



Adopt
North East

Keeping in touch

Post adoption contact

A guide for 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 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 adoptive 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 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 letters to be sent and received confidentially.

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. A copy will be uploaded to your child's record and then your letter / exchange will be sent. It is therefore important that the letters sent to your child/ren's birth family are appropriate and hold no sensitive information. Support is available – there is guidance in this leaflet, there are regular workshops offered by the agency and you can always speak to a social worker about any questions that you may have about what and what not to include.

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.



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 your agreed contact arrangement.

It is important that you continue to stick to your agreement. Birth family may not respond quickly or even in the same year, but it is important that you continue to stick to your agreement as birth family may wish to access their letters when they feel able to. Sticking to your agreement will also support your child/ren's identity, knowing that you continued to send your letters.

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 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:

- 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.

Adoptive

parents' feedback

"Letterbox contact has allowed us to gather information in a safe & confidential way which has supported our children's identity and curiosity about birth family"

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?

It is quicker and easier to email your letters to us. If you do send your letters by post, 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 should sign the letter using your first name only unless there is an exceptional reason why it is not appropriate to do so. Using your first name will support the development of your relationship with birth family over the duration of the agreement.



Example letter from a birth mother to adoptive 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).

Jakes' 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, understanding of Jolly Phonics along with learning to write his own name.

We will continue to love, care and protect him.

Love Jay's Adoptive Parents xxx

Sending your letter

Sending your letters by email

Please include your name, present address and phone number, along with the child's birth name and date of birth in the main body of your email and send your letters to:

postbox@adoptne.org.uk

by post

- Put your letter in an envelope with the child's birth name and date of birth on the envelope.
- This envelope should be sent in a larger envelope with a covering note including your name and present address and phone number / email address.
- Address the large envelope to '**Letter Box Service**' and send to the address below:

Adopt North East
Floor 3
Quadrant West
2 Quick Silver Way
Colbalt Business Park
NE27 0QQ

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

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

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

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





Adopt North East

Floor 3, Quadrant West, 2 Quick Silver Way,
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