

Guidance when writing Later Life Letters

The Later Life Letter is a statutory requirement for all children who are being adopted, along with the Life Story Book, that is given to a child's family upon their placement for adoption. Unlike the Life Story book, the later life letter is written with the intention of the child reading it when they are around 12 years old. As a result of this, it should contain a more detailed account of a child's story.

The following template can be used as guidance to complete your contribution to the child's later life letter, remembering the significance of small pieces of information and memories and what they may mean for a child who has grown up outside of their birth family.

Please refer to the accompanying example letter for more guidance.

Template

Dear _____

My name is _____ and I was your Social Worker before you were born. I know you won't remember me as it will be a long time before you read this letter, but I was your Social Worker from _____ to _____.

I understand that this letter might be difficult for you to read, but I am sure that your adoptive family will help and support you to understand why you are not living with your birth family.

I became your Social Worker because of a lot of worries that professionals had. **Explain the worries.**

My Job was to undertake an assessment of _____ to find out whether they had made the changes needed to be able to do the job of taking care of you.

Explain the child's story. This is the main part of the letter and should be as individual to the child as possible. Any memories or anecdotes you recall about visits will be invaluable.

Prompts:

- **Explain the worries and concerns in relation to your visits to help the child understand why decisions were made. Were home conditions a worry? What was the home like?**
- **You may want to include your memories of the first time you met the child / some direct work that you completed together.**

EXAMPLES

Explain the worries Example: I became your Social Worker because of a lot of worries that professionals had about your birth mother. Your birth mother, Julie had a lot of grown-up problems and because of these, she had her previous children removed from her care as she was not able to keep them safe.

Worries Example: I visited the family home for an unannounced visit and found that the home was unclean and unsafe for children to live in. There were no sheets on your bed and there was lots of clutter in the home, meaning there was no space for you to walk or play. Julie was spoken to about this, and she said that the home conditions would be improved by the following week. I visited again and was pleased to see that the home was clean and tidy! You had space to play and were happily crawling around the floor. Sadly, Julie was not able to keep the home this way and the conditions gradually returned to how they were on my first visit.

- Were any other social workers involved? Why? What were their roles?
- What were birth parent's attitude? Has this changed throughout the process? Did they work well with you? Mention any memories you may have of them.
- Mention any memories you may have, seeing child and birth parents together. How was their interaction?

EXAMPLES

Birth Parent Attitudes Example: Julie understood why we were worried about the care she was giving you, but felt that she was able to give you everything you needed. Initially, Julie worked well with the services that were offering her help to understand how to take care of you. She attended groups at Harbour, which supported her to understand the affects seeing domestic violence would have on you and participated well in these groups. However, Julie stopped working with professionals in April 2021 and no longer attended any meetings. During our last phone call, Julie told me that she wanted you to be happy and did not think that she was able to give you all of the things that you needed. Julie always wanted to be able to take care of you, but even with support she found it difficult to understand what you needed.

Interaction example: I remember during visits you would come to me, very excited that there was someone new in your home! Sometimes you would climb on the furniture, excited to explore. Julie allowed you to climb, even though this might not be safe. I was worried that you may get hurt, as sometimes Julie would not watch you well enough.

- Include clear explanations of when and why the big decisions were made.
- Talk about the day that the child/ren were placed in foster care. Who transported them? Was there anything they took with them etc?
- You may want to include anything of significance such as did the children have a pet when they lived at home? Did they have any particularly strong relationships with anyone (maybe a nursery teacher) what were they called / how would they describe the child?

It was important to _____ that you knew how much they loved you and that she had fought to keep you with them, because they wanted to watch you grow up and keep you safe.

I hope this explains why we made the decisions we did, _____. It was important to all of us that you grow up to be big and strong, and in order to do that you need a family who can make sure you are safe.

We were all very sad that we didn't think _____ would be able to keep you safe and so we couldn't let you go and live with them.

I'm certain that your adoptive family will have made you feel safe well cared for and helped you become the amazing person that I know you can be.

Yours sincerely
_____, Social Worker.

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Before we went to the court, we all wrote to the Judge to say what we thought should happen. I said I was still really worried and I didn't think we could keep you safe if Julie was looking after you.

I worried that there were still lots of grown up problems that needed fixing and you couldn't wait any longer for Julie to fix them. Julie said she would do anything for you to stay with her and she thought she could keep you safe.

We couldn't agree, so then we all went to talk to the Judge. We all had solicitors and barristers with us to help us make sure that the Judge understood what we thought.

Judge Cains listened to myself, other professionals and Julie. Then she talked to The Guardian too, The Guardian said that having listened to all of us, she thought that the best plan would be for you to go to live with somebody else.

She said that Julie loved you very much, but she was finding it hard to fix grown up problems and that made The Guardian worry she wouldn't be able to keep you safe.

The Judge said it was a very hard decision to make and she needed to think about it so she told us she would write to us to let us know.

It's a very important decision and she needed to make sure she had thought about what everyone had said and made the right decision.

When the Judge had thought about it for a week, she wrote to us all and said that she had decided that it wouldn't be safe for you to live with Julie.