

Adoption Support Service

Letterbox Exchange Service



Children, Schools & Families
01438 737500
www.hertsdirect.org/csf



This leaflet is to give information about the Letterbox Exchange Service. You may want to keep it in a safe place to read again in the future.

The Letterbox Exchange Service exists to exchange information between adopted children and members of their birth families.

Most children benefit from having information about their birth families, so they grow up knowing who they are and where they come from. Letterbox contact can provide a straightforward way of keeping your child's information up to date as they grow up.

Research shows that most children do well in their adoptive family if they have knowledge of their birth family through letterbox contact.

Our Letterbox Exchange Service passes letters, cards and photographs between birth families and adoptive families without names and addresses having to be exchanged.

The content of the contact and when it will be sent is usually agreed through the child's social worker before the adoption order is made. Everyone involved signs an agreement to confirm the arrangement.



The Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator can help you with any problems you might have. You can telephone or write to us if you have a question or any concerns about your contact.

Questions that are often asked about letterbox contact ~

❖ How often are letters exchanged?

The number of times a year can vary, but often it is once or twice a year.

❖ What sort of letters should birth families write?

Each birth family will have different ideas about what they want to put in their letters. It can be helpful to think about who is going to read the letter. If the child is still young, it will be the adopters who read the letter so it is better to write to your child and the adopters together.

For example ~ Dear Simon, Mary and Jane. If the child is too young to understand the contents of the letter the



adopters will wait until the child is older to tell them what is in the letter. As the child grows older they will understand more of what is written and eventually be able to read the letter themselves if appropriate.

It is important that positive messages for your child's future are passed on to them so they can feel safe and happy in their adoptive home. This could be difficult for you as you may have strong feelings about your child not being with you, but this letter is not the place to put these feelings.

If there are some things you would like to write which are more suitable for when your child is an adult, you can write a letter at any time to be placed on your child's adoption file. This will be available to your child when they are an adult.

If you are not certain about what to put in your letter you can ask the Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator for help.



❖ How should birth family members sign their letters?

Most people think that it is best to sign your letters or cards with your first name such as Anne, or Mummy Anne. This will be less confusing for your child and they will know that the letter or card is from their birth family.

❖ What sort of letter should adopters write?

Most birth parents appreciate the generosity of adopters who write informally giving them details of how their child is progressing. Lots of adopters include information about how the child is getting on at school and about the child's health. They also often write about the kind of activities that the child enjoys.

The Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator can give advice on what to include in the letter.



◆ How are the children included?

Children's understanding about letterbox contact will change as they grow older. Children have a better chance of understanding about this contact if they are involved from an early age.

As children grow older it may be appropriate for them to add their name to the letter. Eventually they may wish to write their own letter or card.

It is important to remember that each child is different and they should only be included if it is something they want to share in.

It is also important to remember that their views will change over time as their understanding grows. The views they held when they were five or six are likely to be different when they are nine or ten and different again when they are teenagers. So it is important to continue to ask them if and how they would like to be included in the letterbox contact.

If there are any questions about how and when to include a child, the Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator will be able to offer help and advice.



❖ Should we put our address and telephone number on our letters?

The Letterbox Exchange Service exists to enable birth families and adopters to write to each other without exchanging names and addresses, so these should not be written on the letters or cards.

Names and addresses of those sending the cards can be written on a separate piece of paper. It is very important to keep the Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator informed of any change of address or telephone number so that letters are always forwarded to the correct address.

❖ What should we write on the envelope?

It is usual to put the first names of the adopted child and the adopters on the envelope when writing to the adoptive family. For letters to the birth family the full names are usually used. When the agreement is drawn up about how often contact will take place advice will also be given about what to write on your envelope.



❖ Should we seal the envelope?

You should not seal the envelope as all letters are checked in case names and addresses are included by mistake. We also photocopy all letters and cards so that there is a complete record on the child's files in case anything is lost in the future.

It is best to put your letter or card in an unsealed envelope inside a sealed envelope addressed to the Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator.

❖ Will the Letterbox Exchange Service remind me about my contact?

We send reminders about letterbox contact to birth families and adopters at the beginning of the month when the letters are due.

If you become concerned because your letter or card does not arrive, you can contact the Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator who will contact the person who sends the letter or card to see what has happened.



❖ Can the Letterbox Exchange Service be used to send gifts?

Unfortunately we are unable to send any other items other than letters, cards and photographs.

❖ Are the Letterbox agreements legally binding?

No. The agreements are not legal documents but they are a record of what everyone agreed at the time. However, it is possible that the agreement could be looked at again by a court in some circumstances.



You can contact the Letterbox Exchange Co-ordinator at PO Box 28, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 6WA

Tel : 01707 897654

or if you prefer to leave an answerphone message 01707 897632



This information is available
on request in: Large print,
computer disk, audio tape
and other languages.

More information
on the services we provide
is available on the
county council's website

Adoption Support Team,
Old Parkway School, Parkway
Welwyn Garden City AL8 6JD
Tel: 01707 897654
www.hertsdirect.org/adoption

www.hertsdirect.org/csf

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