

ATTACHMENT A
(SUBMISSION NO. 141)

COMPETENCIES
EXPECTED
OF
ADOPTIVE APPLICANTS

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Introduction

Suitability as an adoptive parent.

People want to know what things are considered when someone is assessed for suitability to be a prospective adoptive parent.

Suitability is a broad concept. It involves the demonstration of knowledge, skills, motivations, interest and the ability to take action. Other aspects include the qualities of people, their reputation, health and well being. People have capabilities to do many things in life. These abilities when taken together form competencies. A competency approach to adoptive parenthood is one way to bring together the various things people need to show.

The Adoption Applications Committee, the body that has responsibility for deciding who is suitable to adopt, has agreed to the following competencies. The competencies have elements that will be addressed in the assessment.

Adoptive parenthood is not for everyone. Being good enough is not sufficient. The Adoption Applications Committee wants the best possible people for adoptive parenthood. Adoptive families have additional skills to general parenting, they support an open approach to adoption and are able to meet the likely needs of the child.

How should the task be approached?

One way to approach the assessment is to think of it as if applying for a job. The Adoption Applications Committee will look at information provided in the assessment report to make a decision about suitability as prospective adoptive parents. Showing evidence of knowledge, skills and interest to be an adoptive parent assists the assessor in the assessment report task. Presenting evidence of the competencies will enable an assessment based upon facts, experience and abilities. The assessor will analyse the evidence and report on how the competencies are met. The report will then demonstrate the claim to be a suitable prospective adoptive parent.

**TEN KEY COMPETENCIES HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED EACH
WITH A RANGE OF ASSOCIATED ELEMENTS ¹**

1. Physical environment

Applicants will be able to provide a safe, secure and beneficial physical environment and meet the ongoing material needs of the family.

2. Family life and functioning

Healthy family functioning and structure exists which is characterised by flexibility, closeness, competent communication, democratic parenting, boundaries between parent and child, agreement on important aspects of family life and that the needs of children are considered.

3. Child rearing beliefs and parenting capacity

Applicants demonstrate knowledge of child development stages and have healthy and consistent child rearing beliefs and parenting style.

4. Child protection

Applicants will provide a high standard of care to children that promotes safe and healthy physical, sexual and emotional development through childhood and into adulthood.

5. Parenting a child from a different ethnic background to that of the adoptive parents

Applicants can demonstrate attitudes, knowledge, skills and actions to ensure that the child develops their ethnic identity and knowledge of their cultural heritage.

¹ Adoption Service of Western Australia wishes to acknowledge material from other Australian Adoption Services and the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering. Material was also drawn from a report titled 'A Research Based Rationale for the Assessment of Prospective Adoptive Parents-A Review of Uterature' Elaine Atkinson(M Psych). This research included a literature of some 190 articles.

6. Children who have additional medical, behavioural or psychological care needs

Applicants who wish to adopt a child who has additional medical, behavioural or psychological care needs have realistic expectations of the adoptee, highly developed parenting skills, a very stable and secure relationship and a strong support system.

7. Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills

Each applicant will be of good repute, have a high level of interpersonal skills and there is a strong expectation of retaining health and vigour to raise a child until adulthood and especially during the years of adolescence.

8. Relationship skills

Couple applicants

Applicants have a high level of couple satisfaction characterised by: intimacy, competent couple communication, similarity of attitude and levels of self-disclosure, and appropriate conflict resolution.

Single applicant

The applicant has a high level of skills and experience in maintaining relationships characterised by intimacy, and appropriate levels of self-disclosure and conflict resolution.

9. Problem solving and the willingness to seek and accept support

Applicants initiate and access support at times of stress.

10. Motivation and understanding of adoption

Applicants have a motivation to adopt, based on a desire for a child for his or her own sake and understand the implications of adoption for the family.

1 Physical environment

“Applicants will be able to provide a safe, secure and beneficial physical environment and meet the ongoing material needs of the family”

Elements to consider

- 1.1 Income is adequate to meet the commitments and material needs of the family.²

- 1.2 Physical characteristics of the home are safe and appropriate for children (eg. swimming pool, fencing, traffic, local creeks, guns, tools, pets)

2 See attachment - financial statement FCS 32

2 Family life and functioning

Healthy family functioning and structure exists which is characterised by: flexibility, closeness, competent communication, democratic parenting, boundaries between parent and child, agreement on important aspects of family life and that the needs of children are considered

Elements to consider

- 2.1 Applicants are insightful about their family history in relation to family patterns of interaction, roles, and child rearing and are able to identify how this influences current family life.
- 2.2 Applicants agree on the important aspects of family life such as family routines³, time for the family, child rearing beliefs and maintaining social support systems.
- 2.3 Applicants have a supportive social network.⁴
- 2.4 Applicant's extended family and social networks support and validate the decision to adopt.⁵
- 2.5 A child centred caring family environment exists.
- 2.6 Applicants can identify the changes that will be needed in family life style and functioning to adjust to an adopted child.
- 2.7 Applicants demonstrate a strong desire to conduct family centred activities and adequate time will be available for this to occur.⁶
- 2.8 Applicants demonstrate that the child will be exposed to a range of role models ego gender.

If a child is presently in the relationship

- 2.9 Other siblings accept the adoption and are able to provide an age appropriate description of the likely impact.
- 2.10 Applicants identify strategies to assist child(ren) already in the family to deal with the issues that may arise.

Single Applicants

- 2.11 Applicant demonstrates personal strength and resilience to cope with the demands of parenting on their own.

2.12 Applicant demonstrates they have personal relationships with adults and have developed relationship skills to satisfy their need for intimacy without having to rely on the child to satisfy those needs.

3 Routines contribute to the development of a child's sense of permanence and stability and promote the strength, solidarity and cohesion of the family (Boyce 1985, p166)

4 Social isolation is associated with dysfunctional parenting

5 Bronfenbrenner 1979

COMPETENCIES EXPECTED OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

6 Promotes attachment formation between parents and children

3 Child rearing beliefs and parenting capacity

Both applicants demonstrate knowledge of child development stages and have healthy and consistent child rearing beliefs and parenting capacity

Elements to consider

- 3.1 Applicants are knowledgeable about the age appropriate stages of child development from childhood to adulthood.
- 3.2 Applicants provide a realistic plan for the care of the child, from the time of placement that will enable effective bonding and attachment to occur (eg. leave available from work, who will care for the child in the short and long term, financial arrangements if one partner ceases work).
- 3.3 Applicants display personality characteristics, shared values and attitudes for effective parenting and child management, especially displaying high warmth, high reasoning, low authoritarianism and significantly, sensitivity.⁷
- 3.4 Couples are flexible within parenting roles. There is an ability of one partner to perceive the others stress and move into a care taking role with children.
- 3.5 Applicants understand, and will use, a democratic parenting style that includes elements of: setting rules and boundaries accompanied with emotional support, commitment to the child's welfare, open parent - child communication.
- 3.6 Applicants describe child disciplinary techniques that are appropriate.
- 3.7 Applicants demonstrate a commitment to parenting that encourages the child to maintain contact with the biological family and others who are important to the child. (May require the use of interpreting services for overseas children).

If a child presently in the relationship

- 3.8 Applicants set and reinforce age appropriate boundaries around the child's behaviour.
- 3.9 Appropriate discipline methods are used.
- 3.10 A high degree of support, encouragement, love and warmth is demonstrated towards the child.

If a single applicant

- 3.11 The applicant can identify suitable others who will provide the required level of care during times of absence or illness or in the event of the applicant's death. .

⁷ 'Sensitivity' has been found to play a central role in the formation of secure attachment between the parent and child. It is the ability to see things from the infant's point of view, to be attuned to the baby's signals and to respond promptly and appropriately. Ainsworth, 1979, Crockenberg 1981.

4 Child protection

Applicants will provide a high standard of care to children that promotes safe and healthy physical, sexual and emotional development through childhood and into adulthood. '

Elements to consider

- 4.1 Applicants will provide care to ensure that children are safe from harm, abuse or neglect.
- 4.2 Applicants agree on the important aspects of keeping children safe and protected and demonstrate a preparedness to act firmly and decisively to protect children even when it may threaten other significant relationships.
- 4.3 Applicants understand the effects of abuse on children and can meet the needs of a child who may have been, or is at risk of being abused or neglected and they demonstrate the ability to act as an advocate.
- 4.4 Applicants demonstrate the ability to help children keep themselves safe from harm or abuse and to explain to children how to seek help if their safety is threatened.
- 4.5 Applicants appreciate how their own personal experiences of abuse or neglect have affected themselves and their families, and the impact that it may have on caring for children within the family.

5 Parenting a child from a different ethnic background to that of the adoptive parents

Applicants can demonstrate attitudes, knowledge, skills and actions to ensure that the child develops their ethnic identity and knowledge of their cultural heritage

Elements to consider

- 5.1 Each applicant recognises and positively values the need for, cultural and ethnic continuity for the child during their upbringing.
- 5.2 Applicants demonstrate knowledge of the specific cultural practices and customs of the country/ethnic group from which they are proposing to adopt a child and can explain achievable actions they take to maintain the child's connection with their cultural, ethnic and religious practices and customs.
- 5.3 Each applicant, and people in their close personal network, demonstrate that they recognise the multicultural nature of Australian society, value diversity and affirm the decision to adopt a child of a different ethnic background.
- 5.4 Applicants demonstrate that they are knowledgeable about the effects of discrimination and racism and have the skills to help a child counter racism and develop good self-esteem.

Also consider if adopting a child from overseas

- 5.5 Applicants can demonstrate their motivation and reasons both for overseas adoption and for selecting a specific country, and their connection to that country.

6 Children who have additional medical, behavioural or psychological care needs

Applicants who wish to adopt a child who has additional medical, behavioural or psychological care needs have; realistic expectations of the adoptee, highly developed parenting skills, a very stable and secure relationship and a strong support system⁸

Elements to consider

- 6.1 Applicants can cope with the need to devote much time and energy to building a mutual relationship with the child but without the usual expectations of gratification.
- 6.2 Applicants are able to afford access to professional support.
- 6.3 Both applicants are firmly united with the other partner over child rearing and parenting practices.
- 6.4 Applicants provide examples that demonstrate a high degree of perseverance, determination and resilience.
- 6.5 Applicants are consistently patient and calm amidst adversity.

Also consider if wishing to be considered for the adoption of a child with an impairment⁹

- 6.6 Applicants have knowledge of the range and extent of the impairment and are in agreement about the extent of the impairment that they would be confident to manage.
- 6.7 Applicants are able to identify specific child management needs and have the skills to meet the needs now and in the future.
- 6.8 Applicants recognise the particular vulnerability to abuse and discrimination of disabled or developmentally delayed child(ren).

If a child presently in the relationship

- 6.9 Applicants demonstrate an understanding of the impact of the adopted child (with additional needs) on the existing child(ren).

⁸ Katz 1986 notes that success in parenting older, emotionally disturbed children depends more on specific characteristics of the parents than it does on the psychopathology of the child.

⁹ Physical, mental or sensory

7 Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills

Each applicant will be of good repute, have a high level of interpersonal skills and there is a strong expectation of retaining health and vigour to raise a child until adulthood and especially during the years of adolescence

Elements to consider

Each applicant

- 7.1 Communicates openly, honestly and constructively.
- 7.2 Demonstrates personal warmth to children and adults.¹⁰
- 7.3 Demonstrates appropriate self disclosure by being able to identify and discuss a range of positive and negative feelings,
- 7.4 Is self-motivated to engage in tasks that are required for the well being of the family and relationships e.g. children's outings, arranging family celebrations, routine house cleaning and maintenance, engagement with school system.
- 7.5 Contributes constructively to decision making and problem solving.
- 7.6 Has appropriate responses to anxiety, frustration, anger, disappointment, disruption, stress.
- 7.7 Is aware of their personal strengths and limitations.
- 7.8 Is not a risk to ongoing care and safety due to their criminal record.
- 7.9 Is physically capable of providing care until the child turns 18 (see medical panel recommendation).

COMPETENCIES EXPECTED OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

8 Relationship skills

Couple applicants

Applicants have a high level of couple satisfaction characterised by intimacy, competent couple communication, similarity of attitude and levels of self disclosure, and appropriate conflict resolution

Elements to consider

- 8.1 The relationship has an overt presence of warmth and affection (crucial to the formation of attachment between parents and child and to the overcoming of adverse early life experiences with older children).¹¹
- 8.2 Competent couple communication and intimacy exists (demonstrated by disclosure of private thoughts and feelings about self to spouse (self disclosure) and open communication).¹²
- 8.3 Couples jointly manage crisis events and significant life changes effectively.
- 8.4 Conflict is acknowledged and resolution is by discussion, negotiation and compromise (not demand -withdraw).¹³
- 8.5 Both partners recognise that each has continuing emotional needs that must be met alongside those of the child.¹⁴
- 8.6 Family tasks are shared.¹⁵

Single applicant

The applicant has a high level of skills and experience in maintaining relationships characterised by intimacy, and appropriate levels of self-disclosure and conflict resolution.

Elements to consider

- 8.7 Close relationships have an overt presence of warmth and affection (crucial to the formation of attachment between parents and child and to the overcoming of adverse early life experiences with older children).¹⁶

- 8.8 In conflict situations, the conflict is acknowledged and resolution is by discussion, negotiation and compromise (not demand –withdraw) ¹⁷

11 Weissman & Silvern 1994

12 Hendrick 1981, Chelune, Waring, Vosk & Sultan 1984

13 Noller et al 1994, Buehlman et al 1992, Gottman & Krokoff 1989, Sher & Baucom 1993 14 Rutter & Rutter 1992

15 Rutter & Rutter 1992

16 Weissman & Silvern 1994

17 Noller et al 1994, Buehlman et al 1992, Gottman & Krokoff 1989, Sher & Baucom 1993

9 Problem solving and the willingness to seek and accept support

Applicants initiate and access support at times of stress

Elements to consider

- 9.1 Applicants have demonstrated that they are each able to ask for and accept help in times of need.
- 9.2 Applicants demonstrate that seeking support is not perceived as a deficiency in parenting.
- 9.3 Applicants acknowledge their areas of vulnerability and areas of possible personal development.

10 Motivation and understanding of adoption

Applicants' motivation to adopt is based on a desire for a child for his or" her own sake and understand the implications of adoption for the family

Elements to consider

- 10.1 Applicants have faced the grief and disappointment of their infertility and demonstrate an adaptive resolution and ongoing capacity to cope (eg. appropriate expressions of sadness, anger and grief and demonstrations that the couple communicate with each other about the issue).
- 10.2 Applicants demonstrate an openness of attitude towards adoption: being able to appreciate adoption from the child's perspective, acknowledging the importance of the birth family to the child's sense of identity, being able to express sympathy and understanding of the feelings of the birth parents¹⁸ and demonstrate a degree of willingness to meet and form a relationship with the birth family.
- 10.3 Applicants communicate about adoption in a way that supports an '*acceptance of difference*' ie. openly acknowledges the differences and allows the child to explore the feelings associated with this. '*Rejection of difference*' and '*insistence of difference*' are inappropriate.¹⁹
- 10.4 Applicants convey a positive attitude about the biological parents and the need to provide complete information in relation to the birth family and past history to assist the child develop their self-identity.
- 10.5 Applicants are aware that 'telling' a child about the circumstances of their adoption is a continuous process.
- 10.6 Applicants understand that the child will require varying levels of explanation about adoption depending on their age and circumstances.²⁰
- 10.7 Applicants will use the adoption plan to support open adoption processes.

If adopting a special needs child with an impairment

- 10.8 Motivation for adopting a child with an impairment is appropriate.

18 Fratter 1989

19 Kirk 1964; Brodzinsky & Huffman 1988, Hoopes 1990

20 Brodzinsky 1990 (Material from workshop sited in *Making Good Assessments - a practical resource guide*, 41) Rosenberg 1992 (*Developmental tasks for adoptees (childhood)* sited in *Making Good Assessments - a practical resource guide*, 45)