
A Guide to Keeping in Touch

for birth relatives and adoptive parents

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WHAT IS KEEPING IN TOUCH?

Keeping in Touch is a way for people to stay in touch after a child has been adopted. Contact is between the adoptive family and the birth relative(s) or other significant people in a child's life through an agreed exchange of updates or meetings.

All Keeping in Touch agreements are voluntary arrangements. This means that all parties agree to maintain contact but, unless there is a Contact Order issued by the court, this agreement cannot be legally enforced.

Agreements are set up as we know that well managed contact is helpful for a large number of adopted children. **These agreements rely on the goodwill of the adults involved.**

WHO BENEFITS FROM KEEPING IN TOUCH?

Adopted children:

- Helps children understand their birth family and personal history.
- Provides a sense of continuity between their past and future.
- Helps children develop a sense of identity.
- Helps them to feel accepted by and attached to their adoptive family.
- Assists the child to develop a more realistic view and understanding of their birth relative(s).
- Reassures a child about the wellbeing of their birth relatives.
- Encourages a greater openness about adoption.

Adoptive parents:

- It is useful to know about a child's background and heritage, as this can help answer any questions the child may have.
- Keeping in Touch with birth family can help adopters support their adopted child to deal with issues that arise from their adoption.
- Keeping in Touch is a reminder to have open and honest conversations with the child about their adoption.
- Established contact with birth relatives can help minimise any worries or anxieties the adoptive family may have if the child wishes to make contact with their birth relatives as they become young adults.

Birth relatives:

- Keeping in Touch can provide much needed reassurance to the birth family that the child is safe and well.
- It provides a way to share news about the wellbeing and development of the child and provides a sense of the child getting older.
- Personal information can be shared regarding interests and talents – this helps maintain a healthy connection between the birth family and the child.
- If the child wishes to meet with the birth relative when they get older, regular updates and exchanges of information can ease this process as this relationship is already established.
- Having an active Keeping in Touch agreement in place means it's less likely that the child will feel the need to reach out to birth relatives without the necessary support.

HOW DOES KEEPING IN TOUCH WORK?

- Social Workers will discuss with adopters and the birth family what everyone would like to see in the agreement, before drawing up the agreement paperwork and getting it signed by all parties.
- Once the signed agreement paperwork is received the Keeping in Touch team will draw up the agreement and will issue a Keeping in Touch code, e.g., LB123 or KIT123. **This code is important as it will be used as a reference by everyone who is part of the agreement** and needs to be marked on any correspondence, emails, or letters sent in.
- Both parties will then receive a copy of the agreement to keep.
- No contact items can be sent on until the agreement form has been completed, signed by both parties and the adoption order has been granted.
- The agreement is stored securely and personal contact information kept confidential.
- Parties are encouraged to look at their Keeping in Touch Agreement regularly, making sure it meets the child's needs as they grow. If changes are needed, please contact the Keeping in Touch team and they will be able to help.

WHO CAN USE THE KEEPING IN TOUCH SERVICE?

- Any birth relative or significant person in the child's life prior to their adoption can be considered for a Keeping in Touch agreement.
- Agreements are made for named people, so if additional people would like to keep in contact with the child via their adopters, then this will need to be discussed with the child's social worker or, for existing agreements, with a member of the Keeping in Touch Team.
- It is important that, when setting up Keeping in Touch agreements, everyone's views are considered and that there is a commitment to the contact plan from everyone involved.

WHAT CAN BE SENT IN A LETTER / EMAIL?

- When the Keeping in Touch agreement is set up, the adoptive family will decide what level of contact they are happy to support.
- Agreements can include letters, photographs, and pictures and we recommend that where possible, photographs are part of agreements as they can be so valuable for the child.
- It is important that you only send what has been agreed. Items which are not part of the agreement will need to be returned to the sender.
- If you are unsure of what is included in your agreement, please contact the Keeping in Touch Team and they will let you know.

IS KEEPING IN TOUCH CONFIDENTIAL?

- All information received by the Keeping in Touch Team is treated as confidential information. This means it is only read by practitioners in the Keeping in Touch team unless there is a specific need to share it – e.g., for safeguarding purposes.
- If an item is received that contains identifying information, a Keeping in Touch practitioner will contact the sender by phone / email to make sure this is taken out before the item is sent on.
- If we are unable to contact you, a decision will be made by practitioners and the item may be returned to you with a letter explaining why we are not able to forward the item.

WHEN DO WE SEND OUR ITEMS?

- The frequency of contact will be decided when the agreement is set up. This may be once a year, twice a year etc. The agreement will clearly state which month each party will send in their correspondence. Please try to keep to these times, if possible, as being late can cause worry for the other party. If you have missed your month, do send in your letter anyway and it will be forwarded on.
- The Keeping in Touch team allows 6 weeks for items to be received before sending reminders. Reminders are not sent automatically, so if your item is late, please contact the keeping in touch team to let us know (preferably via email) and we will look into this. Please make sure you include your KIT / LB number.
- If items are being sent for a specific date, such as a birthday or Christmas, we recommend sending these to the Keeping in Touch Team at least four weeks in advance of that date to allow sufficient time for these to be forwarded on.

WHERE DO WE SEND OUR ITEMS?

Items can be emailed to the Keeping in Touch team via their email cypkeepingintouch@suffolk.gov.uk

Items can also be sent via post to

The Keeping in Touch Team,
Adoption and Fostering Service
4th Floor, Gold
Endeavour House,
8 Russell Road,
IPSWICH
IP1 2BX

CAN I INCLUDE MY CHILD IN THE LETTER CONTACT / EMAILS?

- It is important for a child to know that there is contact between their adoptive parent and their birth family from an early age. As children grow, their understanding of Keeping in Touch will also grow.
- Letters or emails may not always be able to be shared directly with children at the point of receiving them. Adoptive parents will make a decision as to when and how to share this information based on the child's age, level of understanding and individual needs.
- Some information might be shared in conversation with the child, other information might need to be shared when the child is older.
- Children can be involved by adding their names and drawings to existing letters or even by writing their own letters. Some children choose to be more involved than others.
- It is important that children's views are sought over time. A teenager will have different views to a younger child, so conversations should continue about their wishes and feelings around Keeping in Touch throughout their childhood.

TIPS FOR BIRTH RELATIVES

- Feel free to share information about your own hobbies and interests and how you might be spending your time e.g., work, holidays or hobbies.
- Do provide reassurance about yourself and wider family members as this can prevent your child from worrying about their birth family.
- Do ask questions about the child's interests, development, and achievements as this shows you have an interest in the child as a person.
- It's nice to share happy memories from your own childhood - what you liked to do, activities / clubs you were involved in etc.- this is interesting for your child to hear.
- We understand you want your child to know that they are loved and it's important for adopted children to know this. However, writing that you miss them can cause feelings of guilt and worry for the child, so please be sensitive when you let them know that you are thinking of them and send your love.

TIPS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Do share information about how your child is growing — this helps the birth relative understand that the child is getting older so they can adapt their letters accordingly.
- Do share the child's likes and dislikes e.g., favourite music /favourite foods.
- Feel free to share information relating to how the child is getting on at school, any clubs they might be attending or any hobbies they have.
- You may wish to share any medical updates or let the birth relative know if the child needs any additional support at school.
- The birth relative will be keen to know that your child is settled and happy - sharing information about the child's friendships can help this.
- Do understand that it is important for an adopted child to know they are cared for and loved by their birth family even if they are not able to live with them.
- Do feel free to ask any questions your child might have about their birth family.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Do notify the Keeping in Touch team if you change your address or contact details.**
- Do keep to the agreement and only send items that are included in the agreement.
- Do make sure that you have not included any identifying information within the letter.
- Do write the letter from adult to adult and sign the letter off as previously agreed. If agreement has been given to include a letter from the child, this is fine too.
- Do ask questions that you are interested in and that encourage a reply from the reader.
- Do try to think about how your letter will come across to the reader, we encourage you to be honest but thoughtful when sharing information.

EMAIL CONTACT

- Email contact can be set up as part of a Keeping in Touch agreement and can be a good way for adoptive families and birth relatives to share information. Email contact can be set up alone or alongside letter contact and direct contact. If this is something you would like to consider for the future, please let the Keeping in Touch Team know.
- We recommend each party sets up a specific email account for Keeping in Touch and only uses this at the agreed times.
- When the email agreement is set up, both parties will agree the frequency of the emails and the month(s) they are going to send their email(s) in.
- Email contact is managed between the two parties and the Keeping in Touch team is not directly involved. However, if there are any queries or difficult information to share, the Keeping in Touch team can support you with this.
- Email contact can be a beneficial way of setting up direct contact arrangements between parties and sharing updates.
- As with letter contact and direct contact, email contact is a voluntary arrangement and the focus should always be on how it meets the needs of your child.

DIRECT CONTACT

- Direct contact (face to face meetings) will be part of some agreements. Direct contact can take place between your child and their birth parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, family friends/kinship members. During these meetings, the child is always supported by their adoptive parents.
- Direct contact usually starts with a meeting between the adults, for example the adoptive parents and the birth parents / grandparents or between the adoptive parents of adopted siblings.
- The Keeping in Touch team help facilitate these meetings and use this time to introduce people to one another, to discuss the timing of any face-to-face meet ups, the location and length of the contact and to answer any questions. A Keeping in Touch practitioner is allocated to both parties to support them with any worries or anxieties they might have about the initial contact taking place.
- The Keeping in Touch can also support the initial direct contact(s) between birth relatives and the adoptive child and their adoptive family. The team is there to ensure that all parties receive support before, during and after the contact.
- The purpose of direct contact must always be in the child's best interests and will be reviewed along with their wishes and feelings as well as their individual needs. The purpose of the direct contact is to help the child to understand their identity and maintain positive connections that are important to them.
- Keeping in Touch agreements that include direct contact can happen in conjunction with other ongoing Keeping in Touch arrangements.
- Arrangements for direct contacts are voluntary and will only take place with the agreement of the adoptive parent (s). Direct contact can be paused, reduced or increased depending on the needs of the child.
- Contact with brothers and sisters can be arranged directly between adoptive parents / carers when children are in separate adoptive or foster placements.

HOW DO I SHARE SIGNIFICANT NEWS?

- We sometimes receive significant news (such as births and bereavements) or sensitive information within a contact letter.
- When significant information is received, we will always contact the sender and then attempt to contact the recipient before forwarding a contact item.
- Should we be unable to contact you, we may make a decision to either send you a covering letter with the contact item; or to send you a letter asking you to contact us to discuss the news we have received.
- The Keeping in Touch Team relies on those engaging in the agreements to provide us with information they wish to be shared with the other party. Unless this news will impact on a child's health or wellbeing, we always protect the sender's wishes around what we disclose.
- Significant news such as a birth or bereavement can be difficult to share. If you need support with sharing some sensitive news or information or would like further support for your child in relation to this, then the Keeping in Touch team is here to support you.
- In the rare but tragic event that a child dies, it is the policy of Suffolk Adoption Agency that the birth parents are informed. In the Keeping in Touch Agreement, we ask adoptive families to sign their agreement and consent to this policy.

SHARING MEDICAL INFORMATION

- If you or your child is diagnosed with a condition that may have health implications for other birth relatives, including any current or future birth siblings, it is important that this information is passed to the Keeping In Touch team. Practitioners in the team will follow their own processes to determine who this information would need to be shared with. Any information received by the team is dealt with sensitively and confidentially.
- If you are unsure whether a health condition needs to be shared, please discuss this with your GP or diagnosing medical clinician and they will be able to offer you guidance on the matter.

SHARING PHOTOS

- Photos are part of many Keeping in Touch agreements and can be beneficial to the child and to adopters and birth family. It is Suffolk's experience that photos are helpful in creating meaningful contact and are rarely misused.
- The child's social worker will have discussed with you if photos will be a part of your Keeping in Touch Agreement. If you wish to add photos to an existing agreement, just contact the Keeping in Touch Team and we will look into this for you.
- If sending photos is part of your agreement, please ensure that any pictures sent are appropriate and do not contain any identifying information e.g. locations / school badges etc. Please do not send pictures of children you do not have parental consent to share pictures for.

PHOTOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Pictures and photographs sent through the Keeping in Touch service are not to be placed on any social media or networking sites online.
- If you do post online the photos that are sent to you or share the pictures, it may place your Keeping in Touch agreement at risk and the other party may not feel able to send any photos in the future.
- Please do not try to seek out the adoptive family, birth family or child online. If someone makes contact with you, we recommend contacting the Keeping in Touch Team - all parties need to be in agreement and the proper support in place before direct contact is arranged.

MY CHILD HAS CONTACTED ME ON SOCIAL MEDIA – WHAT DO I DO?

- If your child attempts to contact you on social media, please do not reply but contact the Keeping in Touch Team in the first instance as we can help.
- Whilst it may be exciting to know the child is thinking of you, we would want to ensure everyone has the support they need before any contact takes place.

It can be hard to write a letter, so if you need some support, do feel free to contact the Keeping in Touch team. Here are some examples of letters that have been shared but we encourage you to write your letters in your own style: make the letters personal to your child, ask and respond to questions – do make the letters your own.

EXAMPLE ADOPTIVE FAMILY LETTER



Dear Kim,

Thank you for your last letter. As you know Lily is now 11 years old and in her last year at junior school. She has really shot up in recent months and is now 5ft 1ins and in size 6 shoes. She still loves her food and eats fairly healthily although she loves chocolate biscuits!

She is really pleased that she is now as tall as her best friend, Becky. She is still very close to Becky, and they are hoping to move up to the same high school together. She is part of a nice group of friends and gets invited to lots of birthday parties.

Lily is starting to show a real interest in clothes, which is a surprise as she has always been happiest in her jeans. She has spent all her birthday money on clothes, and she now looks like quite the young lady. She is also growing her hair again so we've told her she will have to get up earlier on school days to sort it out. She still loves her bed in the mornings and cuddles up to the blue elephant you got her when she was baby!

Lily's teacher seems very pleased with her progress. I think we mentioned in last year's letter that she was getting extra help with her maths as she was really struggling with it. The good news is that she has now caught up and is at the level she should be, so she is really pleased with herself. She is still very into her activities and loves swimming, netball and dancing. I know you mentioned in your last letter that you liked netball when you were a child, so we told her this is maybe why she is so good at it. She hopes she will get into the team when she starts high school which we think she will. She is a bit nervous about moving schools which is to be expected. Her teacher knows that she tends to worry when there are going to be any big changes and goes out of her way to help her.

We went on a caravan holiday to France at Easter which everyone enjoyed, although Lily had expected it to be a bit warmer. Whilst it was cooler than we hoped, Lily still made sure she taste tested all the ice-cream flavours on offer at the local shop! She and her brother Sam had a great time at the caravan park as there was an indoor swimming pool which was just as well given the weather. We also visited the local zoo and Lily was really taken with the chimpanzees! Next year we'll try and go in the summer.

Lily said she wanted to send you something this year, so we've enclosed a drawing she has done for you. We hope you enjoy looking at it.

Best wishes,

Mike and Rebecca

EXAMPLE BIRTH PARENT LETTER



Dear Mike and Rebecca,

I hope this letter finds you well. Thank you for your letter and the news of how Lily is doing. Thank you for sending the photo - I can't believe how big she is getting already, it looks like she is going to be tall like me. I'm pleased to hear she is happy and has good friends around her.

It was great to hear that she still likes the blue fluffy elephant I got her, she never used to go anywhere without it. Does she have any other favourite new toys or games? It doesn't surprise me to hear Lily's favourite food is chocolate biscuits...is the best one still a twix? My favourite foods are strawberries, coffee cake and a good chicken curry!

I'm pleased to hear that Lily is learning to swim and play netball – I was proud to hear from you how good she is! Swimming is a really useful skill to know. I was always in the water when I was a child and was even a part of the local swimming team. Does she have any other favourite sports or clubs yet?

It sounds like it's been a busy year for you all with the trip to France. My favourite animals are the monkeys too! Although I prefer the little spider monkeys to the big apes! I hope Lily enjoyed her ice creams, I'm lucky enough to live near the seaside so I get to do that a lot! I'm definitely a chocolate ice-cream person!

This year I have been working part-time in a local shop and have just moved into a new house. I'm trying to juggle work whilst doing a part-time course at college to become a hairdresser. I've always like doing people's hair and my mum is supporting me to get a qualification so I can do it as a proper job.

When I'm not working or at college, I've been spending time walking my dog Rocky and enjoying the seaside. I have sent you a picture of us on the beach - I have a wet foot as I had to go into the sea to get Rocky's ball!

I look forward to hearing all of your news in your next letter and think of Lily often.,

Best wishes,

Love from Kim



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I change my Keeping in Touch Agreement?

Keeping in Touch agreements can be reviewed and changed to meet the ongoing and changing needs of your child. You can contact the Keeping in Touch team and ask for a review of the agreement and a Keeping in Touch practitioner will look into your request.

We would advise that whilst we can consider amending agreements if all parties agree, there may be occasions when the other party wishes the agreement to remain as it is. In this case, whilst disappointing, their wishes will need to be respected.

Why haven't I heard from them?

Sometimes there may be reasons why one party has not written or is delayed in writing. We appreciate this can be distressing and can make you feel anxious.

We allow the whole of the allocated month for letters to be received. If you have not received any during this period, you would then be able to contact the team and enquire if anything has been received for you. If it has not, the team may be able to send a reminder letter to the other party to encourage them to write.

Whilst it can be hard to write a letter and not receive anything in return, please try to continue the contact wherever possible as this could be important for your child.

Can you help me write my letter?

Yes, please contact the Keeping in Touch Team and ask for some letter writing support. If you live within Suffolk, you may be offered an appointment in either Lowestoft, Bury St. Edmunds or Ipswich offices. Alternatively, we are able to offer advice and guidance over the phone, or through email correspondence where necessary.

Is the KIT agreement a legal document?

No, Keeping in Touch agreements are voluntary agreements and are not legally binding or legally enforceable. Keeping in Touch agreements are entered into in the spirit of goodwill and cooperation.

I am struggling and need some help.

If you are struggling to cope following the adoption of a child, please contact the Keeping in Touch Team who will be able to help you access support, advice and specialist adoption counselling. The easiest way to reach the team is via email: **cypkeepingintouch@suffolk.gov.uk**