



MAILBOX
EXCHANGE SERVICE



WHAT IS THE MAILBOX EXCHANGE SERVICE?

The Adoption Mailbox is managed by Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool, for children adopted through Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Council. It is a way of exchanging information safely on behalf of Adopted Children. It enables them to have indirect contact with birth parents and other significant people from their past, by an agreed exchange of letters.

HOW IT WORKS...

The Mailbox Agreement is drawn up between adopters, birth relatives and any other significant people from the child's early life. Each mailbox arrangement is unique and should reflect the child's individual needs. The agreement will include details on what information is to be exchanged, when and how frequently this will take place.

We recommend that letters are exchanged between adults only. Therefore, letters should be addressed directly to the adoptive or birth relative.

As the child gets older, they may wish to write their own letters, or they may want to include a drawing/card or a short note with the letter. Our team are always on hand to provide help and advice should the child wish to be directly involved in their own mailbox exchanges.

Please send mailbox letters to the address detailed at the end of this leaflet within the month agreed. All letters will be screened.

An electronic copy will also be made and stored on the child's record.

WHY ARE MY LETTERS IMPORTANT?

There may be times when it is not easy to send information but please remember that the child's best interests are central to all communications. The information that can be gathered from mailbox letters will contribute to the child's life story and as such is very important.

EXCHANGING INFORMATION ALLOWS:

- An adopted child to learn more about their background and stay connected with birth relatives. This helps the child to form a strong sense of identity.
- A birth relative to pass on information about themselves and other family members which may serve to reassure your child about the wellbeing of their birth family.
- An adoptive parent to answer a child's questions more clearly and receive up to date information about birth family which may not have been available at the time of adoption.
- Adoptive parents to show the child that they acknowledge the importance of their birth family and that they accept and value them as an essential part of who they are.
- Acts as a reminder to talk openly about adoption and helps build a pattern of communication and openness.
- Helps to prepare an adopted child for the future and having received news of birth family over the years will make them more confident about what to expect.





ADVICE FOR BIRTH FAMILY

STARTING AND ENDING LETTERS

You should use the first name(s) of the adult(s) that you are writing to. You should sign the letter using your first name only as you are writing to the adoptive parents not directly to the child.

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

- Letters do not have to be written in any certain style or format. They should just concentrate on news you would like to share.
- Share information about yourself and other family members as this may serve to reassure the child on everyone's wellbeing.

NEWS AND THINGS YOU MIGHT WISH TO WRITE ABOUT

- How are you doing? 'I am doing great at the moment; this year feels much better than last.'
- Family news such as marriages, bereavement, births of brothers and sisters 'my brother is getting married next year we are excited'.
- Any interests or hobbies 'I have recently started going bingo with Auntie Shelley.'
- Significant events you are looking forward to 'I'm excited, I am going abroad next year for the first time.'
- Any important health issues 'I recently had my eyes tested and now need glasses.'
- Show an interest and ask questions about your child's interest, hobbies, and school progress where possible link these back to your own experiences 'I used to enjoy going swimming, so it's great to hear you won at your swimming gala' 'it's great to hear you are improving with your spelling, as this was never my strength'.
- In order to build a relationship with your child's adoptive parent acknowledge how much you appreciate receiving their letters. 'Thank you for the update on how Jack is getting on, it's comforting to hear how happy, content and loved he is'.
- It's ok to mention your thoughts and feelings about your child 'I think about Jack every day, we all miss him dearly.'

WHAT NOT TO WRITE ABOUT

Although you may feel sad and angry at times about what's happened, it is important not to focus on these feelings within your letters. Try to concentrate on the future as it is not a good idea to talk about the past, why the child has been adopted or what went wrong. Remember, the adoptive parents may choose not to share information with the child should they feel, it would cause them worry or upset. It is always better to write in a way that is easy to share with the child.


- Avoid overly emotional comments or unrealistic promises such as 'I cry everyday' and 'We will see each other soon.'
- Avoid comments that undermine the adoptive parents 'You will always be my child'.
- Ensure that you do not include any contact details. If you do so, this may prevent your letter being passed on.

SUPPORT

Writing to the child through Mailbox may not be easy; it can often lead to emotions, such as guilt, regret, anger, or sadness. If you need support to write your letter, please contact the team who will be happy to help.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Mailbox contact works better when everyone respects the confidential nature of the information exchanged. Should mailbox information be shared inappropriately or misused, Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool may change or even end the arrangement if it is deemed no longer beneficial/safe for the child.

A large, thick red heart outline is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page. It is set against a background of light pink, wavy, ribbon-like shapes that flow across the bottom of the page.

ADVICE FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

STARTING AND ENDING LETTERS

You should use the first name(s) of the adult(s) that you are writing to. You should sign the letter using your first name only or refer to yourself as the child's adoptive parent(s) if you wish anonymity of names to be maintained.

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

- Letters do not have to be written in any certain style or format. They should just concentrate on news you would like to share.
- It is important to think about the possible impact of any information you share. How would you feel reading what you have written? If you are unsure, please contact the mailbox team for advice.

NEWS AND THINGS YOU MIGHT WISH TO WRITE ABOUT

- Although letters should be sensitive, positive, and reassuring they should also be factual, truthful, and reflective of the child.
- Adhere to what you have agreed to on your mailbox agreement, avoid unnecessary delays.
- Developmental milestones details such as growth, health, education, emerging personality, and achievements.
- Likes and dislikes.
- Upcoming family events.
- Holidays and seasonal activities.
- Relationship dynamics/family and peers.
- Academic progress.
- Ask questions and show an interest in birth family's everyday life.
- Be creative, include artwork such as drawings, handprints or mark making.
- Photographs – **ONLY** if agreed.



WHAT NOT TO WRITE ABOUT

- The name and location of the child's hometown/city, school, clubs, or activities.
- The name and location of planned or regular holidays.
- The names and addresses of wider family members or members of your support network.

If you want to include some information in your letter but are unsure if it's appropriate, please contact the mailbox team who be happy to discuss this with you.

SUPPORT

Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool's Adoption Support Team and Mailbox Team can offer help, advice, and support around mailbox contact. Please ask to speak to the Duty mailbox worker.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED...

SHOULD I INCLUDE PHOTOGRAPHS IN MY LETTER EXCHANGE?

Before the child was formally adopted a social worker will have decided whether photographs should be included in the agreement. If you are unsure on what was agreed, please contact the mailbox team who will be happy to discuss your agreement with you.

CAN AN AGREEMENT BE CHANGED?

If you wish to explore whether the mailbox agreement can be amended, please contact the adoption mailbox team to discuss your options further.

Any changes would only be made if they were felt to be in the child's best interest.





IF THERE'S NO RESPONSE TO LETTER BOX

Please allow a full month after the month which you were due to receive your letter in. For example, if you are due to receive your letter in September, please allow until the end of October before you contact the adoption mailbox team.

Sadly, sometimes, contact arrangements are not kept (although you would be surprised how many are). There are a range of reasons for this with the most common being the absence of up-to-date contact information. This is why we ask all parties to keep in touch and let us know if any details change.

We understand that not receiving a reply can be upsetting and disappointing. However, we still encourage you to keep writing in these circumstances as you will demonstrate that the child's identity and life story is important to you.

Please try your best to send your letters on time to avoid causing anxiety for those who may worry about the reason for delay.

WILL LETTER BOX LETTERS BE READ BY THE CHILD?

This will very much depend on what the adoptive parents believe is in the best interests of the child. They will have to decide whether the child is ready, old enough and mature enough and in the right place emotionally to be able to deal with a letter. If for whatever reason they think that the child is not ready, they may choose to summarise the letter or keep it safe for a later time.

Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool are always on hand to offer help and advice when needed.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING MAILBOX HAPPEN?

Most Mailbox Contact plans do not involve a court order to make sure they happen. Instead, birth family members, adopters and others who may be involved simply agree to follow the plan to keep in touch. Although this means that the arrangements are voluntary, because the adults agreeing to the plan want to do the right thing for the child, a very high number of plans are followed and promises kept.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CHILD TURNS EIGHTEEN?

At 18 the child's mailbox will close. Please contact us directly for further advice and support in relation to post 18 contact.



EXAMPLE LETTERS

Adopter to Birth Family Member

Tuesday, 13 September

Dear XXXX,

I cannot believe it has been a year since we last wrote to you. Thank you for your reply. We have saved this in Henry's memory box which he can look at when the time is right for him. He has lots of photographs and keepsakes from his early life with you. We hope this reassures you that you and your family are never forgotten and are very much a part of his life story.

We call Henry 'our little firefly' as he has an abundance of energy and enthusiasm for life. His curly shoulder-length hair is shiny and frames his big blue eyes perfectly. I wonder if he inherited these from you.

In the last 6 months, Henry has grown so much. Are there any other family members that are on the tall side as Henry towers above all his friends? This growth has come at a price... He loves food and will eat almost anything; we cannot seem to fill him up! However, Sprouts are a no-go! He loves Friday nights (we all do) as it is takeaway pizza night. His favourite topping is 'Nepperoni' as he calls it (ha ha) and his most disliked is olives... Henry says, 'er Yucky. We wonder what your favourite pizza topping is and what you really dislike on a pizza.

As Henry turned three in August, he has now started nursery. He was a little nervous and tearful on his first day and would not let go of my leg when we arrived. I think this is because he sometimes struggles in new situations but with the right support, we are hoping things will get easier for him. Luckily, the nursery was supportive and asked a boy called Alfie to hold Henry's hand and show him the collection of toy diggers. When we picked him up after lunch, he bounced out with a beaming smile, covered in mud. All Henry talked about was diggers and Alfie. I have a feeling they are going to be good friends. Henry is generally very sociable and does not seem to struggle to make friends. Perhaps it is his cheeky little giggle that attracts others it certainly brightens our day. We are currently supporting him to learn how to take turns and share as he does tend to become very possessive of his toys and games.

Henry likes the digger picture at the top of this letter as it's yellow. This is his favourite colour. He asked me what your favourite colour is unfortunately I could not answer him so maybe you can.

In other news, Henry's uncle will be getting married to his fiancé soon so we are all looking forward to a happy occasion where we can dress up in our best clothes. Henry looks super smart in the 3-piece suit we have bought him. They also have a little boy who will have his 1st birthday in October. They have an Elmo-themed party planned which Henry is excited about. He is hoping that there will be a digger cake but I have a feeling it will be an Elmo cake instead. When is your birthday? Do have anything nice planned? We loved hearing about your birthday celebrations last year as it's nice for Henry to hear that you are happy and well.

We have enclosed a picture that Henry painted at the nursery. He said that it's a monkey in a tree. This is reflective of his love of animals and they seem to love him too. Our family dog Bruno never leaves his side. Bruno is a golden retriever who is just as energetic as Henry. They really are a double act! Where there is food you'll find Henry and Bruno, Double trouble! (we have enclosed a photo of Bruno which was taken on his last walk). How's your cat? I know in your last letter you said she was quite old and grumpy. Henry said he is happy that you have a friend. Maybe you could send us a photo so Henry will know what she looks like.

We will write off now as it's nearly bedtime. This is the best part of our day. Lots of bubbles, splashes and singing! Henry loves to sing 'Rub a dub dub, Henry's in the Tub'. That reminds me... Henry will be starting swimming lessons soon. We will let you know how it goes in our next letter. Until then we wish you all the best for Christmas and the New Year. We look forward to your reply so we can hear all about what you and your family have been up to. Until then...

Take care
XXXX

EXAMPLE LETTERS

Birth Family Member to Adopter

1st October

Dear XXXX,

Thank you for your letter. I look forward to hearing from you each year as I like to know that Henry is happy and healthy. It is also good to know that you keep my letters as they will help Henry to understand that I have not forgotten him and always think about him and love him. Please feel free to ask me any questions as I know how important this will be for Henry's life story. I will always do my best to answer what I can.

By the sounds of it, I think Henry may have inherited my curly hair rather than my eyes as I have Hazel eyes. His birth dad Tom's eyes are blue, so he sounds like a good mix of us both. I am really surprised to hear that he is tall for his age though as both Tom and I are quite short (5 ft 1 & 5 ft 6). Although, my brother is over 6ft so perhaps that is where he gets this from.

I do not blame him for not liking spouts as they were never my favourite. I have memories of my mum trying to get me to eat at least one every Christmas day with the promise of a delicious pudding. I could never manage it but always ended up with a pudding anyway. In answer to your question about pizza, my favourite toppings are ham and pineapple (not for everyone ha ha) and I do not like olives. A takeaway pizza night sounds ace, maybe I will have to plan one for when my friend comes next. She comes to see me every Saturday for a catch up.

It is probably a good thing that Henry has a good appetite especially now he has started nursery as he will need the energy for all that digger play and running around with Alfie. It is nice to hear that he has made friends and I suppose his first day was always going to be a little scary for him, but I am glad he had a good day in the end. Please would you let me know how he is getting on in your next letter?

It makes me smile that Henry likes diggers so much as my dad worked on a building site for most of his life until he retired last year. Like Henry, he has an abundance of energy, loves life, and lives it to the fullest now he has more time to do the things he enjoys. He has actually planned a trip across route 66 next year!

I love the yellow digger at the top of your letter, as I too like yellow but to be honest my favourite colour is green. Maybe this is because I am always surrounded by greenery as I am always out pottering around and sitting with my cat Buttercup In the garden. I have started growing my own vegetables (not sprouts ha ha). I have started small with lettuce as apparently; it is easy to grow but plan to plant some carrots if everything goes well. Does Henry like gardening? I bet he is always out playing with Bruno. I can send some photographs of my garden with my next letter if you think this is something he would like to see.

I hope you all had a good time at the wedding and birthday party. What cake did they have in the end? I bet Henry ate it whatever it was!

I have enclosed a photograph of Buttercup with this letter like you asked. I hope Henry likes it. As you can see, she is tiny, old, and still very grumpy. She is my best friend though and always curls up on my knee when I watch TV. I like watching all the Soaps like Coronation Street and Eastenders. What is Henry's favourite TV programme?

I loved hearing all about Henry's relationship with Bruno (who looks like a very handsome dog). I too had a dog when I was younger who I loved very much. It is much easier for me to have a cat now though as I would not be able to commit to the time and attention a dog needs. I hope Henry and Bruno have many happy adventures together and cannot wait to hear about them in your next letter.

I will treasure the painting Henry did. I am very thankful to you for sending this.

I am going to write off now as I am off to work. I work part time as a home carer for a care company. This keeps me busy and is very rewarding. I am hoping that they will give me more hours soon as I enjoy being out and about and it might also help me pay for all the pizza nights, I plan to have.

I look forward to next year's letter and hearing all about Henry's swimming lessons, nursery stories and adventures with Bruno.

Until next year,
XXXX



 **Adoption**
Lancashire & Blackpool



SENDING YOUR LETTER

You can either email or post your letter to:
letterbox@adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk
Adoption Mailbox
PO Box 1337
County Hall
Preston
Lancashire
PR2 0TG

Please also include a note with the name and date of birth of the child who the letter relates to and which family members it is for.

Blackpool Council

Lancashire
County
Council 

Adoption Mailbox Team
01772 538158 (Mon-Fri 11am-3pm)
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