

# Information for Birth Parents

www.birth-ties.org.uk

0800 840 2020

## We Can Help

If social workers are making plans for the adoption of your child, you may be confused and hurt and want to talk to someone independent. You might want advice about what's happening and have someone explain how the process works, what will happen next and what this will mean for you and your child.

We have been helping people in this situation for over 15 years and can help you. We believe birth parents are parents for life, even if they are not parenting their children on a daily basis, and have the right to be well represented and supported. We recognise the need for adoptions to be more open and that birth parents have a role to play in their children's future.

## What Support Can We Give You?

We support birth parents where adoption is being considered for their children. We can help explain what is happening through the adoption process at each stage, assist in writing letters through a Letterbox arrangement and help prepare information for the child's file. We also offer counselling to birth parents going through the process and arrange groups with people who have had similar experiences.

## Before the Adoption - Frequently Asked Questions

### **What happens if I do not agree with my child being adopted?**

We can provide support to you at this stage, but we cannot contest the adoption on your behalf. If you do want to contest the adoption, it is very important that you seek help from a solicitor. Your solicitor should be someone who knows about child care law, and you need to be sure that your solicitor can and will represent your views. To help you find a solicitor, you can contact the Family Rights Group who can give you advice and a list of child care solicitors. When you contact a solicitor they will assess if you are entitled to legal aid to help pay their costs.

### **Will I be able to choose the family my child is placed with?**

You can say what sort of family you would like your child to be placed with. For example you can ask that your child be placed with a family where there are other children so that they have brothers and sisters. You can also ask that your child is brought up in a certain religion or culture. The best interests of the child are always put first, but your wishes will be taken into account.

### **What sort of family will my child be placed in?**

Families that adopt children go through very thorough checks to make sure that they are the right sort of people to look after your child. Agencies working with the family build up a full profile of what they are like and what kind of upbringing they are able to offer your

child. Before any child is placed with a family, social services have to be certain that they can meet your child's needs and they will try to match your child with a family that suits them best.

## After the Adoption - Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Can I have any contact with my children once they have been adopted?**

In some circumstances direct contact may be allowed. Today it is recognised that birth parents can usually play a part in a child's life. It is however more likely that indirect contact, where you can exchange letters or gifts, may be agreed depending on the circumstances. Some Local Authorities, but not all, will arrange an exchange of photographs if this is felt to be in the child's best interests. Direct contact may sometimes be agreed, where you will be able to see your child at times and places that are specified.

We can help you establish with your Local Authority what the agreements are about the contact (direct or indirect) you will have.

### **What is Letterbox contact?**

Letterbox is a way that you stay in contact with your son or daughter by exchanging letters, photos or presents. The Letterbox arrangement is set up by either the adoption agency or Local Authority that placed your child and they will be the people responsible for sending the cards etc to your child. The arrangement is always confidential and is free of charge. Items sent through Letterbox are always checked by the agency or Local Authority to make sure they don't contain anything inappropriate e.g you may have left your address on a letter by mistake.

If you need help writing letters as part of a Letterbox arrangement, organisations like After Adoption and services like Birth Ties can help with this. You may also not always receive the sort of letters you are expecting and may need help and advice around this. For more

information on Letterbox services contact Birth Ties on 0800 840 2020

### **Why has Letterbox contact stopped?**

There may be a number of reasons why you have stopped receiving letters as part of indirect contact. One reason could be that the adoptive family aren't sure about something you've written in cards or letters. It is important to talk to your social worker about this and they, or a Birth Ties worker, can give you help on what kind of things your child will benefit from you writing about. We can also help by talking to you, your social workers and the adoptive parents to help make the Letterbox work, or at least find the best way to keep contact if the Letterbox is not working.

### **What happens when my child grows up?**

Once your child reaches the age of 18 they will be allowed by law to obtain their original birth certificate and adoption records and begin to trace if they want to. When your child reaches 18 you may be able to contact them through an Intermediary Service. We can provide you with counselling and advice through this process.

The Children Act 1989 established a statutory 'Contact Register'. This register lets you record your name and a contact address so that in the future, if your adult child wishes to trace you, there is information available about you. You can also leave information on your child's adoption file explaining what your current circumstances are and whether you would like to meet them in the future.

## Counselling

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The Adoption and Children Act 2002 came into force in both England and Wales on 30th December 2005. The Act provides clear pathways for both adopted people and birth relatives to seek information about the adoption, the people involved and guidance about what information may or may not be shared.

In the Act there is a provision for people involved in the

adoption to receive counselling. This is to support them during the process of sharing or receiving information.

As a birth parent you can request an assessment of your adoption support needs, for example counselling. Usually there would be no charge. However, where you are seeking information about a relative (for example an adult adopted son or daughter) and as a result the person contacted requests counselling, you may have to cover the cost of their counselling. Where you are responsible for the costs of another person's counselling you will be given full information on this. The counselling may take longer than one session.

- Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales  
[www.csiw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.csiw.wales.gov.uk)
- OFSTED  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)
- Family Rights Group  
[www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

Birth Ties is a service of After Adoption

## Searching for Your Child

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If your son or daughter is over 18 and you wish to make contact we offer an intermediary service for which there may be a charge.

## Contact Us

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If you wish to talk to anyone about the information outlined in this leaflet then you can call our Birth Ties helpline on 0800 840 2020.

You can also visit our website: [www.birth-ties.org.uk](http://www.birth-ties.org.uk).

## Further Information

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The following sources of information may also be of use:

- Register General (IPS)  
[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)
- British Association for Adoption and Fostering  
[www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)
- A full list of agencies providing a search and intermediary service can be obtained from  
[www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk)
- Commission for Social Care Inspection  
[www.cqc.gov.uk](http://www.cqc.gov.uk)

