

# Writing the first letter to your relative

When making contact for the first time with a relative separated by adoption, you may choose to make a direct approach or use an Intermediary service (third party) such as Jigsaw Qld to make this approach on your behalf. Please contact us if you would like to find out more about this service. If you choose to make direct contact, writing a letter to your relative is recommended as the first step. Writing a first letter can bring up emotions and you may feel anxious or confused about what to include. This is very normal and Jigsaw is able to support you in this process. Here are some tips for first letter writing. Once you have done a first draft you are welcome to send it to us and we will be happy to provide feedback .



## Tip #1: How to address the other party

We suggest using your relative's first name rather than titles like 'Mum', 'Dad', 'Daughter', 'Son', 'Sister' or 'Brother'. Whilst the other person is your family member and you may have been thinking of them in this way for a long time, they may need to take the relationship more slowly. Terminology around roles may be clarified at a later date.

## Tip #2: What to include

Although you share biological ties always keep in mind that this relationship is a new one and it will take time to build trust. This is important to remember when you are deciding what personal information to share in the letter. We have provided a letter template on page 3 that you can use as a guide if you wish but please alter it to suit your situation and personal style.

You may also have many questions for the other party. You might like to choose one or two of your most important questions initially so as to not overwhelm the other party. This can also give the other person an idea of what they might like to include in a return letter if they are open to contact.

## Tip #3: Length of the letter

We recommend keeping the first letter to one page and maintaining a factual but warm tone. The first letter is an introductory one aimed at fostering further communication. You can expand further in future because a normal part of building any new relationship is sharing an increasing amount and depth of information over time.

## Tip #4: Consider handwriting the letter

With a lot of communication happening on a computer or by text these days it may seem strange to write a letter the "old fashioned" way. However we recommend you consider handwriting your letter on suitable paper or within a card. Handwriting gives the sense of "personal" to your letter, regardless of how messy you think your handwriting is. If you do type your letter, it is recommended that you sign it to give a personal touch. This can show the other party how much care you have taken in preparing for

this outreach to them.

### **Tip #5: Provide context**

One of the most common questions we have heard over the years is ‘why are they making contact with me now?’. So, it can be helpful to include in your letter some of the reasons that you are making contact now and what has led you to reach this point in your life.

### **Tip #6: Focus on building a one on one relationship**

The first letter is usually aimed at establishing contact and starting to build trust with the family member that you are outreaching to. It can be important to be mindful about what references you include about your other relatives in the first instance as this may be overwhelming to the other party in a first letter.

### **Tip #7: Including the right photos**

The question of whether or not to include photos in the letter requires careful consideration. For some people the sharing of photos highlights the risk of giving too much of themselves to this first level of engagement and potentially risking rejection. Yet we also know how important it is for people to see and identify aspects of themselves in their relative. This can be particularly relevant for adopted people who have never seen someone who looks like them. Including photos may also be helpful if you are outreaching to a father who wasn't aware of your birth or the pregnancy. However, we recommend adopted people not share baby photos if they are writing to their mothers. This has the potential to cause a significant grief reaction. Your photo is about creating an accurate and positive impression. When choosing which photo to send, think about the image you want to convey to the person who will be receiving it.

Some extra tips about photos:

- Provide a current photo.
- If there are other people in the photo, check whether you have their permission to share it.
- Choose a photo where you are smiling or have a neutral expression to create a warm and friendly impression.
- Sharing a photo with a filter is not ideal for a first photo.

### **Tip #8: Provide reassurance**

It can be helpful to reassure the other party that you are reaching out with good intentions. If you are hoping to build a long term relationship, let them know this as it may be reassuring. However, it can also be important to let the other party know that you are respectful of their wishes and open to moving at whatever pace they are comfortable with. If you are wanting to move slowly yourself, such as through letter writing initially, mention this.

**There is a template over the page — feel free to change it to make it your own style.**

Dear .....

*I am aware that this letter may come as a shock to you but I would like to assure you that I am approaching you in good faith and will respect your wishes.*

*My name is XXXXXX and I believe that you may be my <biological mother/father/sibling or son/daughter lost to adoption>. I was able to obtain information from the relevant department in (insert state) which gave me your name and I am seeking to make contact with you. The correct person I am looking for would have been born in XXXX year/aged XX in XXXX year <you may like to include another detail here to confirm their identity particularly if you are outreaching to somebody who may not know about the adoption such as a father, sibling or adopted person who may not know of their status>.*

*The reason I am in getting in touch now is..... <For adopted people, this may include wanting to find out more about your biological family, medical history or your identity>. For mothers or fathers this may involve wondering how your child's life turned out and always thinking about them. For all parties, it may include hoping to get to know the other party further and building a relationship if possible over time>.*

*I would like to share some information about myself ... <Include a short paragraph about your life now such as who your current family is, occupation, hobbies, interests, important friendships >.*

*If you decide to respond to this letter, one thing that I'm most curious about is... <include one or two of your most important questions here>*

*I hope this letter has not caused you too much distress. I most certainly do not wish to cause any problems for you. It would mean a great deal to me to hear back from you and in time to get to know more about you. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have as well. I realise that you may need time to process this but I hope you will respond when you are ready and let me know your wishes.*

*If you are not the correct person that I am seeking, I would very much appreciate it if you could let me know so that I can continue my search elsewhere.*

*Kind regards,*

*<Include your name here and any contact details that you are comfortable sharing. There is an option of talking to Jigsaw about including a Jigsaw case worker's details also in case the other party would like some support before responding to your letter>*