

# Communicating with transplant recipients



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Some donor families wish to write to the transplant recipients of their loved one's organs and tissues. The decision to write to the transplant recipients is a personal choice, but many feel it helps with the grieving process.

## Letter guidelines

The *BC Human Tissue Gift Act* requires that the identity of both the donor and the recipient be kept confidential. For this reason, we ask that you do not include identifying personal information, such as your names, where you live, or where you work. Feel free to send a card, a simple handwritten note or typed letter.

### You may include:

- Gender and life stage (e.g. child, teen, middle-aged etc.)
- Favourite pastimes, hobbies or interests
- Family situation such as marital status, children, grandchildren (Note: please do not include names.)

### Please do not include:

- The name of the city in which you live
- That you would like to meet the recipient someday, as BC Transplant has a process for this (see 'Direct contact' section)

If you would like to include religious comments, please consider the fact that you do not know the religion of your recipients.

In closing your letter or card, simply sign your card or letter "the donor family". Please do not include the following:

- Your address, city, telephone number or email address
- The name of the hospital in which your loved one was a patient
- Names of your loved one or family members

## Mailing your letter

Place your card or letter in an unsealed envelope. Include on a separate piece of paper:

- Your full name
- Mailing address
- The date of donation

Mail both documents in a sealed envelope to BC Transplant. If you prefer, you can e-mail us your letter at [donorfamily@bct.phsa.ca](mailto:donorfamily@bct.phsa.ca).

BC Transplant's Family Services Program will review the letter to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for both you and the transplant recipient(s). Each letter is forwarded from BC Transplant and therefore there may be a delay before your letter reaches the recipient(s). We make every effort to get letters out as soon as we receive them.



## Will I hear from the transplant recipients?

While you may wish to correspond with a transplant recipient, it is also their personal choice to reply to you. Many recipients have said that they are overwhelmed with emotion and have difficulty expressing their gratitude in words. Others could take several months or even years before they feel comfortable writing. A letter from you may encourage the recipients to write a letter of thanks, knowing that you are ready to receive communication.

Here is a sample letter to get you started:

### *Dear Friend,*

*Your card arrived last week and it was the most meaningful event since our loved one's death. How I wish I could give you both a big hug for writing to us! It gives us great comfort to think of your family, and I try to picture you and your wife and your children, as you celebrate life together.*

*Our loved one made the decision to be an organ donor many years ago, while still a teenager. He registered his wishes last year. Little did he know then how soon his decision would have such a big impact on other people's lives.*

*We feel our loved one lives on in you and in the other recipients. Thank you for helping us find meaning in our loss. We hope and pray for your continued good health.*

***A Donor Mom***

## Direct contact with transplant recipients

Occasionally, donor families and recipients may wish to move beyond anonymous communication to have direct contact. This can take many forms, such as a face-to-face meeting or releasing personal identifying information so you can email or connect with one another directly instead of through BC Transplant.

BC Transplant supports individual transplant recipients and donor families to make informed decisions about how much or how little personal information to share with each other.

Our role is to act as a helpful initial facilitator of this process. To move forward, the following must first take place:

- 1. You and the transplant recipient have exchanged anonymous written correspondence at least once.**
- 2. 12 months have passed since the date of the donation.**
- 3. We receive initial independent requests for direct contact from both you and the recipient in writing.**

Once these take place, then BC Transplant will support both you and the recipient through the consent process and direct contact.

## Having difficulties or need some advice?

If you are having difficulties in writing your letter or have questions about anything that you wish to include in your letter, or about the process for direct contact, please connect with the Family Services program facilitator, who will be happy to assist you in any way possible.

**Jordy Hermiston, MSW, RSW**  
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