

# Birth parents will lose their right to contact children after adoption

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## Britain's adoption crisis



**Rosemary Bennett**  
Social Affairs Correspondent

Parents whose children are taken into care and adopted will lose their right to maintain contact with them as they grow up under government reforms.

New legislation will give courts the power to stop birth parents contacting children through Facebook or other social media websites, a growing problem for adopted young people.

The law will make clear that only in exceptional circumstances will ongoing contact be granted, and only if the birth parents make a convincing case that their child would benefit. The presumption will be that there should be none.

Currently, it is up to social workers to decide whether contact is maintained

or not. Critics say they often try to placate parents about to lose their children by allowing them to keep in touch, either through letters and pictures or through face-to-face meetings. This happens in about 10 per cent of cases and is growing.

Adoptive parents are then compelled to honour the agreement, even if it proves upsetting for the child.

Martin Narey, author of a report for *The Times* on adoption and the ministerial adviser on the subject, said that too often contact was maintained for the benefit of the birth parents and not for the child.

The new rules come as part of the Children and Families Bill, published yesterday, which will also end "undue emphasis" being placed on finding an ethnic match for black and Asian children awaiting new adoptive parents.

Adoptive parents will be allowed to foster the children they hope to adopt in order to reduce the number of moves around the system youngsters are forced to endure.

Speaking at the publication of the

Bill, Edward Timpson, the Children's Minister, said that he planned to overhaul residential homes for children in care. The vast majority of the 65,000 children in care are fostered, but 10 per cent are in residential care of some sort.

The poor quality of some establishments emerged in recent trials of groups of men who sexual exploited teenage girls. In these cases, the girls had no supervision and received little care. Even when they disappeared for long periods it was not reported.

In future, those who work in care homes, particularly managers, will be required to have better qualifications. There will also be a new regime of recording any case of a child going missing, not just after 24 hours have elapsed.

Local authorities will no longer be able to routinely send children in care to residential homes outside their boroughs, and therefore beyond their supervision, in what was referred to as a growing culture of "out of sight, out of mind".

After a court case involving a teen-

age girl who was sexually exploited after being placed hundreds of miles from her local authority, it was found that children's homes in 15 different local authorities were entirely occupied by children sent there by other councils, even though they had similar institutions in their own areas.

In the future, a decision to send a child into residential care outside a borough will have to be approved "at a very senior level", and not just by a team manager as at present.

The Bill will also allow couples to share maternity leave after the birth of a child. From 2015 a new mother will be able to trigger "flexible leave" at any point after the first two weeks' recovery period and parents will be able to share the remaining 50 weeks between them as they like — in turns, in different blocks, or at the same time.

However, the impact assessment of the Bill found that as few as 2 per cent of fathers are expected to make use of the new right. Ministers said that they hoped that the numbers would rise over time.