



Department
for Education

Call for Views: Placing of Children in Sibling Groups for Adoption

Call for Views Response Form

Closing date: 31 August 2012

Your comments must reach us by that date.

Please send responses to
adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk

Information provided in response to this call for views, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

Reason for confidentiality:

Name	Dr. Carol Homden
Organisation (if applicable)	Coram
Address:	Coram Community Campus 49 Mecklenburgh Square London WC1N 2QA

If you have an enquiry related to this call for views please e-mail: adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk . Please be aware we can only respond to enquiries relating to the call for views exercise from this mailbox account.

For all other enquiries please contact the Department via the 'Contact Us' page on the DfE website: www.education.gov.uk

Please mark the category which best describes you as a respondent

<input type="checkbox"/> Child/ Young person	<input type="checkbox"/> Children's social worker
<input type="checkbox"/> Adopted child	<input type="checkbox"/> Social worker (adoption team) (LA)
<input type="checkbox"/> Adopted adult	<input type="checkbox"/> Social worker (Voluntary Adoption Agency)
<input type="checkbox"/> Birth parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent Reviewing Officer
<input type="checkbox"/> Birth relative (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Guardian (CAFCASS)
<input type="checkbox"/> Prospective adopter	<input type="checkbox"/> Member of the judiciary
<input type="checkbox"/> Adoptive parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Lawyer
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Member of a Voluntary Community Sector organisation (VCS)	<input type="checkbox"/> Member of an adoption panel
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/> Member of an adoption support organisation

Please Specify:

Children's Charity and registered adoption agency
Provider of management services in adoption
Group includes Coram Children's Legal Centre

PLACING CHILDREN IN SIBLING GROUPS FOR ADOPTION

1. How can we find more adopters willing and able to take on sibling groups, particularly larger groups?

Comments:

Our first comment relates to the broader scope of these proposals. It is essential that there is very careful consideration of any proposal to place siblings together, particularly larger groups. Children need, and have a right to, at least one ongoing relationship in their lives; in some cases, the most promising one will be with one or more siblings. However, this is not always the situation – what could protect one sibling may not be best for another. These are extremely complex decisions, particularly for larger sibling groups. This presents one of the central challenges to placing sibling groups – often decisions are avoided, and this is a decision in itself. Any delay exponentially increases the challenge of finding suitable placements, especially of course where children bring other challenges – are older, of black and minority ethnic background, have disabilities.

To help address this situation, early care planning is crucial, as is timely review of care plans. A realistic assessment must be made at the outset of the chances of findings an adoptive placement. Social workers should be supported by a wider professional group to make these decisions in a timely and well-evidenced manner. Post-adoption support is likely to be especially necessary, both emotional and practical support. To support a sustainable long term family placement, post-adoption support needs should be assessed at the outset, and the necessary resources made available.

Suggestions for finding more adopters willing to take on sibling groups:

By widening the net in adoption recruitment more positively to encourage more non-traditional adopters to come forward – the proposals in the Adoption Action Plan are designed to support this.

By using promotional examples addressing adopters' perceptions and concerns ie “you don't have to be supermum/dad”.

By ensuring that adoption allowances and post-adoption support package reflect the reality that siblings groups are otherwise likely to remain in long-term (funded) foster care placements. In turn, any perceived barriers facing adoptive families in relation to access to support should be addressed by communicating to them that there is reliable and assured access to defined post-adoption support.

2. How can we better support those families willing to adopt sibling groups, particularly larger groups?

Comments:

By defining the post-adoption support package available to include:

- Realistic payments akin to foster care allowances
- Special adaptation provision for housing changes required
- Provision of support to adoptive parents in relation to challenges as they arise but likely to include assistance in dealing with educational needs; parenting support (both in the form of group-based parenting programmes and one to one help) ; therapeutic help; access to the necessary support where children have disabilities. Coram has developed a special version of the 'Incredible Years' parenting programme for adopters, and this is found effective.
- Direct support to adopted children and young people such as participative group work, to enable them to explore the complexities of their situation in a safe non-judgemental setting. Coram provides group-based direct work with adopted young people, and this has provided a very positive way to address these issues over time. This work has been accepted by C4EO as promising practice.
- By ensuring continuity and availability of named social worker for regular problem-solving support and ensuring regular assessment of children's (changing) needs to optimise access to specialist services (if/when required).

3. Please give your views on why this is difficult to achieve at present:

Comments:

Family size in the UK has significantly reduced in recent decades resulting in a change in expectations and in the realities of British family life. Family re-formation is common and adopter recruitment should acknowledge this – e.g. couples where one partner may have a previous family, and wish to adopt within a new relationship.

Prospective adopters are (currently) mainly childless couples where the lifestyle adaptations to accommodating a sibling group are very substantial, especially for larger sibling groups and children where the challenge of parenting is perceived to be significant.

Economic factors will potentially deter many, with housing needs a particular barrier, especially for those who already have larger families or who are considering taking a larger sibling group.

3a. What are the barriers to children in sibling groups being placed together for adoption?

Comments:

Adopters exercise choice in the formation and extension of their family.

The issues and level of post-adoption support needed multiply with the number of children.

The needs of children are individual rather than collective and the experiences of siblings prior to their entry into care and in care may be very different.

3b. What elements of social work practice support the placement of children in sibling groups with adopters?

Comments:

Building and support of parenting capacity and capability enabling adopters to have the confidence and trust to consider a wider range of options.

This is enabled by continuity of relationship with their social worker through the information and assessment process and into post-adoption support.

That support is effective when it is sustained and reliable with defined financial and practical support (including respite in some cases); emotional and problem-solving support which can facilitate access in a timely way to additional or specialist support when needed.

3c. What elements of social work practice inhibit the placement of children in sibling groups with adopters?

Comments:

Decision-delays which mean that all children in the sibling group get older and more difficult to place.

Discontinuity in relationships – being handed between different social workers in the process of information/assessment and post-adoption support.

Lack of vision in welcoming prospective adopters from wider backgrounds.

Delayed or inadequate assessments and/or lack of access to defined and reliable post-adoption packages.

4. We think that placing siblings together should be considered on the merits of the case for each individual child.

Should the law be made more explicit so that placing siblings together is considered on a case by case basis for each individual child?

Yes No

4a. **How should legislation and guidance be revised to achieve this?**

Comments:

The law is clear – it is practice and availability which need to be addressed.

This is achieved by improved permanency tracking and by multi-professional support at the earliest point in the process to make a decision on separation in some cases.

4b. **In what other ways could a case by case basis be promoted for each individual child when considering the adoption of children separately?**

Comments:

Earlier permanency planning and tracking under senior supervision in such a way that the position of each child is considered individually.

Systems for review of plans that ensure that decision making is not allowed to drift.

Access to multi-professional/external support in identifying the grounds for decision including to separate in some cases.

A particular focus on the timescale of the youngest child, whose chances of adoption may be compromised by the needs of older siblings.

Recognition that for older children (who may have had more complex journeys in care) and for whom joint placement may be more essential, long term foster care be the best option.

5. Should we revise legislation and guidance to set out the features of good arrangements for contact with siblings when children are adopted separately?

Yes No

5a. How should legislation and guidance be revised to achieve this?

Comments:

Coram recognises the difficulty in placing sibling groups – whether separately or together – and weighing up the best interests of the children involved on a case-by-case basis. However, guidance should emphasise the importance of not letting difficult decisions create drift and delay in the adoption process.

Coram's adoption consultancy work has shown that some children can experience long delays as a result of no proactive decision being made. Where adoption might be a plan for one / more / all children, avoiding delay is particularly critical in forming strong attachments between the child(ren) and their adoptive family.

This is even more important for those children for whom it is already difficult to find adopters (for example, older children, those with disability, or black or Asian children). Every effort should be made to consider the short- and long-term impact on each child in a sibling group, and on the group as a whole, when

deciding whether to separate siblings or place them together. This process should also involve CAMHS if required.

Guidance should be strengthened on early decision making in the placement of sibling groups. Support is also needed to make sure that the right help is provided to professionals to help them make the difficult decisions about which route to 'permanency' is right for the sibling group (and for each child within the group) at an early stage.

5b. In what other ways could good contact arrangements be promoted when children are adopted separately?

Comments:

Sibling contact is of great importance to adopted and looked after children, and should be given much greater importance in social work practice. It is frequently challenging to arrange, and insufficient resources are often directed towards supporting this aspect of children's lives.

Contact arrangements should be based on the reality of positive attachment and as all forms of contact, be reliable and dependable and subject to regular review and change reflecting how children grow and develop in their adoptive homes.

6. Please use the space below for any other comments you would like to make on placing children in sibling groups for adoption

Comments:

The welfare of the child is paramount. However complex and difficult, the needs of one child cannot be allowed to compromise the welfare (including prospects of new attachment and adoption) of another.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

Completed questionnaires should be sent to the address shown below by 31 August 2012

Send by e-mail to: adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk

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