

Writing to a birth mother

Many people choose to make their first approach through a letter. A letter is often experienced as less intrusive than a phone call, and it gives your birth mother time to adjust to your contact and to make some decisions about how she wishes to respond. It is advisable to give her some time to respond before making a second approach. She may have coped with losing you by trying to push aside what were extremely painful feelings, and while 6-8 weeks may seem a lifetime to you, it might be a short time to her to begin to get in touch with what was probably a very sad time of her life.

- 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 often have 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 her own decision regarding contact with you. In other than a direct approach, it also may be that you are disclosing your birth mother's secret to people who do not know about you, and she may be very distressed at discovering this.
- 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. Old state electoral rolls can be helpful where no name can be found on current federal rolls.
- It is very important to respect your birth mother's privacy and confidentiality. In some situations, birth mothers were advised to keep their experience of pregnancy and adoption a secret and consequently went on to marry and have other children without ever disclosing. To avoid causing your birth mother distress it is advisable to write a discrete letter which would let her know who you are without jeopardising her privacy should someone else read the letter.

Here is an example:

Dear....

I am writing in the hope that you might be able to assist me. I'm doing some research into my family history and I believe we may be related. I was born in (year), in (town).

I would greatly appreciate you contacting me at your convenience. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
(your name, address and phone number/email)

Some people may wish to be more 'up front' in their first letter. However, many choose to send the letter via Registered Mail which ensures that only the person to whom the letter is addressed may receive it.

Another example:

Dear.....

I am writing to you in the belief that you are my birth mother. I was born in *(year)* in *(hospital)* and was given the name *(name if known)* at birth. I was adopted when I was *(age, usually in weeks)* and am now living in *(town)*.

It's very difficult to know how to start this letter as I certainly don't want to cause problems in your life. I can appreciate that this letter, while half expected, may come as a great shock to you, and you may be wondering how it will all turn out. I am also aware that your family and friends may not know about me and that may pose great difficulties for you. I'd like to reassure you that I have thought long and hard about writing this letter, and I would never disturb your privacy by turning up unannounced.

Nevertheless, I have many questions about my background and where I come from that my adoptive parents are not able to answer. I was hoping that we could exchange letters and perhaps have a phone call or meeting in the future, but only if you are willing. I will certainly respect any decision you make about this, and understand that you may need some time to think it over. Perhaps I could tell you a bit about why I've been searching and then a bit about myself. *(Fill in the details of your life.)*

Please ring me or write whenever you feel ready to do this. Even if you do not wish to have contact, it would be helpful for me to hear that. I am content to wait but really need 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....., a counsellor at The Benevolent Society who can be contacted on ... (see below for relevant details). I have also left with her some information about myself and a photo should you wish for these at any time.

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

Yours sincerely/warm regards/kind regards

(Your name, address and phone number/email)

Writing to a birth father

The issue of your birth father's privacy and confidentiality is also paramount in planning a letter. In some cases, your birth father may not even be aware of your existence, or if he is, he may not have told his present partner and family.

For these reasons it is again important to make all efforts to contact your birth father directly, rather than through his relatives and friends.

It is suggested that the letter on the previous page may be the most appropriate.

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 further information, please contact us.

Please phone us if you wish to talk further about any issues raised in this information sheet.

NSW/ACT

Post Adoption Resource Centre
PO Box 239
Bondi NSW 2026
T 02 9365 3444
F 02 9365 3666
E parc@bensoc.org.au
www.bensoc.org.au

QLD

Post Adoption Support Queensland
PO Box 5347
West End QLD 4101
T 07 3170 4600 or 1300 914 819
F 07 3255 2953
E pasq@bensoc.org.au
www.bensoc.org.au