



# Writing the First Letter

After the Post Adoption Support Service or Forced Adoption Support Service (PASS/FASS) have made contact with your relative separated by adoption and they accept contact from you, we will ask them if they will accept a letter from you to them.

This means you may be writing a first letter to your found relative and this can bring up emotions and you may feel anxious and/or confused about what to include. Don't over think it, let things come naturally to you, and you do not need to tell them everything in the first letter. This is the first step in the getting to know each other process.

Here are some tips for the first letter.

## 1. How to address the other party

We suggest using your relative's first name rather than titles like 'Mum', 'Dad', 'Daughter', 'Son', 'Sister', 'Brother'. Whilst the other person is your family member and you may have been thinking of them in this way for a long time, they may need to take the relationship more slowly. Terminology around family roles may be clearer later and then it may be more comfortable and acceptable to use these familial terms.

## 2. What to include

Although you share biological ties, always keep in mind that this relationship is a new one and it will take time to build trust. This is important to remember when you are deciding what personal information to share in the letter. We have provided a letter template on page 3 that you can use as a guide if you wish but please alter it to suit your situation and personal style.

You may also have many questions for the other party. You might like to choose one or two of your most important questions initially to not overwhelm the other party. This can also give the other person an idea of what they might like to include in a return letter.

## 3. Length of the letter

We recommend keeping the first letter to one page and maintaining a factual but warm and friendly tone. The first letter is an introductory one aimed at encouraging further communications. You can expand further in future because a normal part of building any new relationship is sharing an increasing amount and depth of information over time.

#### 4. Consider handwriting the letter

With a lot of communication happening on a computer or by text these days it may seem strange to write a letter the 'old fashioned' way. However, we recommend you consider handwriting your letter on suitable paper or within a card. Handwriting gives the sense of 'personal' to your letter, regardless of how messy you think your handwriting is. If you do type a letter, it is recommended you sign it to give a personal touch. This can show the other party how much care you have taken in preparing for this outreach to them.

#### 5. Provide the context

One of the most common questions we have heard over the years is 'why are they making contact with me now?' Therefore, it can be helpful to include in your letter some of the reasons you are making contact now and what has led you to reach this point in your life.

#### 6. Focus on building a one on one relationship

The first letter is usually aimed at establishing contact and starting to build trust with the family member that you are contacting. It can be important to be mindful about what references you include about other relatives in the first instance as this may be overwhelming to the other party in a first letter.

#### 7. Including the right photos

The question of whether or not to include photos in the letter requires consideration. For some people the sharing of photos highlights the risk of giving too much of themselves to this first level of engagement. We also know how important it is for people to see and identify aspects of themselves in their relative. This can be particularly relevant for adopted people who have never seen someone who looks like them. We recommend adopted people not share baby photos in a first letter if they are writing to their mothers. This has the potential to cause a significant grief reaction to someone who lost a baby to adoption. Your photo is about creating a positive impression and it is good to start from where you are now. When choosing which photo to send, think about the image you want to convey to the person who will be receiving it.

- Provide a current photo
- If there are other people in the photo, check whether you have their permission to share it.
- Think about how the photo you choose makes you feel, and if it generates a positive feeling, then this is the one to choose.



## 8. Provide reassurance

It can be helpful to reassure that other party that you are reaching out in good intentions. If you are hoping to build a long-term relationship, let them know this as it may be reassuring. However, it can also be important to let the other party know that you are respectful of their wishes and open to moving at whatever pace they are comfortable with. If you want to move slowly yourself, such as through letter writing initially don't be afraid to mention this.

Dear.....

*I am aware that this letter may come as a shock to you but I would like to assure you that I am approaching you in good faith and will respect your wishes.*

*My name is ..... and I believe you may be my biological mother/father/sibling or son/daughter lost to adoption. I was able to obtain information from the relevant department in (insert state) which gave me your name and the PASS/FASS service helped me to search for you and made the initial contact.*

*The reason I am getting in touch now is..... (for adopted people this may include wanting to find out more about your biological family or medical history or your identity or to simply let them know you are ok. For mothers or fathers this may involve wondering how your child's life turned out and always thinking about them. For all parties, it may include hoping to get to know the other party further and build a relationship if possible over time.)*

*I would like to share some information about myself (include a couple of short paragraphs about your life now which might include who your current family is, occupation, hobbies, interests, important friendships. Be sure to share what you are comfortable for the other party to know about you at this initial stage.*

*One thing that I am most curious about is (include one or two of your most important questions here)*

*I hope this letter has not caused you too much distress. I most certainly do not wish to cause any problems for you. It would mean a great deal to me to hear back from you and in time to get to know more about you. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have as well. I realised that you may need time to process this but I hope you will respond when you are ready and let me know your wishes.*

*Kind regards or warm regards,*

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