



Adopt
North East

Keeping in touch

Post adoption contact

A guide for birth 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 to keep in touch with the child after the child is adopted until the child becomes an adult. This is known as Post Adoption Contact.

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 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 would 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.

Who is responsible to make it happen?

Most Post Adoption Contact plans do not involve a court order to make sure they happen. Instead, birth family members and 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 about their birth family and for the birth family to receive information about the child.

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

Letter Box is set up using your contact agreement, so you will already know what type of information you will be sending and you will receive a reminder when your exchange is due.

Will my letters be read by Adopt North East?

Your letters / exchanges will not be read by us. We trust that you will ensure the letters sent to your child/ren's adoptive family are appropriate and hold no sensitive information, including contact details. If information (previously not agreed) is sent, it may mean adopters may choose not to share the letters with children or to withdraw from sending further letters in the future. It is important that you continue to stick to your agreement.

Will my letter be kept by Adopt North East?

A digital copy of what you send will be kept as a record for your child. It will be held securely on our system.

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

How do I get started with my letter exchange?

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.

Please see the last page of this guidance for details of your personal letter exchange.

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.



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 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 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.

News and things you might wish to write about includes:

- **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.
- **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.
- **What interests you have** – I still watch Newcastle play every week.
- **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.

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.*

Do not include any of your contact details.

Please do not include any contact details within your letter.

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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 and 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.

Example letter from a 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

No response to my letter

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.

It is therefore important to keep your contact details up to date with Adopt North East, we can then support you (or signpost you to PAC UK). That is why we ask all parties with a plan to keep in touch and let us know if any details change.

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 uploaded and saved on our system. Letters can be requested by the adoptive family at any time. 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. Further information will be sent to you as your child(ren) approaches 18 years of age.

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.

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

For further information or queries please contact:

Email: postbox@adoptne.org.uk

Tel: 0191 6435099 (10:00am – 4:00pm Monday to Friday)
or contact us through our website

www.adoptnortheast.org.uk/enquire-now

Help and support from Adopt North East

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
NI 7GR

Advice Line (Leeds Office): 0113 230 2100 (10:00am – 1.00pm Monday, Thursday & Fri, Tuesday 4-7pm & Wednesday 1-4pm).

Website: www.pac-uk.org

Information about your Letter Box Exchange

You can expect to receive your letter from the adopters in the month(s) of:

You can respond to your letter in the month(s) of:

It has been agreed that you can include with your letter:

Please let us know about any changes to your circumstances as soon as possible so we can update our records.



Adopt North East

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