

Post Adoption Information Sheet No 11

Writing to an adopted person

In our experience, a first approach is more likely to gain a favourable response if it is made via 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. Four to eight weeks may seem a lifetime to you, but the adopted person may never have thought deeply about adoption. It is vitally important that you give him/her plenty of time to reply.

- You may wish to approach the person yourself or you may wish to use an intermediary. The Benevolent Society provides an Intermediary Service which is described in Information Sheet No 32.
- When at all possible, firstly try to contact the person being sought directly. Approaches made through relatives or friends have often proved problematic as others 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 (e.g., a marriage search) and use of the electoral roll. Old state electoral rolls can be helpful where no name can be found on current federal rolls.

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

Some parents and relatives believe that it's more respectful to approach the adoptive parents first, to acknowledge their role within the adopted person's life. Some are also concerned that the adopted person may not know that they're adopted, and therefore believe that the best way to hear such news is from their parents.

However there are important reasons for approaching the adopted person directly:

- They are now an adult and may not be happy to be treated as a child. He/she needs to make their 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 their son/daughter of their adoption, it is something the adopted person is aware of.

- If the adoptive parents prefer not to discuss the approach and they ask the person not to make an approach, the person then faces the dilemma of whether to make contact or allow the adoptive 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, e.g. *'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 that he/she has existing relationships with their adoptive family. Terms such as 'my son', 'my daughter' or 'my brother' 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 your child/relative felt loved in their family - 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.
- You may decide to send the letter via Registered Mail which ensures that only the person to whom the letter is addressed may receive it.

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 mother/father/brother/uncle (or *we may be related*). I was able to learn of your adopted name through applying for information about you from a Government Department that holds adoption records.

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.

(Specific to parents) 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/him 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 Post Adoption Services have compiled a booklet on writing your first letter. If you would like a copy sent out to you or you wish to talk further about any issues raised in this information sheet, please feel free to contact us.

Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC)	
Location:	Locked Bag 6002, Hurstville BC NSW 1481
Phone:	02 9504 6788
Email:	PARC@benevolent.org.au
Website:	www.benevolent.org.au

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ)	
Location:	Ground Floor, 189 Coronation Dr, Milton QLD 4064
Phone:	07 3170 4600
Email:	PASQ@benevolent.org.au
Website:	www.benevolent.org.au