



# Frequently asked questions by Looked after Children with siblings who are adopted

### **Who makes the decision about my brother or sister being adopted?**

There are many people involved in making this decision. Social workers, family support workers, Child Protection Independent reviewing officers, police officers and psychologists are just a few of the many people who may work with your family. They make assessments and provide evidence which is presented to Court. The final decision about what happens to you and your brother or sister is made by a Judge who has seen all the evidence and asks a lot of questions. He makes the decision which he believes is the right one based on all the information and which is in yours and your brother or sister's best interest.

### **How do I know my brother and sister are safe?**

As much as we possibly can we make sure that any children we place with adopters are loving caring parents who want to do the best they can for the children they adopt. We do this by making a lot of checks such as with their employers, with the police and with the Local Authority where they live to see if anyone has any concerns about the adopters. We also ask the adopters to give us three people's names that we approach and ask them about the adopters and if they have any worries about children being in their care. Adopters have to have a very in depth assessment by an experienced adoption social worker who gets to know the adopters very well and can identify any difficulties with how they may potentially care for a child they wish to adopt. There are a few hurdles for adopters to go through before they finally get to the point where they adopt a child which include being questioned by Adoption Panel members, a Judge or Magistrates and by the child's adoption agency.

Once the child is adopted you may have the opportunity to receive letters from the adopters and eventually your brother and sister which may reassure you that they are being well looked after.

### **What is letter box contact?**

Letter box contact is an opportunity for you to stay in touch with your brother or sister through regular letters. It helps you to feel part of your brother or sisters life even though they cannot be with you and provides a way of knowing they are safe and well.

### **Why do I send photos but do not receive them?**

At the point of your brother or sister being placed with their adopter an agreement is made about what can be sent through letter box contact and what cannot. Often it is agreed that photos of you are very important for your brother/sister to have as they are growing up.

Sometimes it is agreed by social workers and adopters that at that point in time, it is not safe for photos of your sibling to be shared with yourself. This may be because there is a risk that this photo could be shared with birth family members and make where your sibling is living identifiable.

However, this decision may change as yours and the adopters circumstances change, and there may be an opportunity to receive photos or see one which is kept in the Adoption Service office. The first thing to do would be to ask your social worker if this is possible for you and they will be able to explain the reason if it is not to you, or make arrangements for photos to be sent through the letter box contact.

### **Why can't I send Birthday and Christmas cards?**

It is usually the adopter's decision as to whether they want to receive cards for your brother or sister. This decision could change in time but the adopters may need reassurance that you will send cards every year. Most of us enjoy receiving Birthday and Christmas cards and look forward to reading them and if one year they do not receive one from a special person it could make them feel sad and worried as to why a card never arrived.

### **What can I do if I want to meet my brother or sister when I am older?**

When your brother or sister turns 18 the adoption team will not be involved in any contact arrangements. Any future contact between your brother or sister will be their decision. If your brother or sister wants to continue writing to you they can place their details on the adoption contact register and ask us whether you have placed your details on your brother and sisters contact file so that they can get in touch with you.

If you want to meet your brother or sister it is always best that you speak to your foster carer or social worker who will help you. They will contact the adoption team and we can offer you support and advice as to how you can possibly achieve this.

When you are 18 years old you can contact the adoption team and we can offer you help and advice on how you can put your name on the contact register. This service is a connection that can be made between people. You must both be on the Adoption Contact Register. You can also contact the adoption team and put your contact details on your brother or sisters file in case they wish to continue writing to you.

### **What can I put in my contact letters and what am I not allowed to put in?**

Your brother or sister would be very interested to hear about what you like to do such as your hobbies or activities. Maybe you could tell them about your pets or any holidays you have had. They would like to know all about you such as what are your favourite subjects at school or what your friends are like. However, to make sure you and your brother and sister are kept safe telephone contact numbers, your home address, the name of your school, or any Facebook or social media user names /details should not be included in the letter. It is easy to forget sometimes that we may have photos of ourselves with identifying information on such as a school jumper with the name on. So you should check the photos, if they are allowed, are ok to send.

The adoption team would be very happy to help you write your letter if you want us to. You can ring us or ask your foster carer, key worker or social worker to contact us on your behalf.

### **What happens to my letter once I have written it?**

It is given by you, your foster carer or your social worker to the Adoption Service Letter Box Contact Coordinator, who currently is a lady called Mel Hibbert. Mel really enjoys receiving your letters. She checks them in case there has been any identifying information put in them by mistake. She then makes a copy of the letter or card. This is to keep on your brother or sister's contact file just in case it gets lost in the post or in the years to come. Mel then sends the letter or card to your brother or sister's adopters.

## What is a life story book?

This is a book that is prepared by your brother and sister's social worker when they are adopted which has lots of photos and information in it to explain to them who their birth family is, where they were born and lived, what nursery they went to and the reason why they have become adopted. It is very important for your brother and sister to have this information to help them understand the memories they may have and also so that they know all about you.

## Why can't I send presents?

Unfortunately, due to the high number of children placed for adoption the adoption service are unable to manage the volume of parcels they may receive or have to send between adopters and birth families.

## Will my brother or sister forget me?

We have found that brothers and sisters who have been adopted really want to know about you and appreciate the letters and photos you send. By using letter box contact they will always know they have a brother or sister.

## Questions?

**If you have any questions about contact or want some help, contact the adoption service who are very happy to help. Contact us on 325545 or ask your social worker or carer to do so on your behalf.**

