through the various stages of the process, outlining exactly what is involved and how long it may take to be approved.

It's important for you to build a clear understanding of the purpose and importance of each of these stages.

Doing this will leave you better equipped to deal with each individual part of the application and assessment process. It should also make you feel more confident about the process as a whole.

This section has one other important aim. It explains what you can expect from Lambeth, including the standards we have set ourselves to make the process as efficient as possible.

Preliminary Enquiry

When you contact us to enquire about an adoption home study, we will:

- send you a copy of the Adoption Information Pack, consisting of:
 - This information
 - Lambeth Complaints Leaflet
 - Initial Enquiry Form for you to complete and return.
- invite you to any Information Sessions being run for adopters.

Once you have returned the completed Enquiry Form, we will consider within the social work team whether the information you have provided meets our eligibility criteria.

- If you do meet the criteria, we will invite you to make an appointment for an initial interview.
- If you don't meet the criteria, we will advise you in writing about other options open to you in pursuing adoption applications.



Initial Interview

The initial interview is a key part of the process with a number of important purposes - it enables us to:

- explore why you want to adopt and how fully you understand the issues and challenges of adoption
- discuss, and advise you, on any factors which might have an adverse effect on your application, and identify any tasks you may need to complete before proceeding to a formal application
- answer any questions you may have, outline our practice for preparing and assessing prospective adopters, and confirm your views about working in this way.

After the interview we will:

- decide within the social work team whether we can proceed to a Formal Application; and
- write to let you know our decision and, if it is to proceed, the likely timescale.

Formal Application

You will need to complete and return a detailed Application Form. Then we will take up all the personal and medical references required both by our procedures and by the law relating to Adoption Agencies.

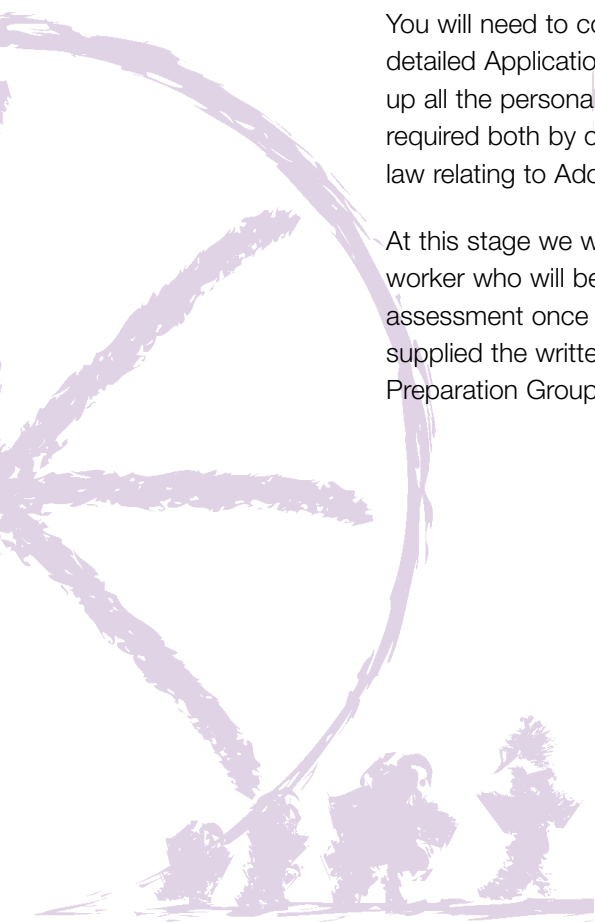
At this stage we will also identify the agency worker who will be undertaking your assessment once you have attended and supplied the written evaluation of the Preparation Groups.

Group Preparation

We will invite you to a series of preparation groups (usually held on three Saturdays and one evening). Unless there are exceptional circumstances, we'll expect you to attend these (or to have previously attended them) before your assessment begins.

You'll find these group sessions very valuable. Not only do you learn more about adopting, you get to meet, and talk to, people in the same situation as you. There is an assessment element in the groups as well. Social workers will pass that information on to the assessing social worker; if you request to, you can see a copy of this written feedback.

We will ask you to complete and return a written evaluation of these groups after you've finished the series and you are ready to proceed to the assessment stage. This helps us with your assessment and it also enables us to plan for future groups.



Home Study Assessment & Report

The home study is the cornerstone of the assessment process. Your social worker will carry out an in-depth survey of you within your home. This enables us to gauge your strengths and weaknesses effectively, and ultimately it helps us determine whether you can provide a loving family and secure home environment for a child.

During the study, your social worker will ask you to undertake a variety of activities and tasks designed to assist your assessment and continuing preparation. S/he will also carry out a series of interviews with you. If applicable, your children and any other members of the household will be interviewed. Additionally, s/he will interview your two personal referees and possibly other significant people in your extended family and wider network.

When the assessment is complete your social worker will collate their research in a final draft of your Home Study report. The main part of this is the BAAF Form F, which is a detailed summary of the information you have shared with the social worker.

We will send you a copy of the report and ask you to sign it. You will be able to correct any factual errors and, if you wish, you can write observations about the report for our Adoption and Permanency Panel.



Approval

Your social worker will present the Home Study report, along with any written observations submitted by you, to the Lambeth Adoption and Permanency Panel which you will be invited to attend.

The panel will discuss your application and recommend to the agency whether or not you should be approved to adopt. Our Agency Decision-Maker will consider your report along with the Panel's recommendation, and then come to a decision on whether to approve your application.

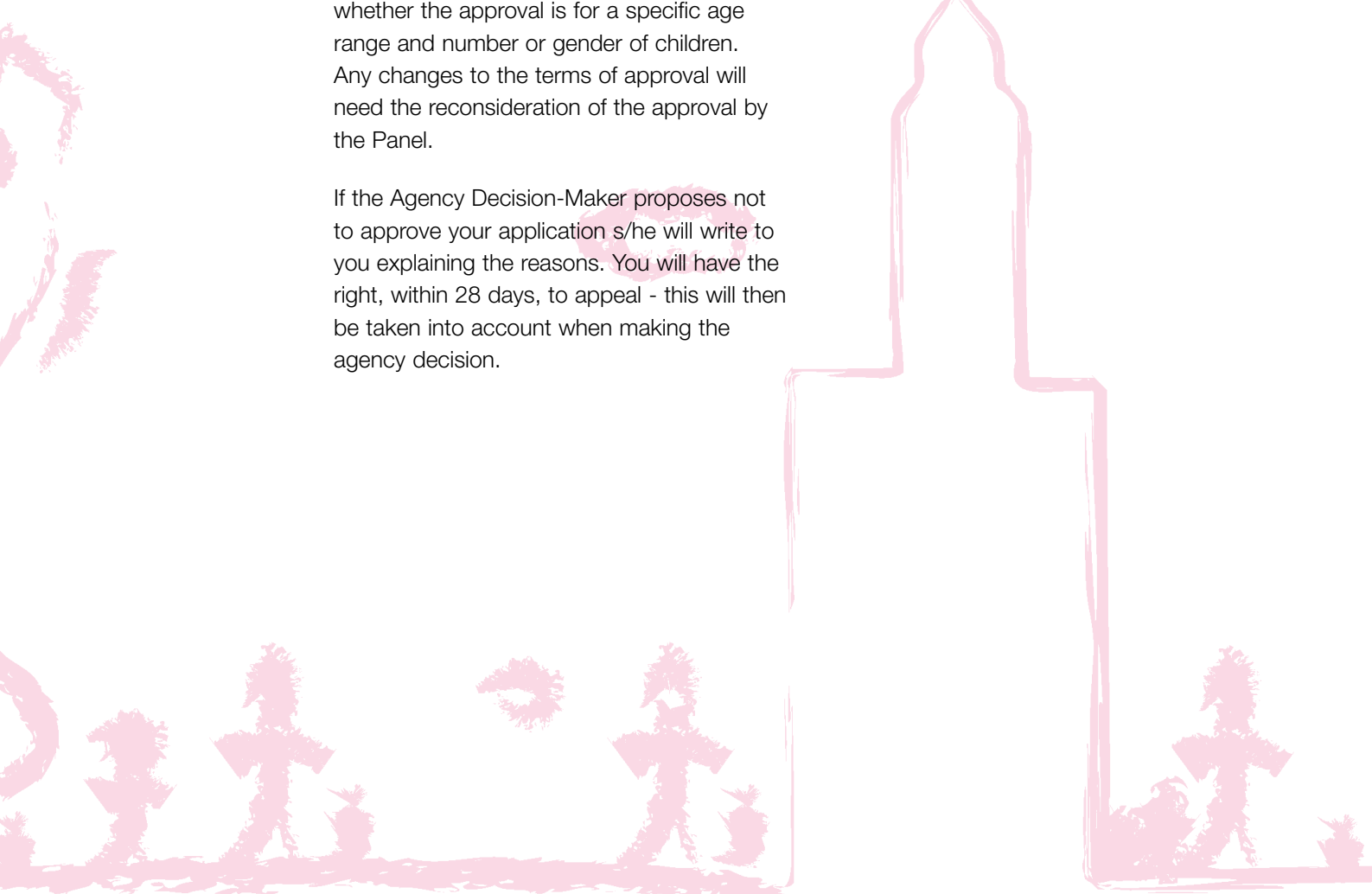
You will be informed of the panel recommendation within 24 hours and in writing within one week. This will specify whether the approval is for a specific age range and number or gender of children. Any changes to the terms of approval will need the reconsideration of the approval by the Panel.

If the Agency Decision-Maker proposes not to approve your application s/he will write to you explaining the reasons. You will have the right, within 28 days, to appeal - this will then be taken into account when making the agency decision.

After Approval

Once you've been approved, your social worker will visit you to offer lots more advice and assistance. They will also arrange to see you when you receive information about a specific child and following the placement of a child with you.

Our support doesn't end there either. We will be available to you at any time in the future. In fact, we will gladly provide news or offer any help we can. And if you feel you don't need to maintain contact, that's fine with us too. As long as the child is within a loving, secure family, we're happy.



Timescales for Applications

We aim to meet the standards and timescales as set out in the National Standards for Adopters.

- a) To provide a written response to a first enquiry within a week.
- b) To provide a follow-up interview/invitation to a preparation meeting within 2 months.
- c) To make a decision on approval within 6 months of accepting an application to proceed.
- d) If (b) and (c) follow each other without a gap, the whole procedure from enquiry to decision should not take more than 8 months. The Lambeth Adoption Panel will be asked to record reasons for delays.

However it is very important for you to understand that:

- factors beyond our control may prolong the process - such as your holidays, the time you need for tasks connected with your application and any unavoidable delays in receiving your personal references, from the local authority, police etc.
- your preparation and assessment will be unique to you, and you may want, or benefit from, additional time to consider the complex range of issues involved in an adoption.

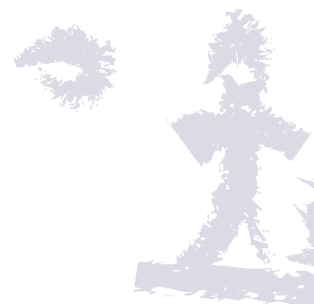
Subject to these two points, we aim to complete your adoption application without undue or unavoidable delay.

Confidentiality & Security of Information

Adoption agencies are required by Regulations to adhere to strict rules concerning the confidentiality and security of information received from/about users of their services.

- The information we obtain in connection with your application will be treated in the strictest confidence and stored securely in your individual case file.

- We will not disclose any identifying information about your application to third parties without your written permission unless Regulations or Law requires such a disclosure.



Representations & Complaints

Whether you are content or dissatisfied with the service you have received from Lambeth Adoption Service we are interested in your views and would like to hear them.

Your Comments

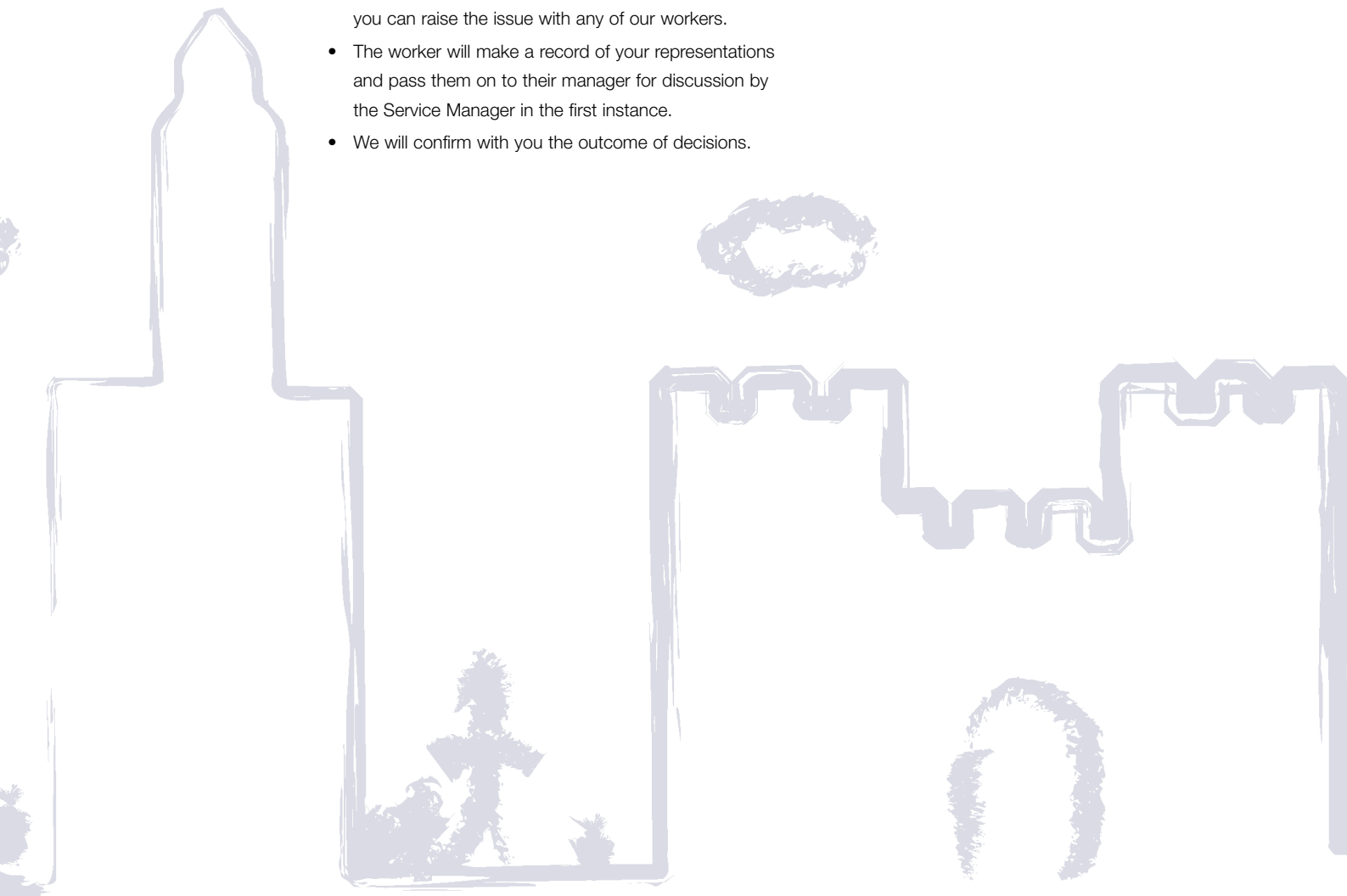
- We will routinely ask you to comment on your experience of Lambeth's Services.
- You are also welcome to write at any time to the Adoption and Foster Care Services Manager to let us know directly about the services we provide.
- At the completion of an assessment you will be asked for feedback as to the service received from Lambeth.

Representations

- If you wish to make requests or recommendations about how our services might be improved, or if you are dissatisfied about how we have worked with you, you can raise the issue with any of our workers.
- The worker will make a record of your representations and pass them on to their manager for discussion by the Service Manager in the first instance.
- We will confirm with you the outcome of decisions.

Complaints

- You have the right to make a complaint at any time about the service provided. Initially we would wish to attempt to resolve any complaint in consultation with you.
- The attached leaflet describes the Complaint System for complaints or positive feedback about the services of Lambeth Social Services.
- A copy of the full complaints procedure is available on request.



FAQ

Q. Am I too old to adopt?

A. Your age will not pose a problem, providing there is no concern that you will not survive throughout the years of the child's dependence.

Q. How long does the adoption process take?

A. Less than an average pregnancy - the whole procedure from initial enquiry through to approval should not take more than 8 months.

Q. How long does it take for a child to be placed once my application is approved?

A. It depends very much on the age, background or particular needs of the child you are looking for.

Q. What accommodation do I need?

A. You must have room for the child.

Q. Do I need own my own home?

A. Not at all, your current accommodation just has to be judged suitable for a child.

Q. Do I need a certain income level to adopt?

A. No, every case is treated individually and you may be eligible for financial help.

Q. Can I still get help and support after a child is placed with me?

A. Of course. We're more than happy to offer help for as long as you need it.

Q. Do your checks really need to be so rigorous?

A. The checks may seem intrusive, but the welfare of children in our care always comes first. This means we have to carry out in-depth checks to ensure your suitability to adopt.

Q. Who makes the decisions regarding health issues?

A. We are guided by a specialist medical adviser on all health matters.

Q. Will I receive help with any legal costs I may incur?

A. Again, this depends on your individual circumstances - but financial aid may be available.

Useful Contacts

British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering

Skyline House, 200 Union Street,
London SE1 0LX
Tel: 020 7593 2000
Fax: 020 7593 2001
e-mail: mail@baaf.org.uk
www.baaf.org.uk

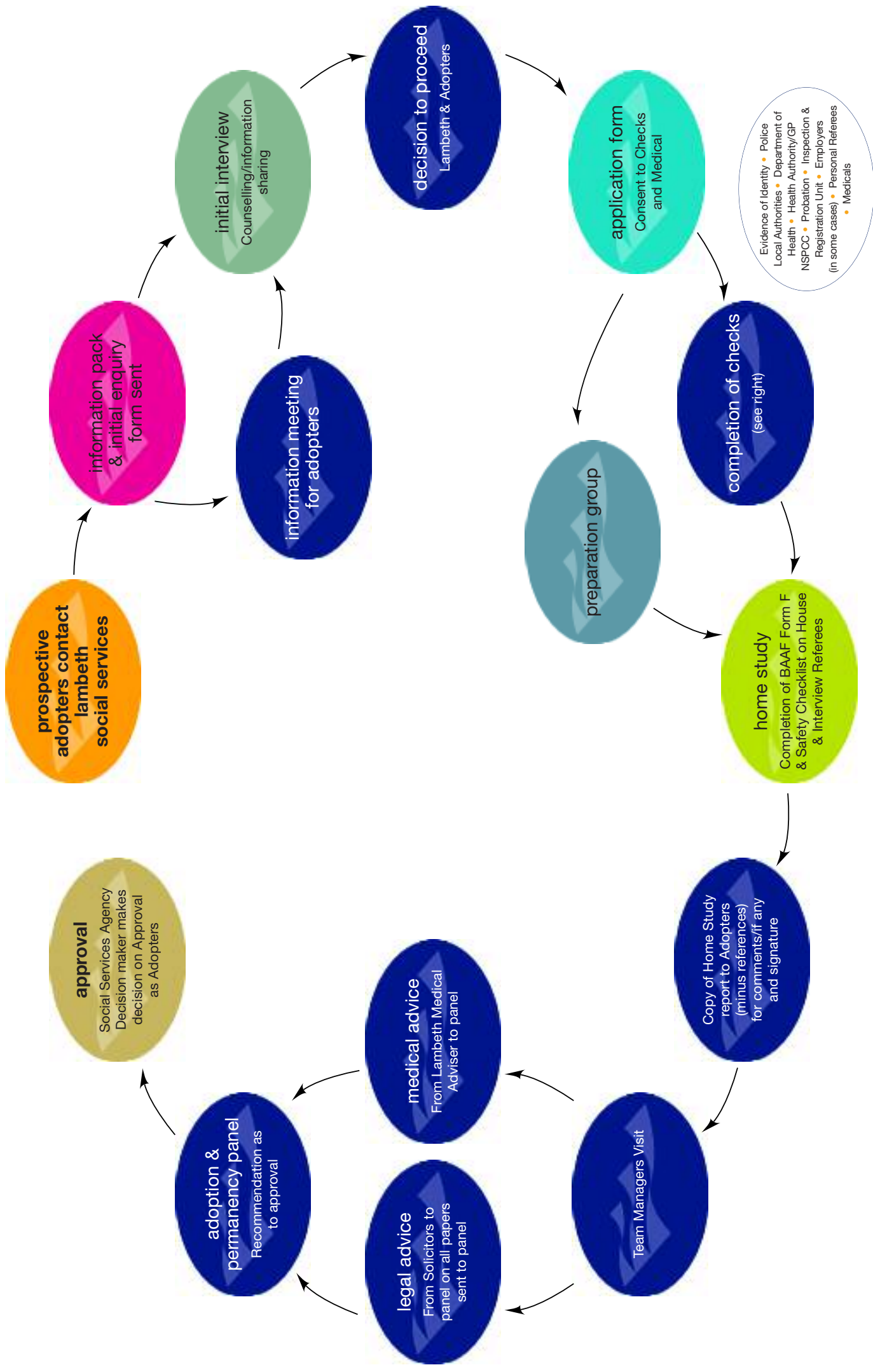
The BAAF is an independent body which promotes best practice in adoption and fostering. They are a major publisher, training provider and family finder.

The Post Adoption Centre

5 Tomano Mews,
London NW5 2RZ
Tel: 020 7284 0555
Fax: 020 7482 2367

The centre offers a confidential and specialist service of advice, counselling and family work to anyone who has been involved in an adoption.

Steps in the Approval Process for Adopters





Lambeth Social Services
Adoption Team
91 Clapham High Street
London SW4 7TF

Tel: 020 7926 8503