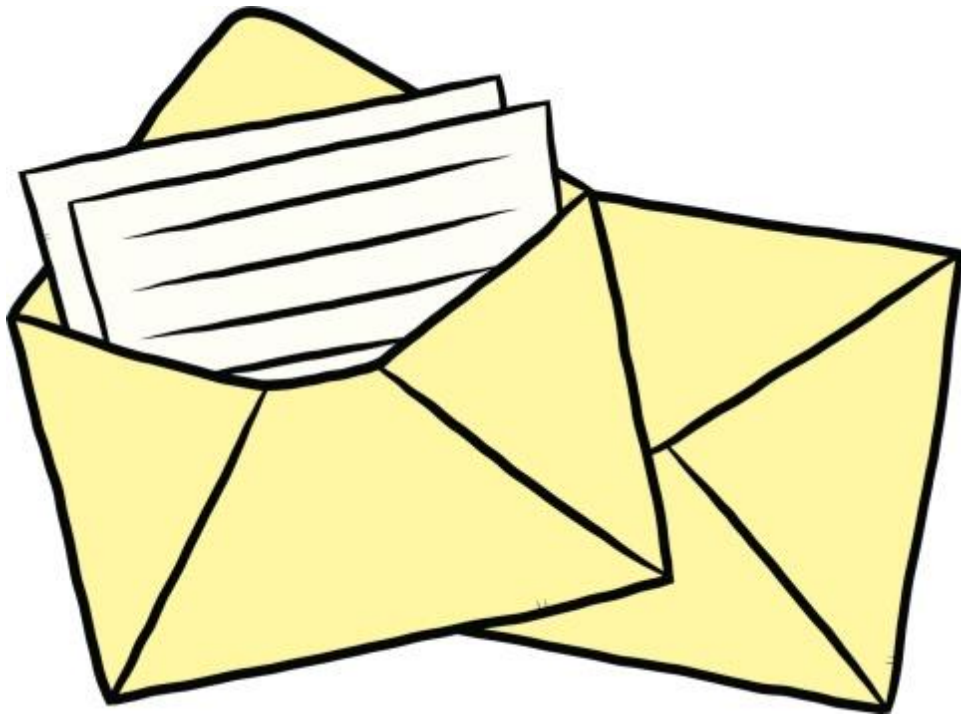




**Adoption
Central
England**

Letterbox Exchange Scheme

Information Booklet for Birth Relatives

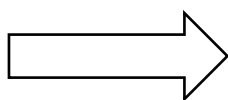


Who are Adoption Central England?

The adoption services for Coventry, Herefordshire, Solihull, Warwickshire, Worcestershire & Herefordshire have now joined together to create Adoption Central England, also known as ACE Adoption.

Please see our website of www.aceadoption.com for more information regarding our organisation.

Coventry
Herefordshire
Solihull
Warwickshire
Worcestershire



**Adoption
Central
England**



Who are the Family Connexions Team?

Family Connexions is a confidential and independent service offering support, information and advice to all birth families within the ACE region affected by adoption.

The support offered includes helping birth families to maintain contact arrangements such as letterbox. The Letterbox coordinators who manage letterbox exchanges are part of the Family Connexions team.

What is Letterbox?

Letterbox is a service for adoptive families and birth families to exchange written information that will benefit the child they all care about and support open communication during the child's life. Letterbox is between the adults with information being shared with the child as appropriate.

It lasts throughout childhood and in some cases can continue into early adulthood of a person who has been adopted. Confidential information such as surnames, addresses and school information will not be exchanged.

Planning for the letterbox will begin at the same time as the plan for adoption is being considered and will look at what best meet the child's needs. Letterbox can be reviewed as a child grows up and their needs change.



The Letterbox Agreement

A written agreement will be made shortly after a child is placed with their adoptive family.

It will include how often and when information will be exchanged and what sort of information will be included. The social worker will ask the adoptive family and the birth family to sign the agreement and give them a copy.

You will be reminded a month before you need to send your letter by post, text message or email. Once a letter is received the letterbox coordinator will read and copy it for the letterbox file. If the letter is likely to cause concern you will be contacted and offered help in rewriting it.

The adults are responsible for the exchange of information, but the child/ren can be involved with the exchange as and where appropriate.

A Letterbox agreement is not legally binding but we ask everyone to recognise the importance of the exchange and to try to keep the exchange going.

Letterbox contact is way for a child to have up to date information about their birth family. Having this information can be important in helping them form a positive identity around their history and to be in a position to consider other contact as they get older.



When can I expect my letter?

This should be written in the agreement, for example, once a year in June. Your letter will usually be sent out to you during that month.

We know how important letters are to you and that you will be hoping for a letter on the 1st of the month but this usually does not happen. The letterbox coordinator will contact you once a letter is received and arrange how you want it to be sent to you.

Usually the adopters write first as they often have quite a lot of news to tell about the child and this may make it easier for you to then reply.

What can I expect in my letters?

Most letters talk about how a child is developing, what hobbies or interests they have, favorite foods or games and how they are doing at school. (See examples at the back of this booklet) Adopters will often answer questions that you have asked in previous letters too.

We know that you may have a strong need to be reassured that the child is alive and well. You may also welcome more detailed news of the child's health and progress, looks and interests.

Although this news sometimes brings back a sense of loss or painful memories, it can also give a sense of connection to the child. Most birth parents and relatives would rather have a letter than not.

It can help you to build up a realistic view of the developing child, as they grow up. A regular exchange of information over the years may help to smooth the way if the adopted child is thinking about meeting you when he or she is grown up.



What can I include in my letters?

Before you start write a list of things that you want to say or share.

Don't forget to put a date at the top of your letter.

Remember letters should be addressed to the adopters and child rather than the child.

Your letter should provide some information about yourself and current circumstances. You could share hobbies and interests, describe some thing you have been doing such as a day out, decorating your home or your favorite song or TV program.



Lots of birth family members have the letter from adopters to hand when they write. This helps them to comment on what they have been told about the child and to answer any questions that might have been asked.

It is ok to say, briefly, in the letter that you love and care about the child/ren. The message should be kept simple such as 'thinking of you', 'sending my love', 'hope you have a wonderful day' etc.

Most adopted children refer to their birth parents by their first name. You can sign yourself in this way or ask your social worker or the letterbox co-ordinator to find out how the child refers to you so that you can use this term.

Your letter does not have to be long and detailed. Its purpose is to let the adopters and the child know how you are, that you have thought about them and potentially to be able to answer any questions they have.

Don't forget to put "Letterbox" on the envelope if you are posting, alternatively you can send your letter in via email to letterbox coordinator for your area.

Remember if you are ever stuck or require help and support – your letterbox co-ordinator and the Family Connexions Team are here to help. You can find all the relevant contact details at the end of this booklet.

What to avoid in letters?

We know that they will always be your child/ren, but please don't call the child in your letter 'son' or 'daughter' as this can be confusing for child/ren.

Very emotional statements about missing the child, being distressed without them, wanting them back or wanting them to contact you when they are older are likely to upset a child and may lead to your letter not being accepted. The Letterbox coordinator or Family Connexions can help you manage this.

Unless it has been agreed in your letterbox agreement – please do not request or include photographs, names, personal details, schools, other family members not included in the agreement(s).

Please think about how you share your news. Sharing things that may cause feelings of distress or sadness can be very difficult for a child who is not in a position to help.

Reading and replying to letters.

Reading and replying to your letterbox letter can be emotional and trigger sad memories. If you need support to write or in managing how you feel about letterbox please talk to the letterbox coordinator. They can help you write a letter or refer you to the Family Connexions team for on going emotional support.



When you read or write your letters think about who is around that can support you. Where is the best place to read / write them and who might you want to talk to about what is in the letters.

It is important to remember that the letter you write is to help your child to feel connected to you. Try to think about talking with your child when you write what do you think they would want to hear. Try to avoid writing when you are angry or upset as using very emotional language may mean that you are asked to write your letter again.

Example Letters

June 2021

Dear Richard and Mary

Thank you both for our letter about Ryan, it is really good to know that he is settled with you and is starting to try more foods. I don't eat eggs as it makes my eczema worse you might find the same with Ryan. What does he like to eat? Has he got any more teeth coming through?

We can't believe he is now at nursery, he must be a big boy now. It is nice that he has a pet cat, we bet he just loves playing with her.

We think it is good that you take him swimming so he knows how to swim when you go on holiday and to the seaside. I like swimming but don't go very much, Dave can't swim but he's really pleased that Ryan is learning.

I am ok, I am now at college doing a part time course so I can learn about computers. Dave is now working in a shop and he really likes it as well. We have got a dog now called Buster, he is lovely and we like to take him for walks.

We went to Blackpool in the summer and stayed in a caravan which was really nice. Anyway, we hope that you enjoy nursery and we look forward to hearing from you all again when we have our next letter.

With love from Sarah and Dave x

Summer 2021

Dear Karen, Arthur and James.

Hi everyone I hope you are all well. Thank you very much for the recent letter – it is incredible to hear all that James is doing, he's growing up so fast!

I am glad to hear he is doing well at school. Well done James on winning the football tournament! Does James support a football team? I support West Brom, and sometimes go to the stadium to watch them play.

I had to go to hospital for a little operation a couple of months ago, but I am better now. I am hoping to go abroad for my holiday this summer, I don't know where yet – I will let you know next time I write. Are you planning to go away again soon?

It is nice to hear James has so many hobbies and loves films. Do you go to the cinema often? I love James Bond movies, that's why I picked James for your name.

I look forward to hearing from you again next year. I hope you all have a good Christmas and James enjoys his birthday. I will be thinking of James, and I hope he has a nice day.

Shane x

Example Letter from adopters

February 2021

Dear Jasmine and Rob,

Thank you for your last letter and glad you are well. COVID has been such a strange time but we have been lucky to avoid it so far.

Amelia is now 10 years old and in Year 5 at school. She is one of the tallest in her class, and she gets on very well with her classmates. She is often invited to birthday parties or to friend's houses after school. She had a very good school report in the summer – her teacher said that she has made very good progress in English, and her Maths is improving, although she does still struggle with it. Amelia loves science and wondered what things you enjoyed at school?

We recently went on holiday to Tenerife, there was a club for children in the evenings and Amelia made lots of friends there! We took her to see a musical as a treat for her birthday, and she seemed to really enjoy this. We wondered if you still liked walking with Milo the dog? Amelia often goes to the park near us and loves going on walks too. Did we tell you? She has a cuddly toy dog that she has called Milo.

Amelia enjoys reading, and her favourite author is Jacqueline Wilson. She wanted you to know that she is reading "The Diamond Grills" at the moment. She also enjoys playing on the Wii and we often play Mario Kart as a family, but the children are much better than us!

We look forward to hearing your news.
Trisha and Glen x



Any questions?

Q. Where do I send my letter?

A. At the end of this booklet is the postal and email address for each letterbox coordinator. You would usually send in your letter via post or email to the Coordinator responsible for the Local Authority area that was working with you and your child

Q. I've moved house / changed my contact details. Do I need to tell anyone?

a. It is important that you let your letterbox co-ordinator know if your contact addresses change to ensure we can contact you and send out letters. If we can not confirm your details we will not send out the letter and this will be kept on file till we can contact you.

Q. I have not received my newsletter, what should I do?

a. Please contact us if you have not received your newsletter during the month agreed in writing – it may be the case that it is still being processed or required revising. If not, we can send out a reminder to the adoptive family.

Q. I'm not sure what to write?

a. Please contact the letterbox coordinator (see last page for details) we will be happy to help with writing your letter.

Q. Why am I not receiving any newsletters?

a. Sometimes adopters forget to write. Occasionally sometime adopters or birth family members choose not to the initial agreement. If you have not received your letter please contact your letterbox coordinator, we will do our best to ensure that you get your letter but we cannot force either party to contribute to the letterbox exchange if they choose not to.

Q. I haven't written for a while but want to start. I don't know what to put.

a. Please do contact the letterbox coordinator. They can help you to get started or refer you to Family Connexions who can support you to write the letter.

Q. My child will be turning 18 soon, what will happen to our letterbox?

a. Letterbox will be reviewed before a child turns 18, if requested by the young person – we can continue until they are 21. Otherwise letterbox will end at 18 years old. Once 18, this decision lies with the adopted person and it is important to respect their wishes. We will always respect the decision of the young person, we can not ask them to get in contact with you outside of letterbox nor give you their direct contact information.

Q. What happens to letters that are not collected?

a. Any letters that cannot be passed on will be kept on file along with copies of all letters sent, in case the adopted person would like to access them later in life.

If your agreement includes photographs, it is important you follow the below rules:

- Photos must be **clear** and **only** of the person(s) in the agreement(s).
- Photos must **not** include identifying information including surnames, school or team badges or local landmarks.
- Children in photographs must be **fully clothed** – we will **not** forward on any photographs where a child is in the bath or in swimming attire etc.
- Under **no** circumstances can photos be uploaded onto the internet – this includes all social media platforms e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat etc.

Please do try to follow the suggestions above. We want to make sure that letterbox is as successful as possible. If you are struggling with any of the above do contact your letterbox coordinator (see next page) they can offer support.

Contact Information

COVENTRY

Contact: Ruba Aktar

Letterbox – ACE, Council House, Coventry, CV1 5RR

letterboxcoventry@aceadoption.com

Mobile: 07876 216884

HEREFORDSHIRE

Contact: Nicki Banes

Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE

letterboxherefordshire@aceadoption.com

Mobile: 07971 534839

SOLIHULL

Contact:

Chelmund's Place, 858 Chester Road, Solihull. B37 7WG

letterboxsolihull@aceadoption.com

Mobile:

WARWICKSHIRE

Contact: Laura Bremner

Saltisford Offices, Ansel Way, Warwick. CV34 1UL

letterboxwarwickshire@aceadoption.com

Mobile: 07584 442087

WORCESTERSHIRE

Contact: Janine Jackson / Yvonne Morris

County Hall, Splechley Road, Worcester. WR5 2NP

letterboxworcestershire@aceadoption.com

Mobile: 07787 270380

You can also contact us via telephone: 0300 369 0556

Or by email on: enquiries@aceadoption.com

Please mark all emails for the attention of your letterbox co-ordinator in the subject box to avoid any delays in dealing with your query.