



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together

Gwasaneth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd I

Letterbox information Exchange For Adopted Children

“Working with families to achieve positive outcomes in adoption”



**For Children
For Families
For Always.**

The South East Wales Adoption Service
North Wing, Block B, Mamhilad house, Mamhilad
Park Estate, Pontypool, NP4 0HZ
Adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
01495 355766

Why Have a Letterbox Scheme?

In the past adopted people have often regretted not having an opportunity to learn up to date news of their birth relatives. Many adoptive parents and birth relatives have also expressed their wish for information.

The Social Services department decides whether a Letterbox arrangement is in the child's best interests.

If you are an adopted child, exchanging information can help you:

- To keep links with significant birth relatives
- To understand more about your background
- To know about changes and events in your birth family
- To prepare for possible future contact where appropriate

If you are an adopter, exchanging information can help you:

- To find out information that was not available at the time of the adoption (e.g. regarding a medical condition which has occurred after your child's adoption, and which may be hereditary)
- To maintain a positive link with the birth family that will support the child's identity.
- To have an exchange of general information, interests, hobbies and significant life events.

If you are a birth parent, sibling or other birth relative, exchanging information can help you:

- To find out important information about the child, their health and progress
- To inform the child about changes in your own life
- To maintain positive links with the child
- To offer reassurance and support that can help the child's sense of identity

For all parties

Letterbox can help to prepare for the possibility of direct contact when the child becomes an adult if they so wish.

Some adopted children may want to contribute themselves; but the Letterbox is officially set up between birth relatives and adopters. The adoptive parents have control of how and when information received through the Letterbox scheme is passed on to their children.



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How will the Letterbox Scheme work?

The scheme allows for news to be sent at the agreed times. Typically this is once or twice a year. However the arrangement should be set and reviewed in consideration to the child's best interests.

Each Letterbox agreement will be set up between adopters, birth relatives and the Social Services Department. This may include birth parents, but also grandparents, siblings, or significant others. Where news is to be sent between brothers and sisters placed in different adoptive families, this can usually be done via letterbox or directly between both sets of adoptive parents.

Your child's social worker will discuss with both adopters and birth relatives what information can be exchanged. We will keep a copy of all material on file in case the originals are lost. All letterbox exchange items are checked before forwarding on to ensure the contents is appropriate.

When will the Letterbox start?

If everybody involved wants the letterbox, and the Social Services Department has agreed, the details will be confirmed by your Social Worker at the time your child is placed for adoption. A copy of the agreement will be sent to all parties.

If you want any changes to be made to the Letterbox arrangements before the Adoption Order, you should discuss these with your child's Social Worker and / or Adoption Social Worker. After the Adoption Order has been granted you can discuss any issues regarding letterbox with the Adoption Support Team on the contact details below.

When and where shall I send my letters?

Please send your letters and cards at the time you agreed to:

Letterbox

South East Wales Adoption Services
Block B, North Wing, 2nd Floor,
Mamhilad House,
Mamhilad Park Estate,
Pontypool,
Torfaen NP4 0HZ
Tel 01495 355766



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What if I move?

Please do let us know if you change your address so that we can keep in contact with you.

What if I forget to send my letter on?

Please do your best to remember, as it will help to keep the scheme running smoothly. If for some reason you do not feel able to send information as agreed, please do let us know. We will then be able to discuss any support required and inform the other parties.

What about confidentiality?

All the letters received by the Letterbox scheme will be treated as carefully and confidentially as all adoption records. Some basic details will be entered on computer to allow the system to operate however we have taken steps to ensure a high degree of confidentiality. If you yourself accidentally include confidential information (such as names or address) in your letter, this will be taken out before the letter is sent on unless special arrangements are made.

We shall send this by Recorded Delivery to try to prevent information going astray. Of course, we cannot be held responsible for information lost in the post, but would always seek to have a copy on file.

What if the information I send or receive needs translating?

We shall provide the translation service that you need.

What sort of news shall I send?

It may help you to know what to say in your letter if you can put yourself in the other person's shoes when you write. If required the Adoption Support Team can also help you to write a letter.

If you are a birth relative:

You can still help your child a great deal by keeping in touch with them. You may want to write:

- About the news of the last year in your family
- About people, places or even pets your child knew before adoption
- About your thoughts, about your child
- To reassure your child about things which may have worried them at the time of their adoption (e.g. your own situation/health etc)
- About your child's roots and family background, including your culture and religious beliefs
- About yourself, your relationships, interests, jobs and health



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Other information you may wish to pass on can be done so though a separate letter may be needed for information such as:

- Important family medical information
- Major events (such as deaths, marriages, divorce, birth of brothers or sisters, illness, emigration)

Writing to the child may not only help him or her, but also perhaps help you to deal with your own feelings. You may indeed still feel sad or angry about the adoption. However, it is very important to the child as they grow up to know about you and that you are glad to hear of their progress. There may be times when you will find it hard to send news, but please remember the child may benefit a great deal from these communications between you and their adopters. You may find it helpful to discuss any of the above with an Adoption Support Social Worker.

You may want to send questions, drawn pictures or Cards if this is agreed.

If you have any other information, which you would like to be available to your child, please contact the adoption service to discuss.

If you are an adoptive parent:

The information you send will depend on who you are sending it to and their past relationship with your child and perhaps with yourselves. It may need to be different for each of several birth relatives. You may like to send news about:

- Your child's health and development – height, weight, favourite colour, toys, food
- Their progress at school
- Their hobbies, interest and what they are good at
- Their looks and personality
- How they get on with friends and family
- Any changes in your family, for example new brothers and sisters, house moves (please note: change of address should be notified separately to the Letterbox scheme to keep it confidential)
- Your feelings about being a parent to your child, your thoughts about the birth family's feelings, or your child's comments about their adoption or about their past.
- You may want to send questions, drawn pictures or letters from the child themselves if this has been agreed.

There may be times when it is not easy to send information but please remember your child may benefit greatly from these communications between yourselves and their birth family, and it can be so important to birth relatives to know the child is alive and doing well.

Also research from After Adoption informs us that "it is not about maintenance of the relationships as they were with the birth family. What children like is to have some continuity that enables them to integrate the past with the present, and obviously then the future"

Oakwater 2013



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What if something urgent happens?

If you think there is a need for news to be sent urgently (such as illness or death etc) please contact the Adoption Support Team and an adoption worker will advise you.

What if the news I receive is distressing or difficult?

You may wish to contact an adoption worker in your agency, or one of the following:

After Adoption

0800 056 8578

<http://www.afteradoption.org.uk>

Adoption UK

01295 752240

www.adoptionuk.org.uk

Natural Parents Network

0845 456 5031

www.n-p-n.co.uk

What if no news is sent to me?

We know it may be disappointing or difficult when you do not receive a letter as agreed, but this may be for one of many reasons and it may not necessarily mean a lack of concern. We would urge you to continue to send your news every year and it may be that in the future the other person will start sending their news again too. If you feel it would be helpful to talk over your feelings about not receiving any news, do contact the Letterbox scheme.

The Letterbox scheme will keep a record of the date that all information was received and sent out and this will be included in the Adoption file which the child can access when 18 years old.

What should I do if I am having problems with the Letterbox arrangement?

Please contact The Adoption Service with problems or concerns and an adoption worker will advise you.

How long does the Letterbox continue?

The Letterbox scheme for the child continues until he or she reaches 18 years. We will then write to you and the child at that time telling you that the scheme has ended. The whole of the Letterbox file will then become part of the child's adoption records which are kept for 100 years from the date of their Adoption Order.



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