

contact after adoption

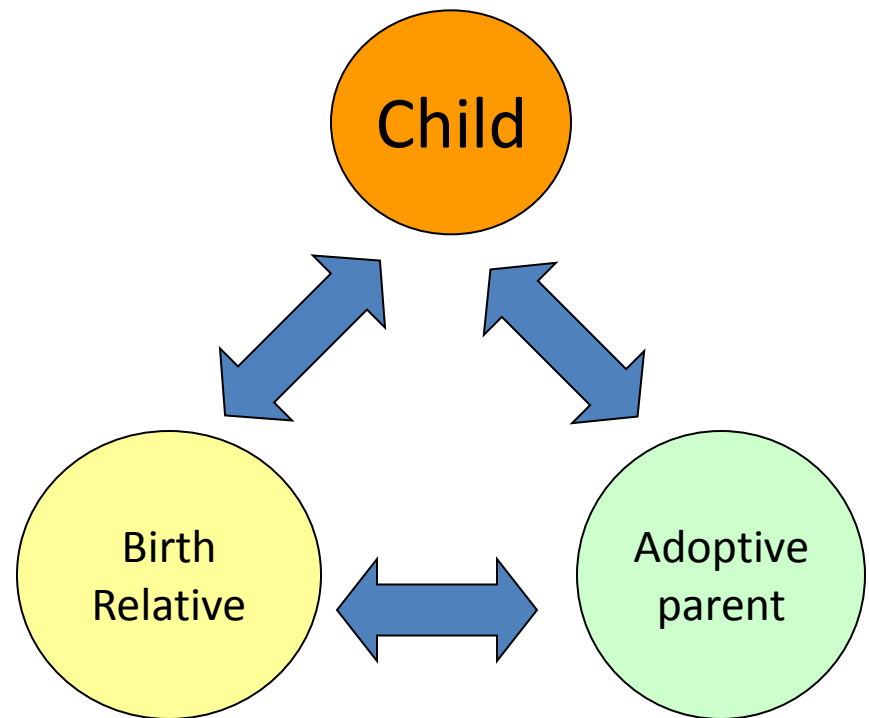
**Adoptive parents' and birth relatives'
views of contact**

Dr Mary Beek

To understand contact we need to think of it as a whole system (Neil & Howe 2004)

Contact is not an event, but a dynamic, transactional
Experience

How each person behaves, thinks and feels in contact can change how the other parties behave, think and feel



Benefits for adopters

- Supportive to adopters
- Supportive to children
- Foundation for future direct contact
- Reducing anxiety about birth family

Supportive to adopters

...now we've met his mother and talked to his maternal grandmother over the years, it's made us understand Sean's potential weaknesses and strengths genetically...and it's helped us to maybe steer him away from certain situations.

Adoptive father

Support to child

And for Kirsty to know that she had everyone important to her thinking about her, because Mum and Dad absolutely doted on her and she knew I felt the same way. To have all these people giving you that extra special attention, all together, and accepting and actually enjoying the situation. I just felt it added to her sense of well-being in a way that couldn't happen if you didn't have contact.

Reducing anxiety about the birth family

For me, a mother popping up out of the blue would feel very threatening. So I don't have that threat because we already have that relationship with her. So it's not going to open up a whole series of questions as to what does this mean, what does she (daughter) want, is she going to want her more than me, because we've come on a journey with them.

Adoptive mother

Benefits for birth relatives

- Close relationships (grandparents)
- Knowing child is well and happy: *“I’ve got an overall picture and that is lovely. It’s just peace of mind really”*
- Offering something positive to child
- Easing feelings of guilt and loss

Offering something positive to child

I'm sure it helps them to know the other side, the birth family, and to know that they're important. I mean (adoptive mother), bless her, she said that. It's one of the last things she said was 'don't worry, you will always be important to them'.

Birth mother

Easing feelings of guilt and loss

...after he was born, I knew he'd gone into care but I didn't know where at the time...and I used to work in a supermarket and I used to look at all the babies in prams and wonder if it was him. And I would have been like that probably, until now, wondering how he was and what he looked like. So no, I'm glad we did have the contact.

Birth grandmother

Challenges for adoptive parents (direct contact)

“I don’t suppose I ever looked forward to it because it was always emotional...I suppose I felt sorry for [birth mum]...and I worried about how Luke felt about it. My feelings were concern for them really.”

(Adoptive mother)

- Practicalities
- Roles and boundaries
- Emotional strain

Challenges for adopters (indirect)

- Knowing what to say
- Knowing what to share
- No response

No response: decision to cease sending

- Is it wanted?
- Child wishes to cease
- No benefit to child

No response: decision to continue sending

- Honouring a commitment
- Using contact to open adoption related conversations
- Empathy for birth parents
- A foundation for possible meeting in the future

Challenges for birth relatives

- Protecting confidentiality of the adopters (direct)
- Knowing what to say – positives and negatives (indirect)
- ‘Surface level’ (indirect)
- Ending without reason (indirect)
- Role anxiety

Role anxiety when contact changes

- How would you describe your relationship with Lily?

Friends. Not quite. I suppose it is a friend. It's an okay relationship, I think we're gradually getting to know each other...I've offered my support to Lily and said 'if you need anything' but then I think 'well she doesn't really know me, would she ask me?' I don't think she would ask me for help actually because who am I?...There's always that question of what kind of relationship it's going to be?

(Birth mum; met adopted daughter age 18)

Ending without reason

- Imagining the worst
- Have I done something wrong?
- Grieving process stalled
- Dreading the future

Ending without reason

Going through his mind he could be thinking ‘why didn’t they take *me*?’...and then as his siblings got older and gone to college and university we said they’d both graduated, I wonder if that sort of made Kyle think that he were either missing out on something, or just didn’t want to know

Grandparent and carer for adopted child’s siblings

Dreading the future

He's 17 in December which really scares me...

Interviewer: Why does that scare you?

Because I keep thinking he's going to come and knock on the door. I'm really starting to get a bit twitchy about that. It's really, really scary. Because I don't know what (adoptive mother) has told him. Even though she broke the contact, I don't know if she still told him about me. (Birth mother)

Key elements of supporting contact

