

# Adoption Letterbox Service

**There are two types of contact which can help adopted children keep in touch with their birth families:**

- **direct contact – arranged face to face meetings**
- **indirect contact – through letters and referred to as letterbox contact.**

**Letterbox is the most common form of contact for adopted children.**

The **Letterbox Service** allows information to be exchanged between a child's adoptive family and members of their birth family. It is usually a voluntary arrangement where adoptive parents and birth families agree to keep in touch by exchanging news through the Letterbox Service once or twice a year.

### **What are the benefits of Letterbox Contact?**

Research has shown that most adopted children benefit from having information about their birth family as they grow up. It can help children to develop a sense of identity, reassure them about the wellbeing of their birth family and let them know that they haven't been forgotten.

Adoptive families benefit from knowing more about their child's birth family origins, family traits, health issues and medical history. They often find that the exchanges of information with birth relatives helps them to talk more openly with their children about their adoption.

Receiving newsletters lets birth families know about their child's progress and development and offers reassurance about the child's wellbeing.

### **How does the Letterbox Service work?**

The Letterbox Service is safe and confidential. There is no exchange of any identifying information such as surnames or addresses.

Letterbox arrangements are usually drawn up before the child goes to live with their adoptive family. These arrangements set out exactly what will be exchanged and when the exchanges will take place.

Once the Letterbox Service has been told about the agreement, they will send a confirmation letter to both families. Reminder letters will be sent out a few weeks before news is due to be exchanged. If a newsletter doesn't arrive in the due month we will send a reminder letter.

Only items which can be easily posted can be exchanged through the Letterbox Service. Your agreement may include:

- newsletters
- photographs
- cards
- drawings
- gift vouchers.

The Letterbox social worker and co-ordinator can offer advice and ideas to help you write your letter, and can arrange to meet with you if you prefer.

We will photocopy all letters and cards so there is a complete record on the child's Letterbox file in case anything is lost in the future.

The Letterbox Service has a Freepost address, so there is no need for postage to be paid.

**Is it confidential?**

The news and information that birth relatives receive is for the recipient only and they are responsible for its safekeeping. It should not under any circumstances be posted on the internet, on sites like Facebook for example.

**How are decisions made about contact arrangements?**

A Contact Order is sometimes written into an Adoption Order, making the arrangement legally binding.

However, most contact arrangements are made informally between adoptive and birth families, with the help of their social workers. The Contact Plan will be discussed when the child is approved for adoption and again when the child is being placed for adoption.

The best interest of the child will always come first when the nature of the contact is being decided.

**Who decides what I can send?**

This will be agreed between you, your child's social worker and your child's adoptive parents. A decision will be made about what can be sent, when and how often.

**Will my child see my letter?**

The adopters will have to consider:

- the age of the child - if they are too young to read, the letter may be put away to be read when they are older or they may think it would be better to share the news in conversation with the child
- how the child will receive the news - if it is felt that hearing news of birth relatives will be distressing or unsettling, the adopters may choose to save a letter until the child is more settled.

**What if the adopters change their mind?**

The child's welfare is at the centre of any decision made about contact.

The Contact Plan doesn't usually form part of the adoption order. The agreement is voluntary and can only succeed if both birth family and adopters are willing to participate. It is very rare for adoptive parents to pull out of an agreement and we will always try to discuss any changes with them.

**What if a birth relative changes their mind?**

Sometimes we lose touch with birth relatives because they:

- forget to tell us they have moved
- don't claim their correspondence
- choose to withdraw because contact is too painful for them.

We would encourage the adopters to continue to write in with their news which we will keep on file for the future and if a birth relative gets in touch with us again, we will have up-to-date news to send on. They may however, choose to stop writing in themselves and contact between the families may be lost.

For more information about the Letterbox Service phone **01392 386638** or email [letterbox@devon.gov.uk](mailto:letterbox@devon.gov.uk) or speak to your Adoption Social Worker.