

# ADOPT LONDON

## Adoption: a guide for adoptive parents – Post Adoption Contact



[www.adoptlondon.org.uk](http://www.adoptlondon.org.uk)



In cooperation with:



## **Introduction**

We hope this leaflet gives you further information about contact.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the contents of the leaflet, please do not hesitate to contact the Contact Co-ordinators.

The leaflet also explains how Adopt London East contact service operates.

## **Why contact is important for adopted children**

When children are adopted, most children continue to have some form of contact with their birth families. There are many benefits for a child to remain in contact with their birth family. Having regular information or contact can help the child with their identity, build their self-esteem and support them to know that they are loved by everyone who is or has been in their lives.

Contact enables a child to maintain links with birth relatives, providing reassurance about how birth relatives are getting on and that their birth families still care about them. It can also help the child to know that their parents acknowledge the importance of the birth family for the child. Adopted children often want to know about their roots and to make sense of their earlier experiences. Having contact helps an adopted child to move on and begin the journey of understanding their life history.

Having some form of contact with birth family members, does benefit most children and therefore contact is only set up with the belief that it is in the child's best interest. The aim of contact is to help children feel both accepted in their adoptive family and comfortable about their roots and origins. If in years to come adopted young people are thinking about meeting with their birth relatives, having participated in contact over the years will help them to feel more confident about what to expect.

### How contact can help adoptive parents

At the time a child is adopted birth parents may choose not to share details about themselves and their family. As a relationship grows via letterbox exchange or if direct contact takes place, birth parents begin to share more information about themselves and their family and sometimes will share important things such as baby/early years' photos of the child.

Adoptive parents may wish to have information from the birth relatives that would help the child understand the reasons for their adoption or to find out about family medical history, or the origin of strengths and talents the child displays such as sports, drawing or musical ability.



## **Different types of contact**

### **Direct Contact**

This is when a child and the adoptive parents have a face-to-face meeting with members of the child's birth family, normally once or twice a year. This can be either supervised by the Contact Co-ordinator or by the adopters.

Sometimes a child will have direct contact with their birth parents, birth siblings, grandparents or foster carers. Direct contact is sometimes agreed at the time of the adoption or can be requested by adoptive parents as their child grows and their contact needs change.

The Contact Co-ordinator will support all direct contact, which normally take place in a neutral venue in the community in places such as parks, bowling alleys and community farms etc. Some direct contacts are always supervised by the Contact Co-ordinators or at a contact centre by a supervisor. However often when adoptive parents begin to feel confident to attend contact without a Contact Co-ordinator being present, then contact becomes another part of the life of the family. The Contact Co-ordinator will take on a monitoring role and will also be the go between who arranges the venue etc.

If direct contact occurs with birth siblings who have been adopted by a different family or grandparents, some adoptive parents make the arrangements for contact themselves.

It is often a time, both as you prepare your child prior to contact and after contact, that they will have questions about their birth family members and why they are adopted. This gives you as parents an opportunity to talk with your child about being adopted. If you would like any support with this, please do contact us.



### Indirect Contact or Letterbox Contact

Indirect contact is when a child remains linked to their birth family members via an exchange of letters.

Indirect contact can include the exchange of many different items such as a newsletter, birthday and celebration cards, photographs, drawings, craft, small gifts or gift vouchers which are exchanged via the confidential letterbox service that is managed by Adopt London East.

The purpose of letterbox contact is to keep your child linked to their birth family members, it is important for birth relatives to know that the child is happy and well.

By having a letterbox exchange, it means adopted children's birth history information does not cease from the time of their adoption. Birth family members may wish to share important information about their own lives such as getting married, the birth of new children or death of family members.

If you would like help with the content of your letterbox exchange or support with preparing a response, please contact the Contact Co-ordinator.

Both direct and indirect contact arrangements should be reviewed over time as children's needs are likely to change. This can include both increasing and decreasing the contact; or moving from direct to indirect and vice-versa.

It is expected that adopters will keep to the contact arrangement unless there has been agreement for this to be amended following a review.

It is also important that letterbox contact is sent on the agreed month. Late letterbox contact can cause birth family members to become

anxious and it can then affect the positive relationship that builds between adopters and birth family members via letterbox exchange.

It is always best to speak with the Contact Co-ordinator if there are any concerns, comments or questions you have about your letterbox exchange as soon as is possible. We appreciate that your circumstances may change, and you may wish to enter into a discussion about the letterbox exchange, and potential changes. It is important that everyone involved in the letterbox arrangement has a measure of flexibility and goodwill. If there are changes that are requested, or problems at the time of the exchange these will be discussed with all parties involved in the exchange, and dealt with in a sensitive and understanding manner. It is important you let us know if there is a problem, however small you think it might be, and we will do all we can to help.

If you have any news that you feel cannot wait until your agreed letterbox exchange time, please write to or telephone the Contact Co-ordinator who will consider whether it is appropriate to forward this additional information.



### **What will happen if birth family members do not take an active role with letterbox exchange**

Where communication/contact has been lost with a birth relative, the letterbox exchange will be kept on file. We would request you continue to send your letterbox information, even if the birth family don't reply. We are not always aware of what birth parents are going through and the reasons why their child was taken into care in the first place may still be prevalent in their lives. Alongside this, there is also their own adjustment and feelings of separation and loss. The Contact Co-ordinator will always work alongside

birth family members, encouraging them to reply to your letterbox correspondence. By continuing with the contact agreement you have acknowledged your child's birth family and complied with the contact agreement. Should your child access their adoption files when they are 18 years old or older, they will see very clearly your commitment to the contact plan. If communication is re-established the letterbox exchange will be forwarded to the birth relative. The Contact Co-ordinator will inform you if a birth family member makes contact again and let you know your letterbox contact been forwarded on.



### **How is contact set up?**

Usually, plans for contact begin to be explored when a decision is made that the child will be placed for adoption. The child's Social Worker will begin to identify birth family members who are important in the child's life.

Your Social Worker will inform you of a child's proposed contact plan. Discussion will also take place during the matching process and again when the application for an adoption order is made.

Occasionally, contact orders are made by the court at the time of the Adoption Order being granted. We always consider all parties' wishes when establishing a child's contact plan.

Most importantly the contact plan must reflect the needs of the child. It is the role of a Social Worker to ensure that the agreement for contact is in the child's best interests and acceptable for everyone involved.

For both direct and indirect contact, a written agreement is completed by the Contact Co-ordinator.

### How Adopt London East Contact Service operates

#### Direct Contact

A Contact Co-ordinator will meet with you to discuss the options with regards to your child's direct contact plan. All contact agreements are made to individually meet the needs of your child and your family and all options will be explored with you when the meeting takes place.

It is very important the direct contact plan feels both comfortable and achievable for your family.

A clear plan will be written on your child's contact agreement, which details the expectation of all parties who attend the contact.

Direct contact is normally arranged to take place within school holidays. This allows a child the opportunity to ask any questions they may have after contact and time to settle back into family life prior to going back to school.

The contact agreement will detail the month that contact will take place and the length of time. It will also include information such as if photos can be taken and by whom and if gifts or cards can be exchanged.

Direct contact is sometimes organised and supervised by the Contact Co-ordinator subject to a risk assessment.

It can also be supervised by adopters, once they feel comfortable to do so. However, a Contact Co-ordinator will always monitor and support all contact so they take place smoothly with all participants feeling comfortable.

A reminder letter will be sent the month before the direct contact is due. The letter will serve as a prompt for you to contact the Contact Co-ordinator so arrangements for the contact can be made. The



Contact Co-ordinator will contact everyone who will be attending the contact and arrange the date, time, place for all parties to meet after discussing it with you.

Sometimes the adoptive family choose to arrange the contact themselves by exchanging e-mail addresses with birth family members or other adoptive families.

### Indirect (Letterbox) Contact

When your child's letterbox contact is being established a Contact Co-ordinator will meet with you to discuss the details of your child's letterbox exchange and how best it will meet your child's needs and the needs of your family.

The details of the letterbox exchange that will be explored with you will include; -

- Which month/s you would like to send your letterbox contact. Whichever month you chose the birth family members will send their letterbox exchange the following month.
- What items you will send in your letterbox exchange.
- What items birth family members letterbox exchange will contain.
- How you will sign your letterbox exchange.
- How birth family members will sign their letterbox exchange.

All parties involved in the letterbox exchange, will have the opportunity to discuss and agree the details of the contact arrangements.

A letterbox agreement will then be completed by a Contact Co-ordinator and will be sent to you for approval to check it reflects the plan discussed and then to sign and return it to Adopt London East.

Once it is agreed and signed it will be scanned onto your child's file and returned to you.

A photo questionnaire which explores if photos are safe to send will also be completed by your child's Social Worker when they complete a contact referral form. We always assess carefully if photographs form part of a letterbox exchange.

It is important to consider sending photographs of your child/ren

with your letterbox exchange and there are many ways photos can be included. The Contact Co-ordinator will discuss these with you.

The Contact Co-ordinator will then meet all birth family members who will be taking part in the letterbox exchange to explain how the Adopt London East contact service operates and discuss the details of their contact plan with them.

The letterbox agreement unlike other reports and documents in adoption is not a legal document. This means should your child's needs change with regards to the contact plan it can be reviewed and changed at any time.

Any changes to your child's contact plan after the adoption will only be made with your approval.

A month before contact is due, the Contact Co-ordinator will send you a reminder letter as a prompt. They will also offer to support you in putting your letterbox exchange together, if required.

On receiving your letterbox exchange, the Contact Co-ordinator will check it to make sure it is suitable to send. Checks include that it does not contain information that would identify for example where you are living and that it is sensitively written.

You will then receive a letter/e-mail to confirm we have received your letterbox and it has been sent onto agreed birth family members.

A copy of all letters will be kept on your child's file.

If letterbox contact is between your child and several members of their birth family, one response is sufficient. This can be copied and distributed to all birth family members who are part of the agreement. You may wish to send enough copies for the letterbox



exchange, or the Contact Co-ordinator can help you with copying correspondence.

However, you may want to address your newsletter to each family member by name.

What information you include in your newsletter may depend on who the contact is being sent to and of course, their past relationship with the child.

The Contact Co-ordinator has copies of several anonymised newsletters which they will be able to show you to give you some ideas of what information to put into your newsletter.

The newsletter should give birth family members an overview of your child. However, it is up to you what information you are comfortable to share.

Here are a few ideas of the kinds of news you might wish to exchange about the child:

- Their health and general development
- Their progress at school
- Hobbies and things they like to play and do
- Favourite things i.e. TV programme, foods, music etc
- Routine i.e. bedtime

### **Where do I send my letterbox contact?**

Your letterbox contact should be placed in an unsealed envelope. It should then be placed in another sealed envelope and addressed to:

**Adopt London East  
Havering Town Hall  
Main Road  
Romford  
RM1 3BB**

**Please remember to inform Adopt London East if you move home or any of your contact details change.**

If you have any questions please contact the Contact Coordinator at Adopt London East in writing to the above address or by telephone. The contact number is 01708 434547.

### **Confidentiality**

We want to ensure that both adopters and birth families are aware of the need for confidentiality with the information and photographs that are exchanged as part of the letterbox agreement. This means that we do not expect sensitive information or photographs to be shared with other adopted siblings or placed on any social networking sites such as Facebook, My Space, Instagram, Twitter and Bebo or placed in magazines or newspapers.

### **Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, My Space, Bebo and Twitter are really popular with children and young people. This is a relatively new kind of communication and the ease in which children can find and be found by their birth families, is raising concerns for many adoptive families. The British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) have produced tips for parents getting to grips with social media sites and the risks it presents.

Our advice would be to talk openly about adoption with your child, discussing the reasons they were adopted and giving realistic and age appropriate information about their birth family.

BAAF's tips are:

- Talk openly and honestly with your child about social media, contact issues and the risks involved. Then work together to come up with solutions.
- Look at privacy settings so that your child's profile cannot be seen publicly and also hide lists of 'friends'.
- Explain to your child the risks involved in accepting random unknown people as 'friends'.
- Make sure they are not making information public that could help identify them, such as their date of birth or address.
- Discuss the possibility of using a nickname online instead of their real name, perhaps even having an unusual spelling (e.g. N1ck Sm1th).
- Avoid using profile pictures. Instead use the default pictures or something generic like flowers, landscapes, football team logos etc.
- Your child should be discouraged from posting any information about their school or local area.
- Do not tag your child in photos posted online and ask friends and family to be aware of this also.
- Make sure your child is aware of the risks of joining groups or networks that identify where they live or go to school.
- Make sure your child knows how to 'block' people so that if they do receive unwanted contact it can be managed.
- Remember not to post photos of your child on your own Facebook page.

### Comments and complaints

If you have a comment or concern about the Adopt London East contact service please contact the Team Manager who will listen to your comments or concerns and try and resolve any issues that you may have. The Team Manager can be contacted:

Post: **Adopt London East**  
**Havering Town Hall**  
**Main Road**  
**Romford**  
**RM1 3BB**

Telephone: **01708 434547**

Email: **[adoptlondoneast@haverling.gov.uk](mailto:adoptlondoneast@haverling.gov.uk)**

Alternatively, you can comment, compliment or complain about Young Peoples Services by telephone to the Designated Complaints Officer on **01708 432 589**

All local authority adoption services are inspected by an organisation called Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Their contact details are below.

Post: **Ofsted**  
**Freshford House**  
**Redcliffe Way**  
**Bristol**  
**BS1 6NL**

Telephone: **08456404040**

Email: **[Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)**

## Useful contacts

**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.

Post: **PAC-UK**  
**Family Action Head Office**  
**34 Wharf Road**  
**London**  
**N1 7GR**

Telephone: **020 7284 0555**

Advice Line: **0207 284 5879** (10:00am – 1.00pm Mon to Fri or 5:30pm – 7.30pm Thurs).

Website: **[www.pac-uk.org](http://www.pac-uk.org)**

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**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:

Post: **Adoption UK**  
**Linden House**  
**55 The Green**  
**South Bar Street**  
**Banbury**  
**Oxfordshire**  
**OX16 9AB**

Telephone: **01295 752240**

Website: **[www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)**

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**The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command, or CEOP Command**, is a command of the UK's National Crime Agency. CEOP is a law enforcement agency and is here to help keep children and young people safe from sexual abuse and grooming online. CEOP offer video/booklets and guidance for internet safety. They have also designed internet safety information for parents of adopted children. The CEOP Thinkuknow website also has information and advice to help you to stay safe if something has happened to you online.

Website: **<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>**