

# Communicating with the family of your organ donor



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Some transplant recipients write to their donor family to express their gratitude. The decision to write to your donor family is a personal choice, but your words can often help families cope with the loss of their loved one.

## 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:

- Your 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 donor family 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 donor family.

In closing your letter or card, simply sign your card or letter "a transplant recipient". Please do not include the following:

- Your address, city, telephone number or email address
- The name of the hospital where you received your transplant

## 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 transplant

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 your donor family. Each letter is forwarded from BC Transplant and therefore there may be a delay before your letter reaches the donor family. We make every effort to get letters out as soon as we receive them.



## Will I hear from my donor family?

While you may wish to correspond with your donor family, it is also their personal choice to reply to you. You may or may not receive communication from your donor family. Some families may respond to a letter from you, while others may prefer privacy and choose not to write. Others could take several months or even years before they feel comfortable writing. The donor family is coping with the loss of their loved one, and people manage grief and the complex emotions that are part of organ donation in different ways.

Here is a sample letter to get you started:

### *Dear Donor Family,*

*It has been difficult to express how grateful I am to have received an organ from your loved one. Perhaps this is why it has taken me this long to write to you. I want to offer you my sincerest condolences for the loss of your loved one and my thanks for their gift of life.*

*I was so close to losing my life. My family and I experienced a lot of pain facing an uncertain future. When I learned that an organ became available for me, I was both overjoyed and deeply sorry for what it meant for my donor and their family. The loss that you have endured and the opportunity that I have been given because of the generosity of you and your loved one are both immeasurable.*

*For me, this gift of life means I now have the strength and ability to return to many of the activities I enjoyed before I became so critically ill. It means I can spend more time with my family and be there with them through the milestones of their own lives.*

*I promise you that I will take care of myself and your loved one's organ so that a part of them may live on in me for many years to come.*

### *A Transplant Recipient*

## Direct contact with your donor family

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

Once these take place, then BC Transplant will support both you and the donor family 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 you wish to include, please contact your transplant clinic social worker.

If you have questions about the process for direct contact, please contact:

**BC Transplant Family Services**  
**t: 604-877-2143**  
**e: [donorfamily@bct.phsa.ca](mailto:donorfamily@bct.phsa.ca)**