



A Guide to writing updates
for Adopted Children





Introduction

In the past when children were adopted, this was thought to be a final arrangement and all contact was stopped. However, adopted adults have told us that this has left them feeling like a 'jigsaw with a piece missing'.

Now most children placed for adoption have indirect contact known as Letterbox arrangements. Such an arrangement allows for the exchange of information between birth relatives and adoptive parents.

Adopted people who do not know much about their original backgrounds can sometimes feel they don't really know who they are. This feeling can surface at different times throughout their lives. Adopted people can also feel upset by learning later in life that they have brothers or sisters born to their own birth mother. Or they can be concerned by not knowing what happened to their birth family over the years.

These factors - and the knowledge that birth family frequently feel unresolved anguish and concern about children who have been adopted from them - have led to a belief that greater openness between birth families and adoptive families can help everyone.

In more and more cases children adopted today will have memories of their birth families and a sense of some connection to them, whatever the reasons for becoming adopted.

Advice and guidance for birth relatives

This guide is to help you put together an update letter about you and your family for a child who has been adopted. If you need any more help with doing an update please get in touch - we will be happy to give you what support we can. Contact details are at the end of the booklet.

An example of what an update letter may look like is at the end of this information booklet.

Everyone knows how hard it must be to write to a child who you grieve for. It is hoped this information booklet will not only assist you, but help a child to have the information they need to keep their birth family identity without them feeling worried or sad too.

Where to begin?

The first thing to do is check your Letterbox arrangement to make sure when you should send your updates and what has been arranged. Give yourself some time before the update is supposed to be sent to help prepare what you are going to say.

Make a list - it usually helps.

How long should the update be?

Updates should be about as long as a one or two page letter.

Do I write or type the update?

This is really up to you. You can hand write it like a letter and post it to us, or you can type it on a computer and send it in an email.

Can someone else write the update for me?

Again, this is up to you as long as it is your words and you are ok with someone else knowing about your personal business.



What should I write about?

The idea of the update is for a child to know what is happening with you and their birth family so the list below might help.



Where you are living. (But do not give your full address or any identifying information such as telephone, email etc.). You may say for example, 'I still live in (for example Stockton) but have moved to a new house', then say what your new house is like.



What you have been doing since your last update such as 'I have been on holiday and went to ...' And what you did there. Or I have started a college course, or a new hobby and things such as that.



What you do in your spare time such as television programmes you like to watch, any magazines you like to read, new friends you have made and other leisure interests you have, any new talents you have discovered such as being good at swimming or karaoke.



Things that have made you proud about yourself, such as doing more exercise, stopping smoking, getting fit, passing an exam, efforts to overcome difficulties such as drug or alcohol abuse.



Happenings there have been in the family, such as a new family member being born, someone getting engaged or married or being happy with a new partner. You should also tell about sad happenings such as birth family members who have passed away, but this should be kept to close family members such as birth grandparents.



Things you are planning for the following year such as Christmas, holidays, outings with friends and family, big events in the family and so on.

What shouldn't I write about?

It is acknowledged how hard it must be for you to write to a child without telling them how sad you are that they cannot live with their birth family. But to include this in your update could be very upsetting for them and could make them feel guilty and upset for enjoying their life as it is now, which you would not want. So here is a list of the 'shouldn't do's':



Don't try to explain what happened and why. The child's Life Story Book will have already explained this and updates are not really meant to do this.

If you want to explain your feelings about the reasons why a child was removed and adopted, and what this means to you, you can put these in a letter, which is called a Later Life Letter. This is put on a child's file for them to read when they are 18 years old should they ask to see their adoption file. Just contact Adoption Tees Valley for more details about this.



If the child is your birth child, don't make unreal promises such as 'When I have overcome my troubles or I am better you can come back and live with me'. No matter how brilliantly you have overcome the difficulties that led to your child being removed, this would not happen as adoption means your child legally belongs to another family. Whatever changes happen in your life, they would not be returned home to their birth family, sad as that may be for you.



Don't talk about seeing each other again. Even though it is understandable that this is what you are hoping for, this is a decision that a child will have to make when they become an adult.



Don't question a child about their present feelings such as 'Are you happy in your new family, do they look after you? Would you like to be back home? What makes them (adoptive family) better than your birth family? And so on. A child will be confused as to how they should answer. They will always feel a sense of loyalty to you and their birth family, and will feel bad and guilty if they say they are happy. So they may say they are not happy, when they are, to help you feel better. It is best to avoid this situation and in reality it may also mean that your update letter is never actually shared with the child.

Can I ask any questions?

Of course - obviously there will be questions you want answers to about everyday things and there is no reason why you shouldn't ask. For example, questions such as 'How are you getting on with Maths?' is a way of you telling something about yourself. You could say 'I was terrible at Maths in school but I have got better now I am older.'

There may be other everyday happenings you would like to know about that haven't been put into the update such as 'What's your favourite subject in school' or 'What's your favourite sport?' Again these are questions you can add to, and they will help a child to learn more about you by stating what your favourite subject or sport is or was. That is the whole idea of the updates - for a child to learn about you and their birth family.

Will a child be putting together their own updates for me?

This really depends on the age of a child. Adopters are told that when a child is very young, adopters should put together the updates for birth relatives. But as the child grows and matures they should be involved in doing the updates. Then, when a child is able to understand, they could do their own updates if they wish.

What do I call myself in an update?

No-one would ever weaken your importance in a child's life by taking away what it means to you to be called a child's Mum, Dad, Sister, Brother, Grandparent, Aunt, and Uncle and so on. Of course, to you and the birth family you will always be those people.

But it has to be said that a child will have become part of their adoptive family and the names and titles of family members will be part of their new life and be different to the people in their birth family.

So a child does not get confused, it is important that you add to the front of your family title the word 'birth,' such as 'Birth-Mum, Birth-Dad, Birth-Grandparents' etc. to help a child understand the difference.

A child's adoptive parents would have already explained the difference to the child.

Will I receive photographs of the child?

A photograph of the child may be something you would like. Some adoptive parents may recognise this and might agree to send one, but not all feel able to do this and each case is considered separately. If it is agreed for you to receive a photograph please do not openly share it on social media or misuse it in any way as this will result in photographs being stopped.

What if I don't get updates from the adopters?

The Adoption Service tries really hard to make sure adopters send you an update but sometimes they don't. If your update is not here for you at the agreed time we will write to the adopters to remind them to send it. Usually, however, if you send your updates they will send theirs.

Even if adopters don't send their update, you should keep sending yours as they are kept on file and a child can see them when they are 18 years of age if they ask to see their file. They will know you kept to your agreement as promised, and can read them all.

Does the Adoption Service check my update before it is sent to my child's adopters?

Yes, all updates are checked to make sure they are OK to send. We also take a photocopy of letters and keep them on file. By keeping a record of your letter we are able to prove that you sent it.



When are letters from other people sent to me?

How do I receive my update?

When we receive information for you that is part of the agreement, we will contact you to confirm your current address. Once you have confirmed your address, your Letterbox will be sent to you by recorded delivery. If you change your address or phone number, please let the adoption service know, otherwise we will not be able to let you know when information is here for you. You can also contact Adoption Tees Valley when your update is due to check if it has arrived.

Sometimes your information may not have arrived when it is due. If this is the case then we will contact the adoptive family to advise them you have been in touch and remind them to send in their update.



Where do I send my updates?

You should send your update to:

Postbox
Adoption Tees Valley
Oxbridge Avenue
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 4LE

Or you can email them to:

letterbox@adoptionteesvalley.org.uk

It helps if you put the child's full birth name and date of birth as well as your name, so we know who it is for and who it is from.

Contact us for further information

For additional help about Letterbox, please contact:

The Duty Social Worker

Tel: 01642 526400

Email: letterbox@adoptionteesvalley.org.uk

We also run a monthly 'drop-in' session in all of the local Boroughs. This will give you an opportunity to drop off and/or collect your information and talk to a social worker from Adoption Tees Valley if you need any help or advice with the Letterbox. To find out when and where these are being held please contact the Duty Social Worker as above or go to the Adoption Tees Valley website at: adoptionteesvalley.org.uk

An example of an update from birth family to adoptive family

10 September

Dear Bob & June

Thank you for your update about Freddie. It was good to hear how well he is doing and I loved his drawing for me. Please tell him thank you.

I am doing ok. I am still living in the same address although I have asked for a transfer to somewhere else to make a fresh start, but I don't think this will happen in the near future but I will keep trying.

Tina



Now my update for Freddie:

Dear Freddie

Thank you for the lovely drawing. I have put it on the front of my fridge and show it to all the family when they visit.

It was good to hear how well you are doing in school; I was good at Maths too. It makes me happy to know you are having a good time and well done for learning to swim and ride your bike.

I still live in the same house but I am hoping to move to a new one soon. I see a lot of my sisters, and my sister Michelle, that's your birth aunty, has just had a baby girl. She is lovely and they have called her Lily.

Your Mum and Dad tell me you like watching television. I do too - I watch all the soaps and don't like to miss any of them!

I don't go out much but I do go to a karaoke night with my sister Angela every Thursday. We have a good time and a good laugh and it cheers both of us up. Some of the people who get up to sing are really funny.

My favourite food at the moment is Mexican food; it's really hot and spicy.

You wanted to know more about my Mum and Dad coming from Ireland. Well they were both born in Belfast which is Northern Ireland. After they got married in 1970, they decided to come to England to live to look for better jobs. They also wanted to have a family and at that time there was lots of troubles in Ireland and they wanted their children to grow up where it would be safe.

They both still have strong Irish accents which can be funny at times because they say things in a very different way to the English such as instead of small they say 'wee'.

So keep up all your good work in school and I look forward to your next update, maybe you could do me another drawing.

Love from Birth Mum Tina

About your last update:

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What I have done recently:

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About my health:

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Things I like to do at the moment:

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My favourite foods at the moment:

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What I watch on TV:

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Things I am planning to do:

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News about your birth family:

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Answers to your questions:

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Love from





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