

## Writing Your “First Letter”

When a birth relative is located, the question often asked is, "what do we do now?" While many people want to meet right away, our experience has taught us that often the most successful connections are those that proceed more slowly, allowing the relationship to grow and develop over time. Taking things slowly gives each person an opportunity to get to know one another as well as deal with the myriad of often conflicting emotions that may arise.

To begin this process, we ask that you write a letter to your birth relative that does not contain any identifying information. This letter is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself. You may wish to include a brief summary of major events in your life, as well as a statement about how your adoption experience has affected your life. It will also be important to include what you are hoping for from this contact. Many people, when first located, feel more comfortable beginning contact with letters and photos exchanged confidentially and anonymously through The Cradle. You may wish to express your willingness to begin contact in this manner.

We have found that in these letters, using terminology such as "birth parent," "birth son," and "birth daughter" can be helpful. Although you may wish to do so, please do not include your last name, address, phone number, or email in this letter. It is best to wait until both you and your birth relative are comfortable before releasing this information.

For photographs, you may wish to include several of yourself from childhood through the present. In addition, if you have children you are parenting or have parented, you may wish to include photos of them. If you do not want to part with certain photos (for example of yourself as a child), you could send color photocopies. We recommend avoiding photographs of yourself in which you are wearing sunglasses.

Your letter/photo(s) can be mailed, faxed or emailed to us.

If we are able to locate your birth relative, we will make this letter available to him or her. If we are not able to locate your birth relative, or if your birth relative is not open to receiving your letter, it will remain in our files. Should we hear from your birth relative in the future, this letter will then be available to him or her.

While this letter may be difficult to write, please remember that it is your birth relative's first introduction to you as a person. Keep in mind that you cannot say everything in one letter, and that too much information can be overwhelming for the recipient. Hopefully, this will be the first of many contacts. If you would like us to review a draft of your letter, please feel free to send, email, or fax it to us. Remember that it does not have to be perfect, just sincere. The most important thing of all is just to start writing!