

Writing the first letter to your relative

You may approach your birth relative yourself or you may choose to use an Intermediary service (third party) such as Jigsaw QLD to make this approach on your behalf. Regardless of which approach you choose, writing a letter to your relative is always recommended as the most appropriate first step to make contact. You may feel overwhelmed with what to write in your first letter or anxious about the process in general. This is very normal. At Jigsaw we often provide support to people during this letter writing stage and we frequently receive requests for a First Letter template. Your first letter is a personal letter from you to your birth relative which is why we don't have a template. But we can give you some tips to help you along the way and are happy to look at your draft:



Tip #1: Start from the start

Although you share biological ties always keep in mind that this relationship is new and like any new relationship it will require building trust and confidence. This is important to remember when you are deciding what personal information to share in the letter.

Tip #2: Make sure the letter is not too long

Consider not overwhelming your relative with an overly lengthy or overly emotional and intense letter. The first letter is an introductory letter to foster further communication. You can expand further in future letters.

Tip #3: Use the person's name

Address the letter using the relative's first name and sign it using your first name and surname, to avoid introducing terms that are suggestive of roles (ie "Dear Mum/ Dear Son/ Dear Dad"). Terminology around roles will be mutually agreed upon at a later date as your relationship develops.

Tip #4: Handwriting is important

With most communication happening on a computer these days it's difficult to imagine writing a letter the "old fashioned" way. But we recommend you consider handwriting your letter on suitable paper or within a card. Handwriting also gives the sense of "personal" to your letter, regardless of how messy you think your handwriting is.

Tip #5: 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 en-

gement, which potentially carries the risk of rejection. Yet we also know how important it is for people to see and identify aspects of themselves in their birth 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 birth 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 birth mothers. This has the potential to cause a significant grief reaction.

Tip #6: Why now?

Some relatives who are approached may want to know why you are seeking contact with them. At Jigsaw we know that in most cases this is more about why an approach wasn't made earlier. You may consider writing about this in your first letter.

Tip #7: Focus on building a one on one relationship

The contact you are establishing with your first letter is about building a relationship between you and your birth relative. Try to be mindful about what references you include about your other relatives and how this might be received and also how much you want to share.

Tip #8: A suggested outline

Embarking on writing the first letter can be a daunting task. For those who are finding it hard to get started, here's a suggested outline. Make sure you included your contact details so the other party knows where to reply.

Dear

I am aware that this letter may come as a surprise to you but would like to assure you that I am approaching you in good faith and complete respect for your privacy. I realise that this may be of a sensitive nature to you and understand that you may need some time to take in this new situation.

I was born/had a child on..... My mother/my father/my child was named.....(Include some details of the adoption).

I grew up..... I have included some photos of myself that I thought may be of interest to you. (Include some details about yourself, your family and your upbringing).

The reason why 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/fathers, this may involve wondering how your child's life turned out and always thinking about them).

I hope that this letter has not been a complete shock to you and has not caused you too much distress. I most certainly do not wish to cause you any problems or interfere with your life. It would mean a great deal to me to hear back from you and in time to get to know more about you when you feel you are ready. I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

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