

Indirect Contact (also known as Letterbox Contact)

Not all parents have direct contact with their children but do remain in contact via an Indirect / Letterbox contact service.

This can take the form of letters, cards, gifts or emails sent through a third party, such as a solicitor, CAFCASS advisor, or a contact centre.

Being limited to indirect contact can sometimes feel frustrating, however it is important for the child to maintain some form of contact with their parent and receive consistent form of contact. It may be at this time the best or only thing that you can do for your child.

Benefits of indirect contact for the child:

- Reassures the child that they are loved and have not been deserted.
- Reassures that the contact parent is still interested in the child's life, interests and hobbies.
- Provides the child with the knowledge that the contact parent is okay, preventing any feelings of guilt the child may hold with regards to not having any direct contact taking place.
- Provides the child with an understanding and full sense of their own identity developed from parents and their cultural backgrounds, religions, personalities and physical features.
- Avoids an unrealistic impression of the contact parent, such as negative fantasies about the contact parent.
- Provides both child and contact parent with the opportunity to resume direct contact sometime in the future. Prior indirect contact can also make the transition to direct contact easier.
- Enables the child to manage a relationship in difficult circumstances and supports how they manage relationships in the future.

Advice on writing letters to your child.

- Cater for your audience – consider the age, interests and personality of your child
- Imagine you are holding a conversation with your child, be chatty, talkative and tell stories
- Avoid asking lots of questions, instead, ask one question then also give information to your child by answering it about yourself.
- Consider the way the letter looks; this is what is first ‘seen’ by the child. For example you could include a range of colours or use stickers for decoration.
- Avoid overly-emotional statements a simple ‘I miss you’, ‘Thinking of you,’ or ‘Love from...’ is enough. Younger children may not understand emotional statements, while older children may misinterpret them and may feel guilt or other negative emotions.
- Your child needs to get to know you – talk about your life, because even the more mundane aspects will be of interest to them.
- On occasion mention your family members, children need to know they have another whole family, but don’t confuse them with lots of new information
- An occasional recollection of positive family experiences reminds children that they are loved by both parents.

Indirect contact can be difficult if indirect contact is one way or you have limited knowledge around the child’s likes, interests or hobbies,. It is important that indirect contact is maintained (as outlined in benefits above) so do not give up! Your child needs to know that that you did everything you could maintain contact with them.

Indirect contact does not always have to be in the form of letters, indirect contact can be creative and imaginative.

Making indirect contact interesting:

- Cards or postcards
- Write your child a bedtime story
- Lyrics to a song that reminds you of your child or is your child’s favourite song
- Drawings
- Gifts (if permitted)
- Stories using photographs
- Collages using pictures from newspapers or magazines that interest your child or images of the latest cartoon characters or movies in the cinema.