



North East Lincolnshire Council

Information for **birth relatives** **The Contact Letter Box Service**



Advice



Adoption service



What is the contact letter box service?

The Contact letter box service is managed by North East Lincolnshire Council's Adoption Service and deals with the exchange of information about adopted children between adoptive parents and the children's birth families.

The information is usually a yearly newsletter from the adoptive parents sent to the Adoption Service and then passed on to agreed birth relatives. This newsletter will be sent each year, in the month agreed when the contact arrangements were drawn up.

It can also mean photographs, birthday and Christmas cards and the return of news from birth relatives to the adoptive parents.

We regret we cannot accept presents under any circumstances.

Each child will have an individual "contact agreement" which will be discussed with you before the child is placed for adoption and will be sent to you in writing following a child's placement with an adoptive family.

Who do I discuss my requests for contact with?

You should always discuss your requests with your child's social worker. If you are not in agreement with the plan for adoption it can be very difficult to think about the future. However, talking about what information you would hope to receive if the adoption does go ahead, is very helpful in planning to meet your requests.

You will need to consider what you would like to receive and what you would like to send. It is important to think about what is realistic to expect of a family who may adopt your child and what would be best for your child. For example, yearly news is a reasonable request to make while asking to have letters six times a year is not.

If you are thinking about asking to send cards it is important that you consider:

- Can you promise to send the card every year so that your child does not feel let down if a card does not arrive?
- Can you think about how to sign the card so that your child is not upset by the greeting in the card?

You can also discuss your wishes with the adoption social worker. If you have not already been contacted by the adoption social worker you can find their name from your child's social worker or by ringing the Adoption Service on the number given at the end of this leaflet.

You could also request to discuss contact, or any aspect of the adoption, with an independent social worker who does not work for North East Lincolnshire Council. You can arrange this by contacting your child's social worker or the adoption social worker.

Will my requests for contact be met?

In deciding what letter box contact to agree to what is best for your child is always the main consideration. Where the social worker agrees that the contact you have requested is in your child's best interests every effort will be made to find a family who are able to meet your requests. Sometimes a family may be suitable in every other way but may not be able to meet your requests for letter box contact. If this is the case the social worker will decide if this would still be the right family for your child.

Many adopters feel confident about sending photographs but there are some concerns that photographs could be used to try to trace children in their new families and therefore upset their security and stability.

Some adopters also feel uncomfortable about receiving birthday cards from birth families.

How long will arrangements last?

If everything goes smoothly and your child is still happy to send and receive information the arrangements will last until your child is 18. However, several circumstances may lead to the arrangements being changed before your child is 18:

- Your child may have strong views about passing on information and/or photographs before they are 18 and may decide that they do not wish this to continue. The child's views will be respected and you will be contacted by the Adoption Service to discuss this and to explain the reasons.
- The adoptive parents may feel that the child is being upset by the information received and will seek to change the agreement on your child's behalf. Again, the Adoption Service will contact you to explain the changes and the reason for them.

Keeping to the agreement

Most arrangements are voluntary, that is, they are not subject to any legal order. However, if the agreement is not kept to and you are not happy with the reasons given, you should talk to a solicitor as you may have reason to apply to a court for permission to apply for a Contact Order.

Practical points to remember

- You need to contact the Adoption Team during the month before your contact is due, to let them know your address. This must be done each year and it is important to do it even if you have not moved. If you do not do this, the Adoption Team will keep any letters etc they receive for you until you do confirm your address. This is in case you have moved and forgotten to tell us, so that important information for you from the adopters is not lost.
- **We will not know whom the information or cards from you are for unless you include a note to the Adoption Team, stating your name and your child's full name.** This will help us to make sure that any letters are sent to the right person.
- We try to send out contact information within five working days of receiving it. You will need to bear this in mind if birthday cards are part of the agreement and allow enough time for us to send them on. Also please remember that the post at Christmas takes longer and we also have to deal with more cards and letters than usual.
- Your social worker or adoption worker will discuss the best way to sign cards or letters. If you are unsure about this, please ask.
- If your annual information does not arrive during the month agreed, please telephone the Adoption Team.
- Most contact arrangements work very well. However, if you do experience any problems, please contact the Adoption Team and we will be happy to try to sort out any difficulties.
- We regret that we cannot accept any presents or money for the children, only letters and cards which are part of the contact agreement will be sent on to the adoptive family.
- **Please be aware that placing any contact information for example, photographs on any social networking sites or the internet may jeopardise the contact agreement.**

- All correspondence should be sent to:

**North East Lincolnshire Council
The Fostering and Adoption Service
Civic Offices
Knoll Street, Cleethorpes
DN35 8LN
North East Lincolnshire
Telephone: 325545 to 326292 option 2**

Keeping in touch in adoption arrangements

An adoption social worker would be very happy to help you with explaining this leaflet if there is anything which is not clear to you.

Over the years, many birth relatives have contacted the Adoption Team for help and advice about how to write their letter.

Sometimes it can be very hard to know how to write your letter for example:

- how do you start the letter?
- what do you include?
- are there things not to say?
- how do you sign off?

The purpose of this leaflet is to try and give you some help. At all times, the

Adoption Team in North East Lincolnshire would be pleased to offer you any help and advice we can.

This is how to contact the Adoption team:

Tel: **325545 to 326292 option 2** email: **fosteringandadoption@nelincs.gov.uk**

Visit: **The Fostering and Adoption Service**

**Civic Offices
Knoll Street, Cleethorpes
DN35 8LN
North East Lincolnshire**

Some things to think about when it is time to send your letter for your child

- It would be good to let your child know that you are ok
- You can obviously reply to any points raised in the adopter's letter, it can be very encouraging to a child if you comment on the information about their achievements and talents in the adopter's letter
- You could mention any major changes in your life since the last letter
- You could mention any main family changes
- Talk about your interests, for example, your favourite TV programme, food, music, things you like to do
- Have you been on any day trips or holidays?
- If your child has interests and talents which are shared by other family members, you may wish to make the link
- You may wish to mention a special time or memory you had with your child
- Sometimes it may not be possible for you to write a long letter, that's ok, bear in mind that it is better to send a short letter than no letter at all
- Do please remember that identifying information, for example, including your address or phone number cannot be passed on. Where this happens, the Adoption team will have to send your letter back to you and obviously this will delay things
- Try not to include any information that may worry your child
- Please do not include photos or cards if these are not part of the agreement. Where this happens, the Adoption Team may have to return them to you
- Do think carefully how you will sign your letters. In most cases, we would suggest signing as Mummy or Mum (and then your first name) and Daddy or Dad (and then your first name). For example Mummy Angela and Daddy Michael

We do hope this will help you. Please do contact the Adoption team if you would like any help.

Alternatively, if you prefer, we can also put you in touch with an independent (and confidential) Adoption Agency – After Adoption Yorkshire (based in Grimsby) and they would be pleased to help.

The Adoption Team



Contact us

If you would like to receive this information in another language or another format such as large print, braille or on audio tape please contact:

North East Lincolnshire Council
The Fostering and Adoption Service
Civic Offices
Knoll Street, Cleethorpes
DN35 8LN
North East Lincolnshire

T: 325545 to 326292 option 2
www.nelincs.gov.uk