clapa
For the UK
cleft community

CLAPA Companions

Creating penpal connections for
young people born with a cleft

Guide for Parents & Carers

www.clapa.com companions@clapa.com

Registered Charity in England and Wales (No. 1108160)
and Scotland (SC041034).

Introduction

CLAPA Companions is a penpal scheme connecting children born with a cleft aged 6 - 15 through letters, emails, videos and audio messages.

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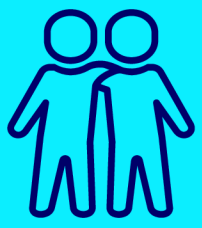
Benefits of CLAPA Companions

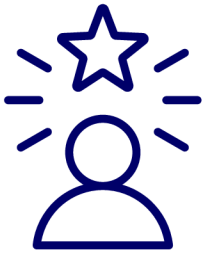


Create new friendships with people born with a cleft

Feel more positive about the cleft journey

Share experiences with other young people

Increase confidence through new connections, whilst reducing feelings of isolation

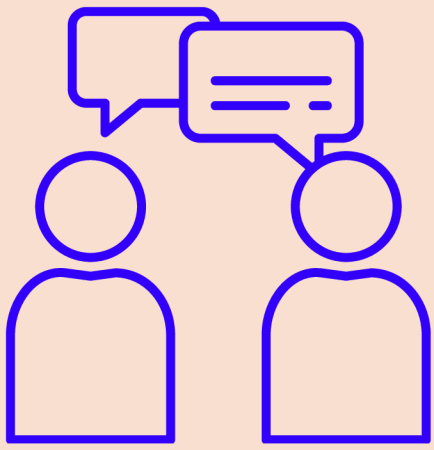


Get more involved in other aspects of CLAPA such as online events, Children and Young People's Council (CYPC) and residential weekends

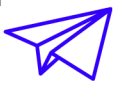
Encourage creativity and develop communication skills

Who is it for?

- Anyone in the UK aged 6 to 15 who was born with a cleft lip and/or palate.
- There is no requirement to be able to read and write as we support alternative communication methods such as video and audio messages.
- We welcome involvement from people of all different backgrounds and abilities.
- Language shouldn't be a barrier and we will work with you to ensure that the service is as accessible and flexible as possible.
- We ask that you make sure your child is keen to get involved before signing up, to avoid disappointing potential penpals.



CLAPA Companions Pathway

1. Fill out a CLAPA Companions Registration Form
2. CLAPA matches up two young people of similar age and interests
3. Penpal A sends the first message to CLAPA
4. CLAPA checks for unsafe content
5. CLAPA sends this message to Penpal B
6. Penpal B receives their message and replies via CLAPA 

7. Communication between Penpals can continue for 6 months or until each person has received 5 messages
8. Penpals decide if they would like to continue contact outside of CLAPA Companions
9. If either penpal says no, then no contact details will be shared. If both say yes, CLAPA will share the agreed contact details with the families
10. Penpals are welcome to sign up to as many rounds as they like

Content Concerns

Checking Messages

To safeguard our young people, we will make sure every message sent for the duration of the 'round' is checked by a trained CLAPA staff member or volunteer. We will send conversation ideas/themes for each message but ultimately, what is included in each message, will be led by the young people.

We have a strict policy of what cannot be included to ensure the safety of our young people. CLAPA moderators will be trained to recognise restricted content, such as names of schools or surnames. If found, this will be removed from the message before sending it to the Penpal, and parents/carers will be notified.

Harmful Content

If the CLAPA moderators deem the content of the message to be written with the intent of causing harm to the other Penpal, then they will inform the sender that they are no longer able to take part in CLAPA Companions and, where appropriate, involve the CLAPA Safeguarding team. CLAPA will then do their best to rematch the other Penpal with someone else.

Safeguarding Concerns

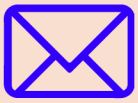
All CLAPA moderators will be trained in safeguarding and looking out for anything in the messages that raises a concern for a young person's wellbeing or safety. If there is a concern then the CLAPA Safeguarding Team will be alerted, the parent/guardian will be contacted and further appropriate steps will be taken. Please see our Safeguarding Policy for more information.

Content Restrictions

What cannot be shared	Reason	What to say/send instead
Name of school or picture of young person showing school logo	To protect the location of the young person	Cover school name/logo in photo. Use 'Primary School' or 'Secondary School' rather than the name of the school itself.
Details about specific location or home address	To protect the location of the young person	You can mention the county you live in or your nearest city. You can also talk about the name of the hospital/cleft clinics you visit.
Personal emails, phone numbers, social media profiles, gamer IDs etc	To protect the young person's identity	It will be at the parent/young person's discretion as to whether they want to share this information at the end of the 'round'
Middle names and family surnames	To protect the young person's identity	We encourage young people to only use their first name or a nickname that they would prefer
Videos, photographs or text containing violent or sexual content	To protect the young person from being exposed to inappropriate content	Ensure that anyone present in photographs or videos are appropriately dressed
Swear words, blasphemy and discriminatory language	To protect the young person from being exposed to hurtful or discriminatory language	Use inclusive and sensitive language

Ways to send a message

There are four ways to create a penpal message: it's completely up to each young person as to how they would like to create theirs. The options include:



Handwritten Letter

Stick to the trusted and beloved fine art of hand-writing a letter. This may help to improve handwriting skills for the young person and allows for the inclusion of any printed photos or drawings. It's fastest if these are scanned and then emailed to us, but you are also welcome to send these by post; the address is on the next page. If you send letters by post, please ensure you make a copy of the letter before you send it, in the unlikely event it gets lost in the post.

Email or Digital Letter

Send a message at the click of a button with email. This way digital photographs or scanned in artwork or letters can be attached. Or for the real technical wizards, let their imaginations run wild through creating a letter on a different software and sending this as an attachment over email.

Video Message

A young person may choose to create a video message to let their personality shine through. Learn more about how to share this with us on the next page. We might ask permission to add video captions for those who may be hard of hearing.

Audio Message

For those that want to talk rather than write, but would prefer not to be on video, an audio message might be the best option. Think of it as creating their very own podcast! This could be attached to an email or sent via a file sharing site. Learn more about this on the next page.

The Technical Bits

To send a message by email, please send to: companions@clapa.com

To send a message by post, please send this to: CLAPA Companions, CLAPA, The Green House, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, LONDON, E2 9DA

To send a large file, that's too big to attach to an email, such as a video, we recommend using one of these two free file-sharing services: One Drive or WeTransfer. Here's a guide to using One Drive and a guide to using WeTransfer.

Get in touch at companions@clapa.com for any further technical assistance with creating or sharing your Penpal messages.

Talking Point Tips

Here's a list of optional talking points for young people that might be of use when creating their messages:

- How old you are
- What makes you, you
- Your favourite sports, games, music, YouTuber, TV show, animals, hobbies
- Somewhere you've been on holiday
- Your family, friends, pets
- What you do and don't like about school
- Something you've done that you're really proud of
- Something you've done that was scary
- Something you've done that was really fun
- Something you're looking forward to
- What you want to be when you're older
- A country you'd love to visit
- A celebrity you'd love to meet
- What type of cleft you were born with and how does it make you feel
- The best thing about you!