Checklist for Later Life Letter

This ‘template’ provides a structure for Later Life Letters. More can be added but, all of the fields relate to issues / areas that have come up in adoption support enquiries where children and their adopters have ‘missing’ information.

The letter needs to be informative, concise and should not be a series of cut and pasted details from other documents. Try and avoid social work language or explain any terminology that you use.

Written by Western Bay Adoption Service

Introduce yourself and your role in relation to the child.	
Give reasons for writing the letter.	
Other key people involved with the child and any information from them e.g. foster carers, contact worker, previous social worker, birth parents and extended family etc.	
Acknowledge that this may be a difficult letter to read, they don’t have to read it all at once, and they should have someone who they can talk to about the letter on hand.	
Refer to other reports that contain additional information and how they can access these (and at what age).	
If the family/background is complex include a family tree giving names of extended family.	
Remember what information children have said they want included in their life story information. • Why they couldn’t stay with their birth family. • Details about their birth family. • Their life before they were adopted. • Where they were born. • If they had any brothers or sisters living somewhere else and why they were split up. • Whether they could make contact with their birth family. • Names – why given and meanings – identity. • Appearance and descriptions – affirms value. • Photos – recording history, family. • Memories of pets etc. (Children need to know that coming into care/being adopted was not their fault).	
Information about child’s ethnicity, their birth family’s culture, religion and sexuality – where parents came from and customs common to that culture.	
The hopes of the birth family for the child and how these hopes were addressed in the plan for the child.	
Description of birth parents – their physical characteristics, their personality, academic and employment history, interest and skills (be honest but avoid being negative).	

What support was offered by the extended family, Social Services, other agencies to keep child with the birth family?	
Information about the child's birth mother – name, date and place of birth, ethnicity (as above), physical description, personality, style, attitudes, talents, her family background etc. *Check with adoptive parent/s who have PR whether this should be full name or just first name – also depending on any concerns regarding safeguarding risk/concerns*	
Information about the child's birth father – (as above with mother) who has provided the information? Relationship with birth mother. *Check with adoptive parent/s who have PR whether this should be full name or just first name – also depending on any concerns regarding safeguarding risk/concerns*	
Pregnancy and birth details – weight, length, any complications, breast or bottle fed etc.	
The child's history • Different places where the child has lived – names of caregivers, addresses, dates, reasons for move. • Name of schools, nursery playgroup, names of teachers, friends school reports. • Milestones – first words, first tooth, first steps, when they learnt to read etc. • The child's particular characteristics e.g. the things the child used to say or do, activities, interest, favourite toys, books etc.	
Reasons why birth parents couldn't look after the child/Reason for adoption – different stages in the planning process and your role in this process and what happened before your involvement. Reasons for any delay. (Phrases that may have been sufficient in the Life Story Book now need to be explained further).	
Giving information about the birth parent's experiences in childhood and adolescence can aid understanding of why the parent did not learn good parenting skills, whey they had low self-esteem, why they were vulnerable to forming relationships with violent partners etc.	
Provide details/explanations of birth parent's health conditions – consider if you need to say if this condition can be inherited or is this something that the adopters will tackle?	
If the child has a disability this may make them more vulnerable to feeling rejected or more likely to be bullied at school – it is important that the Later Life Letter clarifies that it was not their disability that led them to be adopted but parents lack of skill/confidence, support, inability to prioritise child's needs etc.	
Legal issues and court orders can either be included as the narrative develops or details can be attached as a separate section.	
Veto and willingness or not of birth parents to be contacted in the future.	
The date the adoption order was made, name of presiding judge and anecdotal information about what happened at the Court. Did birth parents challenge the making of the order?	
What options for permanence were considered?	
Where child is adopted by family/friend: The LLL needs to address changed relationships within the family.	
Contact arrangements and reasons for any changes during the process (information about this may illustrate that the child's birth parents were interested in them or illuminate other aspects of the birth parent's characters. Any anecdotal information from the contact worker(s)? Possibility of contact in the future?	
Information about siblings – names, D.O.B. why they were not placed together – describe the assessment of how children's needs could be met together or apart and what factors impacted on any plans for contact. Explain the term "sibling" or avoid its use and refer specifically to brother/half-brother etc. The LLL can include info about how the siblings are doing at the time of writing the letter – may help young person to feel more connected to them.	
Matching – why this specific family was chosen for the child – any specific wishes of birth family and child? What was the process for finding their adoptive family?	
Concluding the letter – where they can get support/access records. Comment on how much you have enjoyed knowing the child – recall any personal anecdotes. Good wishes for the future.	