

Keeping in Touch

- Post Adoption Contact

A guide for birth families
and adoptive families



What is it?

When a child has been adopted there is likely to be a plan put in place for how members of the child's birth family (first family) will be able keep in touch with the child after the child is adopted until the child becomes an adult. This is known as Post Adoption Contact.

Who decides it?

Plans are normally decided before a child is adopted. Most of the time, it is the child's Social Worker who works out what is the right plan for the child. The plan should always be based on what is best for the child (even if the plan means that the adults do not always get what they want).

All plans for keeping in touch should include details about who is involved, when it should happen and how it should happen. Everyone who is part of the plan should know what the plan is and have had discussions about it before the child is adopted.



Why is it important?

Post Adoption Contact is important. Children and adults who have been adopted are clear that keeping in touch with their birth family was a help to them. Research on the health and happiness of adopted people proves this. Birth families and adopted families have also said how much keeping in touch helps them too.

Post Adoption Contact:

- Helps an adopted child to keep in touch with their birth family so that they can know that they are safe
- Helps an adopted child know about what is going on in the lives of their birth family, giving them a more real picture of their birth family

- Helps an adopted child understand more about themselves and their identity and know that it is respected and valued by their adopted family
- Helps adoptive parents by giving them information so they can answer the child's questions about their birth family
- Helps the birth family by keeping them in touch with how the child is getting on
- Helps everybody prepare for future contact without large gaps in understanding

Who is responsible for making it happen?

Most Post Adoption Contact plans do not involve a court order to make sure they happen. Instead, birth family members, adopters and others who may be involved simply agree to follow the plan to keep in touch.

Although this means that the arrangements are voluntary, because the adults agreeing to the plan want to do the right thing for the child, a very high number of plans are followed and promises kept.

What is Letter Box Contact?

Letter Box Contact is the most common form of Post Adoption Contact. It is a way in which adopted children can receive written information by post or by email about their birth family; and for the birth family to receive information by post or by email about the child.

This ensures that information that should not be shared is not shared.

Letter Box Contact is also reviewed by specialist staff. This is so information that might be harmful or hurtful to a child is not sent on.

Letter Box Contact enables post or email to be sent and received confidentially.

Will Letter Box letters be read by the child?

This will very much depend on what is best for the child. Adoptive parents have to work this out. Just like any other parenting decision, adoptive parents will have to decide whether the child is ready, old enough and mature enough and in the right place emotionally to be able to deal with a letter.

Adoptive parents can be helped by Adopt North East through advice and support to come to the right decision for the child.

If for whatever reason the adoptive parents think that a child is not ready, they may choose to summarise it for the child, or read bits of the letter but not others, or instead keep the letter safe for another time.



How do I get started with Letter Box?

Everyone should know when they should write their letter. This is normally a certain month of the year. This should have been agreed as part of the plan to keep in touch after the child is adopted.

To help everyone keep on track with Letter Box, just before a letter is due to be sent, a reminder will be provided by Adopt North East.

The best and simplest way to send a letter is to attach it to an email and send it to postbox@adoptne.org.uk

Please provide as much information within the email as possible – the name of the child, the name of the person who the attached letter is for and the name, address and telephone number of who it is from.

Letters can also be sent by post. The letter to the child should be placed in an envelope with child's name and date of birth written on – this envelope should then be placed in a larger envelope with a note of the name of the child, the name of the person who the attached letter is for and the name, address and telephone number of who it is from.

Please send it to:
Letter Box Service
Adopt North East
Baliol Pembroke Wing
Chesters Avenue
Longbenton
NE12 8QP

Advice for adoptive parents

What to write about

The letter does not have to be written in any particular way. It should focus on sharing news about the child.

It is important to think about the possible impact of any information you share. How would you feel reading what you have written? If you are unsure, please contact Adopt North East for advice.

News and things you might wish to write about includes the child's:

- General health and development
- Personality, habits, sayings and mannerisms
- Likes and dislikes
- Friendships
- Progress at school
- Interests and talents
- Holidays and major events

You may also on behalf of your child write and ask specific questions of the birth family.

You may wish to include some information about your activities as a family, or about your feelings about being an adoptive parent of the child.



Advice for adoptive parents

What not to write about

- News that may be particularly emotive
- Anything which might enable the reader to be able to identify you in order to contact you, including your surname, address, location of your home or place of work
- The name and location of the child's school
- The name and locations of any clubs or activities
- The name and location of planned or regular holidays
- The names and addresses of wider family members or members of your support network

If there is news of a nature that would be distressing to the birth family – for example, information of a serious accident or health condition – do not include this information within the letter without first having consulted with Adopt

North East on how best this information should be shared.

What about including items within the letter?

Please do not include any items within your letter. Adopt North East is not able to pass such items on.

Starting and ending letters

You should use the first name(s) of the adult(s) that you are writing to.

You can sign the letter using your first name only or refer to yourself as the child's adoptive parent(s) if you wish anonymity of name to be maintained.

Advice for adoptive parents

Support

The Adopt North East Post Adoption Support Team can offer help, advice and support around post adoption contact. Please ask to speak to the Duty Social Worker.

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. Their contact details are:

Adoption UK
Linden House
55 The Green
South Bar Street
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX16 9AB

Telephone: 01295 752 240
Website: www.adoptionuk.org



Advice for adoptive parents

Example of a letter from adoptive parents to birth parents

Dear Dave and Faiza,

As we write this Jay has recently turned three and is a well-mannered, lovely happy little boy with a great sense of humour.

He will eat most foods now, even cheese!

He particularly loves rice, pasta or stew based/pie dishes (including mild spiced food).

Jay's vocabulary is very good for his age and he really loves singing. Twinkle Twinkle continues to be his favourite nursery rhyme.

Over the past year Jay has attended a local playgroup, a sports group and a music group of which the singing was his favourite!

He now attends nursery on a part time basis and loves it. The initial change has been significant over the past few months as he has grown in confidence and is slowly becoming more independent.

Jay still loves books and sometimes he will sit quietly while listening. He still loves his Thomas

the Tank Engine books, though his favourite book at the moment is called "We're going on a bear hunt" and he loves doing the actions.

He also gets to take a book home from nursery and for the third week running he has chosen the same book (because he loves it!), "The tractor who wants to fall asleep".

In terms of watching television shows, Jake loves Mr Tumble, CoComelon, Grandpa in My Pocket, Mister Maker and recently Jake and the Neverland Pirates.

His favourite toys are an interactive crane set, building blocks, Spiderman scooter, balance bike and any little cars, so long as it they have lights and make lots and lots of noise! He is also developing his imaginative play and is often found chatting away to his soft toys or little people/action figures.

The next 12 months for Jay will be toilet training and understanding of Jolly Phonics, along with learning to write his own name.

We will continue to love, care and protect him.

Love, Steven and Sara xxx

Advice for birth families

What to write about

The letter does not have to be written in any particular way. It should focus on sharing news that you would want your child to know about.

The aim of any information exchanged through Letter Box contact by the birth family is for it to be positive and to let the child know they are thought about and loved.

It is important to the child to know their birth family are well and that you are thinking about them and proud of all their achievements.

Writing to the child through Letter Box may not be easy; it can often lead to many emotions, such as feelings of guilt, regret, anger or most of all sadness. If you need support, there is help available.



Advice for birth families

What not to write about

Writing a letter to your child who has been adopted can be a really hard thing to do. You are bound to feel very sad and angry at times about what's happened. It is important for you not to dwell on these feelings in your letters.

Remember, the adoptive parents are advised not to share information with the child that may cause them to become worried or upset. So it is in your best interests to write in a way that is easy to share with your child.

- Avoid emotional comments
I am so angry they took you away. I cry myself to sleep
- Avoid comments that undermine the adoptive parents
You will always be my little girl

- Avoid making unhelpful promises
We will see each other soon. I promise we will be together again

Please ensure that you do not include any contact details. If you do so, your letter will not be passed on to the adopters.

What about including items within the letter?

Please do not include any items within your letter. Adopt North East is not able to pass such items on.

Advice for birth families

News and things you might wish to write about include:

- That your child is loved and thought of by you
I remember Sam every day and love him very much
- That you are proud of the child's achievements that you have been informed about
I am really pleased that Aisha is learning to walk
- How you are
I am keeping well. This year I have felt a lot better than last year
- Family news since last contact, such as marriages, bereavement, divorce, birth of brothers or sisters or illnesses
Auntie Charlotte has had a baby called Caleb
- What interests you have
I still watch Newcastle play every week
- Any significant events you may want to share
I have moved to a new flat. Our dog has had puppies. I got a new job.
- Any important medical information that you have become aware of
I have had problems with my eyes. I now wear glasses
- Ask questions about the child's hobbies and interests that you have been made aware of – you may comment on hobbies, tastes and talents or interests you may share
I am pleased Dylan has joined the Cubs. When I was younger, I was a cub too. I remember going on a camp and drinking hot chocolate around a fire.

- Comment on information you have been told about how they are getting on at school and ask questions about their progress, strengths etc. You may comment on your own experience of school, your strengths or things about your education you would want you child to know
It was great to read that Chloe is good at maths. It was my favourite subject. I wish I had studied more. Tell Chloe to keep working hard!
- Information that you think may help your child understand and get to know more about their identity
In May, Uncle Derek died. When Uncle Derek was younger, he was the best in the county at snooker. When he was 15 he scored the highest break in snooker and got his photo in the paper.

You may also want to comment on your thoughts about the child's adoption – it is important that if you do, your words will not upset your child or make your child anxious.

I am still sad that the Court decided that Lexi cannot live with me. I do miss her.

You may also want to thank or build your relationship with the adoptive parents who wrote to you.

Thanks for the news about how Tilly is getting on. I appreciate the time you took to write the letter. I hope you had a good Christmas.

Starting and ending letters

You should use the first name(s) of the adult(s) that you are writing to. You should sign the letter with your first name only.

Example of a letter from birth mother to adoptive parents

Dear Sophie and Sarah

Thank you for your letter. It was good to hear how the girls are getting on. I am glad that Kelly can now swim and that she has gained her swimming badge.

I can swim but not very well.

It's good to know that Kelly and Kiera are doing well at school and that Kiera's eczema is better too. I think she gets that from her dad!

I am working now at a local nursing home and am really enjoying it.

I have a new dog, his name is Marley. He is brown and white and he loves walks. He likes to sit by the fire and keep warm. We go round the park every day and sometimes we go along the river.

It was my birthday last week and I had cards and a few presents and my mum made a chocolate cake for me (chocolate cake is my favourite).

Thanks very much for the news. Let them know I'm proud of them.

Best wishes, Jackie

Advice for birth families

Support

The Adopt North East Post Adoption Support Team can offer help, advice and support around post adoption contact. Please ask to speak to the Duty Social Worker.

PAC-UK offers a confidential specialist advice service, counselling and family work for anyone who has been involved with adoption. Their contact details are below.

PAC-UK
Family Action Head Office
34 Wharf Road
London
N1 7GR

Telephone: **0207 284 0555**

Advice Line: **0207 284 5879**
(10am – 1pm Mon, Tues, Wed
and Fri; 5.30pm – 7.30pm Thurs)

Website:
www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

Confidentiality

Letter Box Contact works best when everyone respects the confidential nature of the information exchanged. Should Adopt North East become aware that information shared in the interests of the child is being misused, a review of the arrangement will take place. It may be that the arrangement is changed, or even ended, if it is decided that it is not in the best interests of the child for the arrangement to continue.

If there's no response to Letter Box

Sadly, sometimes, contact arrangements are not kept (although you would be surprised how many are). There are a range of reasons.

The most common reason for a break in contact is that someone within the arrangement has not updated Adopt North East with their new contact details. Unless Adopt North East is able to confirm the details, no exchange can take place. That is why we ask all parties to a plan to keep in touch and let us know if any details change.

We do not want your information to go to the wrong person. Therefore, we will not send out any letters until we can confirm an address. Until we can do so we will hold on to the letters and not send them.

Another reason is the range of emotions around adoption and sometimes it just isn't the right time for someone to write a letter or they don't want to receive a letter. This means that sometimes letters are written but have to be kept until we are contacted and they are requested. It can mean that letters are not responded to and so there is no news to respond to. In these cases, it is really important that the other parties to the arrangement continue to do their bit, sharing their news. Often, contact gets back on track after a while and things go back to how they were planned to be.

Remember, Post Adoption Contact is for the child and research tells us it is really important for them.

When does contact end?

Once an adopted child reaches the age of 18 years old, Post Adoption Contact arrangements end.

Help and support from Adopt North East

The Adopt North East Post Adoption Support Team can offer help, advice and support around post adoption contact. Please ask to speak to the Duty Social Worker.

Further advice, mediation, negotiation and counselling service related to post adoption contact are also available.

For further information or queries: Go to our website: www.adoptnortheast.org.uk/enquire-now

Email: postbox@adoptne.org.uk

Tel: 0191 643 5099





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