

Letterbox contact

**Guidance for adopters
and birth families**



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

Contents

What is Letterbox contact?	04
Advice for birth families.....	04
Advice for adoptive parents	06
Making a start	09

This guidance has been prepared for both birth families and adoptive families alike in the best interests of the child/children.

What is Letterbox contact?

Letterbox is a confidential arrangement through which birth parents / relatives and adoptive parents can exchange information. The arrangements are made between the adults on behalf of children, although the children can sometimes contribute, for example by including a drawing or hand print or by writing something when they are older, if they wish to do so. We recommend that the letters are shared with the child/ren when they are old enough to understand it and when appropriate to do so.

Letterbox contact can be very positive and helpful to all parties in adoption. It may help the adopted child:

- Retain links with birth parents or significant family members.
- Hear about any news from their birth family and gain further understanding of their past.
- Feel more confident by boosting self-esteem and reducing any feelings of loss and rejection.

For birth families

- To reassure you and your family that the child is safe and well.
- For you to offer reassurance to the child and their adoptive family that you and other birth relatives are safe and well.
- To give you updated information about the child's progress.
- It gives you the chance to share any changes in your own life that may be interesting and helpful to hear.
- As the child grows up it may be important for them to know that you stayed in touch in this way. If news has been shared over the years this may help them to make sense of their past in planning for their future as an adult.
- It may help to remind and assist adoptive parents to talk openly with the child/ren about their adoption. This may make it easier to answer the child's questions and deal with all kinds of adoption issues in the future in a healthy and realistic manner.
- During the child's early years letterbox contact may not seem relevant, but it can help at different stages of a child's life up to and including adulthood, as it provides a record for the future.

For Adoptive Parents/Children

- To help the child understand their past birth family history.
- To receive information about the wellbeing of their birth family and to show the child their birth family are still interested in them.
- To provide significant updated information that may not have been available at the time of the Adoption Order, such as a hereditary medical condition or birth or death of a birth relative. This could prevent an adoptee experiencing unprepared loss or make you aware of possible future illness.
- To help the child have a sense of their identity.
- It may help to remind and assist adoptive parents to talk openly with the child/ren about their adoption. This may make it easier to answer the child's questions and deal with all kinds of adoption issues in the future in a healthy and realistic manner.
- During the child's early years letterbox contact may not seem relevant, but it can help at different stages of a child's life up to and including adulthood, as it provides a record for the future.



Advice for birth families:

Tips on writing letters for birth parents/birth relatives/significant others:

- Remember letter writing is a chance to make a good relationship with the child's adoptive parents e.g. ***"Thanks for the news about how Kiran is getting on."***
- Respond to the adoptive parents' news and comment on any achievements e.g. ***"I am pleased he can swim" "I am happy that she has made some friends"***.
- Give news about yourself, perhaps about your home, whether you are working, any hobbies and what you enjoy doing. For example:
"I have moved to a new flat in Birmingham."
"I have started a new job at Asda."
"My dog Toby keeps me busy and fit!"
- Give news of your family such as ***"I bought granddad Jacob a Manchester United mug for his 60th birthday."***
- You could also give some news about the child's brothers and sisters who are living with you e.g. ***"Sonia loves playing music and having her friends round."***
- Please share with the adopters any hereditary condition (e.g. epilepsy or heart condition etc.) the birth or death of a birth relative. For example, ***"Well, I have had the baby, she was born on November 1st and we have called her Sophie."*** or ***"Auntie Amber sadly passed away with cancer."*** This could save the child experiencing unprepared loss and make the adoptive parents aware of possible future illnesses.
- It might be helpful to share any happy stories about you or your family when they were growing up or information about yourself as a child e.g. ***"I was good at swimming."***
- Whilst you will always remain the child's birth parent or birth relative they will also be calling their adoptive parents mummy and daddy / mum / dad. So please sign your letter using your first name or including your first name e.g. ***"birth mum / mummy Sarah"*** or ***"birth dad / daddy Jack"***. This will help your child understand and make sense of the difference between their birth family and adoptive family.

Please remember **DO NOT** include:

- Your address or phone number in the letter.
- Any birthday cards or Christmas cards that are not part of the arrangement.
- Requests for things, which are not part of the arrangement e.g. photos.
- Letterbox cannot accept the exchange of gifts, vouchers or money because we cannot be held responsible for these items. We will not be able to pass such items on.
- We know that maintaining Letterbox contact can be a really hard thing to do. You are bound to feel very sad at times about what's happened, but it is important for you not to dwell on these feelings in your letters. The adoptive parents are advised not to share information with the child that may cause them to become worried or upset. Please avoid emotional comments such as: ***"I am so angry they took you away"*** or ***"I cry myself to sleep"***.
- Avoid letters that could be seen as undermining the adoptive parents such as ***"you will always be my little girl"*** or ***"love from your real mum"***.
- If letters received are unsuitable the Letterbox Administrators may need to contact you to offer help / support.

Example letterbox contact from birth mother to adoptive parents

Dear Sophie and Sarah's adoptive parents, (or first names if provided)

Thank you for your letter it was good to hear how the girls are getting on. I am glad that Sophie can swim, and that she has gained her swimming badge. I can swim but not very well.

It's good to know that they're doing well at school and that Sarah's eczema is better too.

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, and his food. He likes to sit by the fire and keep warm. We go round the park every day, and sometimes we go along the canal.

It was my birthday last week and I had cards and presents, and my mum made a cake for me.

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

Best Wishes,

.....(first name) or (birth mum.....)

Advice for adoptive parents:

What Information to include?

The letters do not have to be written in any particular way but these are some suggestions as to the contents:

- The child's health and development.
- Their personality, habits, sayings and mannerisms.
- Likes and dislikes.
- Their friendships.
- Progress at school.
- Interests and talents.
- Holidays and major events.
- On the child's behalf you may wish to ask questions of the birth family.
- You may wish to include some information about your activities as a family or about your feelings about being a parent to the child/ren.

Do not include the following:

- Your surname or any contact details in the letter.
- Letterbox cannot accept the exchange of gifts, vouchers or money because we cannot be held responsible for these items. We are unable to pass such items on.
- Do not send things which are not part of the arrangement e.g. photos and particularly no school photos.
- Details of frequent social activity or identifying location (e.g. names of school, church etc. holiday details).
- Information on a life threatening incident/condition such as an accident or serious illness. This should be shared with letterbox administrators or duty social workers and then it can be decided on how to pass this information on to the birth family.

Example letterbox contact from adoptive parents to birth mother

Dear Tom and Lisa,

As we write this Jake 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. He also really loves Mr Tumble's CD.

Over the past year Jake 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.

Jake 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 "Sometimes I like to curl up in a ball". It's about the adventures of a wombat and at the end of the day falls asleep in a ball. 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!) Josh and the Woo Woo.

In terms of watching television shows, Jake loves Mr Tumble, Balamory, Grandpa in my pocket, Nina and the Neurons, 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 Jake will be toilet training, understanding of Jolly Phonics and Pencil control, along with learning to write his own name.

We will continue to love, care and protect him.

Love Jake's Adoptive Parents xxx

Making a Start

- The expectation is that the adoptive parents write first at the beginning of the agreed month. This enables birth relatives to respond with any relevant up to date and appropriate information that may be beneficial to the child.
- If letters are not received a phone call may be requested for the Letterbox Administrator or Duty Social Worker to prompt the other party to write and to remind them of the arrangement.

How do I start and sign the letter?

The majority of adopters and birth relatives start the letter by using the first name of the adult they're writing to e.g. **"Dear Julie"** or alternatively if not known you could begin e.g. **"To Daniel's adoptive parents"**.

When you sign the letter just use your first name or alternatively e.g. **"Aisha's adoptive parents"**.

If writing to older children please remember to also include your first name e.g. **"birth mum / mum Jade"**.

Sending your letter 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 **'Letterbox Administrator'** and send to the address below:

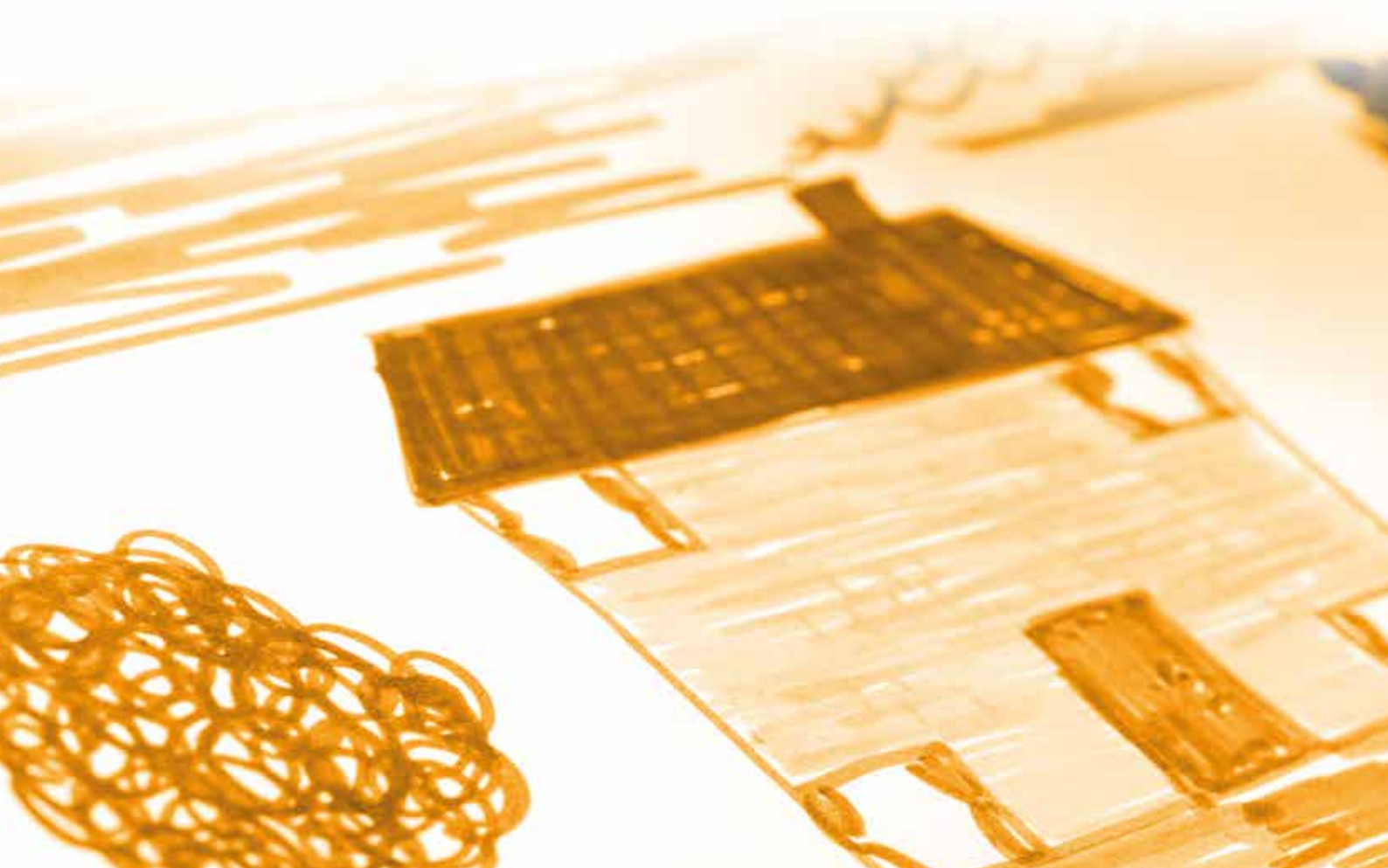
Birmingham Adoption Service
Birmingham Children's Trust
PO Box 16262
Birmingham
B2 2WX

Sending your letters by email

- Please attach the above information with your letters to:
letterbox.contact@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

No response?

- If a letter has not arrived after three weeks of the month agreed we can make a phone call to remind either party of the arrangement and any reason for not complying with the arrangement.
- Sadly, occasionally and despite all efforts made parents may not keep to the contact arrangements. In such cases we would advise that you keep us updated about your contact details and any changes in your life that may be helpful to know. We keep copies of all letters on the child's adoption file; this may also demonstrate your commitment towards them in later years.
- Our experience tells us that birth family and adoptive family lifestyles and circumstances mean they sometimes 'dip in and out of contact' at different stages of life. It is worth remembering that an 'open door' and flexible approach towards contact can still have some long term benefits for the child/ren.
- Even if letters are not received consistently our experience shows it is still a good idea to keep to your side of the arrangement and your letters will be kept on file until they are requested.
- Even if contact ceases between the birth family and the adopters, for whatever reason, the option to restart it is available up to the child reaches the age of 18, just contact us.



Help/support

- The **Letterbox Administrators and Post Adoption Team** can offer help, advice and support with letter writing. Please ask to speak to the **Duty Social Worker**.
- If you struggle with reading or writing please don't let this stop you from keeping in contact. Just let us know and we can offer help.
- Further advice, mediation, negotiation and counselling service related to post adoption contact is available from the post adoption team.

Please refer to the sample letters which you may find helpful however please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or require further assistance.

For further information or queries please contact:

letterbox.contact@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Tel: 0121 303 1010

Contact address:

Birmingham Adoption Service

Birmingham Children's Trust

PO Box 16262

Birmingham

B2 2WX