

So contact us...

Guide to adoption

The Letterbox Scheme



By Phone:

By Post:

By Email:





What is the letterbox Scheme?

The Letterbox Scheme is a confidential service which allows information to be exchanged between birth relatives and adoptive families. The service is run by Derbyshire Adoption Service.

Why have a Letterbox Scheme?

It helps the adoptive child:

- keep in touch with birth relatives
- know more about their origins and background
- be aware of changes in the birth family should they wish to make contact as an adult.

It helps the birth relative:

- learn about the child's progress and interests
- tell the child about what is happening in the birth family
- be aware of the changes in the child's life

It helps an adoptive parent:

- answer the child's questions
- learn important news about the child's birth family eg. medical information and the birth of brothers or sisters
- maintain links with the birth family



Who uses the Letterbox Scheme?

Adoptive parents and the birth relatives or other people important to the child can use the Letterbox Scheme.

A Letterbox contact plan is made between the adults although the exchange normally works best when the child is actively involved in some way. Most adopted children will have a Letterbox arrangement but only if it is in the child's interests and all the people involved agree.

It is usually the birth parents or grandparents who are involved but it can be aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters or other important adults such as former carers, as well as, of course, adoptive parents. Careful thought is given to the timing of the exchange and we would normally avoid Christmas, birthday's and other significant dates for the child. If either party wishes to withdraw from a Letterbox arrangement we would ask that they provide their reasons in writing.



How does the Letterbox Scheme work?

Letters should be sent to:

Letterbox Administrator
Derbyshire Adoption Service
County Hall, Matlock
Derbyshire DE4 3AG

Telephone: 01629 532280

Letters are sent to participants to remind them when a letter is due.

An adoption support worker reads everything that has been sent to make sure that it is appropriate to send on.

Copies are taken and placed on the child's file. Adoptive parents are informed that a child has the right to see the contents of their file once they reach the age of 18.

Before letters are forwarded to the intended person, that person is asked to confirm their address. Once this has been done, the letter is forwarded to them by recorded delivery.

We will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of those involved in the Letterbox Scheme.

Writing for Letterbox

The Letterbox exchange will take place between the adults involved. Letters can be addressed to the child but are sent to the adopters/ carers who decide when and how much information to share with the child. There is an expectation that the letter will be shared with the child at an appropriate time.

The Letterbox Scheme cannot pass on gifts, money or video's/DVD's and any received will be returned to the sender.



Beginning the letter

People often find writing the first few letters quite daunting and so here are some suggestions on how you could begin.

- Thank you for your letter and all the news.
- I/We hope that your health has improved and that you are enjoying the good weather.
- I am/We are sorry to hear that Brutus (pet) has died.
- First I/We would like to thank you for the lovely letter I/we received earlier this year.
- The last letter you wrote was lovely. I/We often enjoy reading it.
- Just a note to let you know how things are going. The last time I/we wrote.....
- It's hard to believe that September is here already.
- I/We have has another busy year.
- How are you all? I/We hope you had a good summer. As you can see from the photos.....
- Just a note to update you on my/our news.

Normally the adoptive family writes first so that the birth relative can reply.



Guidance for Adoptive Families

Adoptive families could write about:

- The child's health, development or physical appearance. If there are any sensitive issues concerning the child's wellbeing please discuss this with an adoption support worker before writing your letter.
- The child's progress at school and friendships but be honest about any difficulties the child may be experiencing.
- The child's hobbies, interests or an awards received.
- Any changes in the family eg. new brothers or sisters, house moves or significant events.
- Holidays taken or days out but please be sensitive to the fact that the recipient may have a very different lifestyle.
- Any responses to queries from the last letter.

Sometimes adoptive parents include a drawing or something the child has written. This is usually very much appreciated.

Guidance for Birth Relatives/significant others

Birth relatives could write about:

- News of the child's birth family including major events such as and births, deaths, marriages, moving house, new job etc. It is useful to identify how people named are related to you as this is important for the child's understanding of their life story.
- People, places or pets the child knew before they were adopted, particularly people the child will have fond memories of. If there are people who have harmed the child please do not refer to them.
- Details of how you spent the year including any holidays, hobbies, interests, activities etc.

- Any important medical information relevant to the child. If this is of a sensitive nature please discuss this with an adoption support worker first.
- Any responses to questions or information in the adoptive family's letter. This could include any happy memories linked to what has been written. Please add anything which might help to reassure the child about your wellbeing.

Ending the letter

- The name you use in signing the letter will have been discussed and agreed with you when the Letterbox Contact Plan was being set up.
- Adopters normally sign with their first name/s or as (e.g.) K's adoptive parents.
- Birth relatives sign birth mum/mummy Sandra, birth daddy/dad, granny Jane, grandad Smith etc.

Here are some examples of how you might end the letter:

- I/We think that covers most of what has happened in the last year.
- With best wishes to you at Christmas and the New Year.
- I/We hope that you are all well. With kind regards.....
- All the best.
- I/We hope that you and your family are well and that you all had a good year as well.
- I/We can't think of anything else to say except have a good holiday.
- I/We enjoy getting a letter from you and hearing your news.
- I/We will have more news for you next year.



What happens to your letter?

All letters are read by adoption support workers to ensure that no identifying information has been included such as information about where you work or live. They will also check that the contents are appropriate for the recipient. Correspondence with a strong emotional content is unlikely to be of any benefit to the child and should be avoided. Adoption support workers will contact participants if there are any issues or queries about the correspondence.

Adoption support workers are available to offer advice and assistance. They will also help with writing letters. Everyone is asked to be mindful of the child's experiences and sensitive to the needs of the other people involved. If there is any information which is likely to be upsetting to the child this should be discussed with an adoption support worker before the letter is sent.

If there is difficult or sensitive information to share such as a death or serious illness in the family please contact an adoption support worker on 01629 532280

Adoption Support Team
Derbyshire Adoption Service
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