



Beginning the contact with your birth mother or birth father

Once you have met with a social worker in the adoption agency and the decision to search has been made, the process of contacting your birth mother can begin. The adoption agency will attempt to locate your birth mother and make contact with her. If she is willing to have contact the agency will encourage both of you to correspond by letter. This will be the same process if you are initiating a search for your birth father, but remember that your birth father's identity has to be confirmed with your birth mother before a search can begin. In a situation where the birth mother is deceased or unable to be contacted, the adoption agency will discuss with you how best to proceed in relation to your search.

Advice on writing letters

Most adoption agencies encourage those who are searching to begin contact with a letter as it is a positive way of engaging with the person who has been located. Prior to meeting, corresponding provides a unique opportunity to gain information and start to build a relationship which can make the initial meeting easier and more comfortable. Email, telephone and text communication, although faster, usually demand an immediate response. Writing letters allows you to take time and reflect on the process and make informed decisions on how you wish to pace the contact.

If your preferred form of correspondence is by email the adoption agency can help with this by agreeing to forward your emails to your birth mother or your birth father. The adoption agency can leave out your email address until you are ready for direct contact.

Most adoption agencies suggest that the person who is searching write the first letter. This is because the person searching will most likely have had more time to think about and consider the issues involved in contact and may be more prepared for writing. The first letter provides you with an opportunity to share some information and to introduce yourself.

Most adoption agencies suggest that letters are exchanged through them without disclosing identifying details until such time as you are ready for direct contact.

Suggestions for writing letters

Getting started is the hardest part. It is often not possible to sit down and immediately write a perfect letter. Some people write several drafts. The suggestions outlined below may be of help to you in writing to your birth mother or birth father.

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- Try to be warm, friendly and reassuring. Assure the person you are writing to that you will respect their wishes about contact and that you understand that circumstances may limit his/her ability to respond quickly, or at great length.
- It's more personal if you write your letter by hand. It is best to sign the letter using your first name. If you type your letter handwrite your name.
- Keep a copy of your letter.
- Don't worry too much about correct spelling, grammar or phraseology.
- Give some background information e.g. upbringing, family situation, education, employment etc.
- Don't attempt to try and cover everything about your life in your first letter. Use this as an opportunity to ask some questions and to invite questions also.
- Say what you might like in terms of the contact. For example it might be that you want to share medical information or to start regular correspondence and hope to meet in the future etc. You may wish to say that you would like to receive a response to your letter.
- Short letters are probably better in the beginning as too much information may be overwhelming in the early stages of correspondence.
- If you wish to enclose a photograph with your letter it may be better to discuss this with your social worker first.
- Always re-read the final letter as if you were the person receiving it. Try to see it through their eyes and try to imagine how they might react.

Discuss sharing any difficult information with your social worker prior to including it in a letter. If there are things that you want to address but believe that a letter may not be the appropriate forum to deal with them, then talk to your social worker about them. You can always discuss the content of your first letter with your social worker if you would like some further advice. Remember, letters are an important part of getting to know each other so it should sound like you.

Waiting for a response to your letter can be an anxious time. It is important to remember that some people need more time than others to respond. If you do not receive a response to your first letter it is advisable to give your birth parent some time to respond before making a second approach. Your birth mother or birth father may have coped with losing you by trying to push aside extremely painful feelings, and while 6-8 weeks may seem a lifetime to you, it's a short time for them to begin to face what was a sad time of their life. Birth parents may need time to absorb all of the information you have shared at this stage before they feel able to respond.

Writing letters may come easier to some more than others. Some people question how many letters they should write or how long should they correspond before moving on to the next stage. This is decided by the individuals themselves. Throughout this process your social worker will maintain contact with you and your birth mother or birth father to provide ongoing support and guidance as the contact develops and possibly moves towards a meeting.