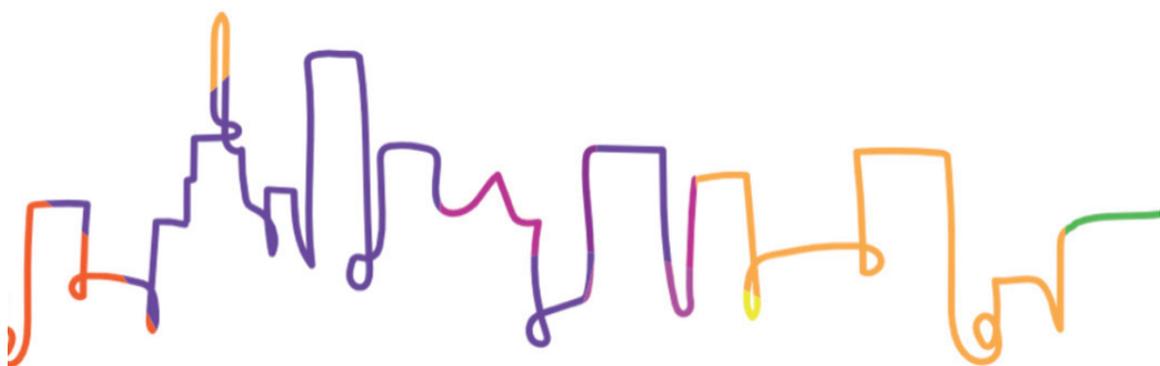


ADOPT LONDON

Adoption: a guide for
birth families -
Post Adoption Contact



www.adoptlondon.org.uk



In cooperation with:



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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.

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Different types of contact

It is important to know that children's contact plans may be different with different members of their birth family.

Indirect Letterbox Contact

This is when adopters write to you and let you know all about the child's progress and development and offer reassurance about the child's wellbeing.

Birth family members can then write back to the adopted child.

Letterbox is a way of telling a child that you love them and think of them often alongside praising their achievements and sharing your family news.

The letterbox exchange normally takes place once or twice a year.

Sometimes, alongside a newsletter, other items such as craft pictures and cards are included within a letterbox exchange. Consideration is always given to the appropriateness of photographs being exchanged through letterbox contact.

This is known as a letterbox service.

Direct Contact

Direct contact is face-to-face contact between agreed members of the birth family and the child.

Often this type of contact is with the birth brothers or sisters who are also living away from their birth families.

Direct contact will only be agreed if this is felt to be in the best interests of the child.

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How contact works

Contact arrangements are usually agreed before the child goes to live with their adoptive family. We always consider all parties' wishes and it is the role of a Social Worker to ensure that the agreement for contact is in the child's best interest and acceptable for everyone involved.

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.

One of the Contact Co-ordinators will meet with you to explain your contact plan and answer any questions you may have. Then you will be asked to sign your part of the contact agreement. Once this is done the agreed contact will then begin.

The written agreement is not legally binding and anyone involved can ask for a review of the contact arrangements at any time.

Letterbox Contact

All letterbox correspondence needs to be sent to Adopt London East and marked for the attention of the Contact Co-ordinator.

The letterbox exchange is an agreement made between birth family members and adopters; this means it is an adult exchange of information.

Children do not write the newsletter or take an active part in the exchange unless the adopters chose to support the children to do so, this is a decision made by the adopters and not by Adopt London East.

However, we do encourage adopters to talk about letterbox with the children and ask them what information they might like to share and include in the newsletters etc.

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Your letterbox agreement will contain all the information you need about your contact plan.

It details:

- The month you send your letterbox.
- What item/s you can send in your letterbox exchange.
- How you will sign your letterbox.

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The letterbox agreement also clearly states what month the adopters will send their letterbox exchange, what items their letterbox exchange will contain and how they will sign it.

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Adopt London East operates a reminder letter system, so just before your letterbox is due you will receive a reminder letter. This serves as a prompt for you to start completing your letterbox exchange.

Please do phone and ask to speak to one of the Contact Co-ordinators if you would like help with your letterbox and we will arrange a time to meet with you.

The adopters will normally write first so you have current information about your child to respond to.

The Contact Coordinator can support you if you need help with reading or writing your letterbox correspondence and offer advice and ideas to help you write your letter.

In some circumstances, audio tapes are appropriate. If the information sent or received needs to be translated into another language, we can provide a translation service. Ask the Contact Co-ordinator if you require any help.

When a letterbox exchange is sent, it is checked by a Contact Co-ordinator to assess its suitability and to check the items sent have been agreed as part of the exchange. All items in a letterbox exchange are also photocopied so there is a complete record on the child's letterbox file.

The letterbox file can be made available to a child when they are 18 years and above if they wish.

If during the checking process, an item is not considered suitable, you will be contacted and it will need to be changed. The Contact Co-ordinator can offer ideas of ways information can be changed so it meets the guidelines and can be sent onto the child.

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

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What should I say in my letterbox contact?

Here are a few ideas of things you might wish to write in your newsletter:

- Tell the child they are loved and thought of by you.
- Praise the child for the achievements you have been informed about.
- Ask questions about their hobbies and interests.
- Comment on information you have been told about how they are getting on at school and ask questions about their progress / strengths etc.
- How you are.
- What are your interests i.e. hobbies, tastes and talents or interests you may share.
- Information about when you were younger such as your strengths at school or things you may have in common.
- Any significant events in the family you may want to share such as recent holidays.
- Family news since last contact, such as marriages, bereavement, divorce, birth of brothers or sisters or illness.
- Thoughts about the child, although it is important that thoughts are written in a way that will not make a child upset or anxious.
- Information about the child's roots and family background, including religious beliefs and culture.
- Any important medical information

The aim of any information exchanged through letterbox contact, 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 relatives are well and that you are thinking about them and proud of all their achievements.

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Writing to the child through letterbox may not be easy; it can often lead to many emotions such as feelings of guilt, regret, anger or most of all sadness. However, the Contact Co-ordinator will offer support if you need help to deal with these feelings.

Direct Contact

Direct contact between adoptive families and birth families will involve the child meeting with family members at a pre-arranged time and place. This is sometimes organised and supervised by the Contact Co-ordinator.

A contact agreement will be completed and signed by everyone who attends and will detail the contact plan. It will contain the following details:

- Who will be present.
- Who should not be present.
- Where the contact will take place.
- The month and length of time the contact will take place.
- Whether gifts, cards will be exchanged.
- Whether photos can be taken during the contact.

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Confidentiality

We want to ensure that both adopters and birth family 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 people or placed on any social networking sites such as Facebook, My Space, Instagram, Twitter and Bebo or placed in magazines or newspapers.

Should we become aware that any items included with a letterbox exchange are being misused a review will take place with you and may result in certain items such as photographs being removed from the agreed list of items exchanged.

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.

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When does contact finish?

Once the young person reaches 18 years old, the letterbox agreement, which was agreed by the birth parents and adoptive parents, ends.

Where do I send my letterbox communication?

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

**Contact Co-ordinator
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.

Support Group

The Contact Co-ordinators facilitate two support groups for birth family members; one for women and the other for men whose life has been affected by adoption. The group is a safe place to share information about children if you wish to talk about how you are feeling, make a new friend and have lunch.

The Contact Co-ordinator will tell you all about the group when they meet with you.

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Comments and complaints

If you have a comment or concern about the Adoption 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**

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**

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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**

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