

WRITING TO AN ADOPTED PERSON

In our experience, a first approach is more likely to gain a favourable response if it is made via a letter. A letter is often experienced as less intrusive than a phone call and it gives the person time to adjust to your contact and to make some decisions about how they may wish to respond. It is advisable to give the person some time to respond before making a second approach. 4-8 weeks may seem a lifetime to you, but your son or daughter may never have thought deeply about adoption. It is vitally important that you give him/her plenty of time in which to reply.

- If you have decided not to use a professional intermediary, when at all possible try first to contact the person being sought directly. Approaches made through relatives or friends have often proved problematic as others then become involved in relaying information and interpreting responses. It is respectful to give the person being sought the opportunity to make his/her own decision regarding contact with you.
- Before writing or even if using an intermediary, ensure as much as possible that you have the correct name and address. It is often possible to locate the person through further Registry searches (eg a marriage search) and use of the electoral roll.

Is it more respectful to write to the adoptive parents first?

Some birth parents see approaching the adoptive parents as more respectful, as their role in the adopted person's life should be acknowledged. They are also concerned that the adoptee may not know that they're adopted, and the best way to hear such news is from their parents.

However there are important reasons for approaching the adoptee directly:

- The adopted person is now an adult and may not be happy to be treated as their parents' child.
- The adoptee needs to make his/her own decision about if and when their parents are told of the contact.
- The adoptive parents' opinion of their son or daughter's readiness for contact may be coloured by their own perspective and may not be accurate. It may also be that, although the parents haven't told the adoptee of their adoption, it is something the adoptee is aware of.
- If the adoptive parents prefer not to discuss the approach and they ask the birth parent not to make an approach, the birth parent faces the dilemma of whether to pursue their right to make contact or to allow the parents' wishes to determine what happens.

Some rules of thumb in writing

- Try to stay low key, keeping your letter reasonably short - a long letter can communicate intensity. You may want to be warm, but avoid extreme expressions of feeling.
- Be reassuring. Assure them that you will not arrive on their doorstep unannounced. Assure them that you will respect their wishes about contact, and that you understand that circumstances may limit their ability to respond quickly, or to respond much at all.
- Say enough about your life to indicate you're not in dire need or looking for another family.
- Be as clear and honest as you can manage, about what outcome you would like at a minimum, eg, *"If you decide that you would prefer not to pursue this please at least let me know, so I can know where I stand."*
- Acknowledge the adoptee has existing relationships with their adoptive family. Terms such as "my son" or "my daughter" may be off putting, as could be referring to yourself as "mum" or "dad". At the same time, it may not be safe to assume the family was a "loving" one - this is unknown at the point of making an approach.
- Write your letter by hand, if your handwriting is moderately readable. It's more personal.
- Keep a copy of your letter.

A sample letter

Dear....

I hope this letter does not come as too great a shock for you. My name is *(name)* and I believe I am your birth mother/father. I was able to learn of your adopted name through applying for information about you from the Community Services.

I do not wish to distress you or interfere in your life or your relationship with your adoptive parents. I understand that this letter, while half expected, may come as a shock and you may need time to consider my contact. I am hoping that we may exchange letters and perhaps have a phone call or meeting in the future, but only if you are willing. Please know that I will respect any decision you make about this. I would also love to answer any questions you may have about your adoption, your birth family or your medical history. If you would like a photo of me and my present family, please let me know.

I would appreciate the opportunity to explain to you in more detail the circumstances of how you came to be adopted. Since the adoption I have frequently thought of you and wondered if you were well and happy. At the time, I wanted a secure future for you with two parents whom I hoped could give you everything you needed.

Please ring me or write whenever you feel ready to do this. I am content to wait for your reply but it is important to me to know your wishes.

You may perhaps find it easier initially to talk to a neutral person rather than to respond directly to me. I have discussed this letter with *(insert counsellor's name)*, a counsellor at

The Benevolent Society, who can be contacted on (*particular days*) on (*see relevant contact details below*). I have also left with her some information about myself and a photo should you wish for these.

*Thinking of you/warm regards/warm wishes
(your name, address and/or phone number/ email)*

***Please do not use the final paragraph without first discussing it with the counsellor you have named.**

The Benevolent Society has compiled a booklet on writing your first letter. If you would like a copy sent out to you or you need any other information please contact us.

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