

Writing to transplant recipients

The donation experience affects everyone differently, and individuals will vary in the way they cope. Some donor families find that sharing stories and information about their loved one is helpful in their grieving process.

Getting a transplant is a life-saving event. In most cases, transplants happen rather suddenly, and the road to recovery may be long. Receiving a letter from their donor's family may assist recipients with the emotional struggles that they experience.

The decision to write to your loved one's transplant recipient is a very individual and personal choice. There is no timeframe for when you should reach out, if you choose to.

There is no obligation for donor families or transplant recipients to write or respond, and you don't need to continuously write to each other.

Anyone in your family may write.

**'I have written at least 100 letters
to the recipients but never on paper.
I feel guilty about this but at some
stage it will happen.'**

The correspondence process

Australia's organ and tissue donation program is confidential. The Human Tissue Acts, Transplantation and Anatomy Acts and associated policies in each state or territory prohibit health professionals and DonateLife staff from disclosing information that might publicly identify a donor or transplant recipient.

Donor families can write **anonymous** correspondence to transplant recipients via DonateLife. DonateLife staff forward the correspondence to the relevant hospital transplant unit, who will then forward it to recipients.

This process exists to maintain confidentiality.

**If you have any questions about the
correspondence process, please contact
your local DonateLife agency for assistance.**

DonateLife ACT

PO Box 11
Woden ACT 2606
T 02 5124 5625
E organ.donation@act.gov.au

DonateLife NSW

PO Box 486
Kogarah NSW 1485
T 02 8566 1700
E otds-familysupport@health.nsw.gov.au

DonateLife NT

PO Box 41326
Casuarina NT 0811
T 08 8922 8349
E donatelife@nt.gov.au

DonateLife QLD

Building 1, Level 4
Princess Alexandra Hospital
199 Ipswich Road
Woolloongabba QLD 4102
T 07 3176 2350
E donatelife@health.qld.gov.au

DonateLife SA

PO Box 287
Rundle Mall SA 5000
T 08 8207 7117
E donatelifesa@sa.gov.au

DonateLife TAS

GPO Box 1061
Hobart TAS 7001
T 03 6166 8858
E donatelife.tasmania@ths.tas.gov.au

DonateLife VIC

Level 2, 19–21 Argyle
Place South
Carlton VIC 3053
T 03 8317 7400
E donatelife@redcrossblood.org.au

DonateLife WA

PO Box 332
Northbridge WA 6865
T 1800 950 155
E donatelifewa@health.wa.gov.au

Organ and Tissue Authority

(02) 5156 6662 | enquiries@donatelife.gov.au

-  DonateLifeAustralia
-  DonateLifeToday
-  DonateLifeToday
-  Australian-Organ-and-Tissue-Authority

donatelife.gov.au



Correspondence guidelines

Donor families



What to write

Many donor families feel they are overwhelmed with emotion and have difficulty expressing their feelings in words. It may take months or even years before a family feels ready to send correspondence.

Everyone will express their story in their own way, and this brochure hopes to guide you through this process.

To begin your letter or card, you may like to start with **‘Dear recipient’** or make it more personal by saying **‘Dear friend’**.

Many transplant recipients welcome and appreciate learning about their donor. You may like to tell them a little about your family member, their family, occupation, hobbies and your relationship to them.

When ending your letter, consider signing off with a phrase such as **‘from your donor’s family’** or a similar phrase that reflects yourself such as **‘from your donor’s mother/father/sister/brother/partner’**.

Example

Dear recipient,

I find myself writing to you as I can’t help wondering about how you are going.

I lost my beloved wife nearly 6 months ago, and find great comfort knowing she was able help another human being.

You are part of the legacy my wife left for me and our 2 young children.

I am finally daring to learn more about the recipients of my wife’s life-saving gifts, one of whom is you.

To give another person a second chance at life is the greatest gift.

**Sincerely,
Your donor’s family**

Correspondence between donor families and recipients is anonymous and confidential. Therefore it is important that you do not include your name, address or any other personal contact details. Please do not include potentially identifying details about your family member, such as their exact age, location or the circumstances around their death.

Always remember your DonatLife Family Support Coordinator can help you during this process, and can provide you with updates on the progress of the recipient at any time.

Sending your correspondence

Please send it to the DonatLife agency in your state or territory. It can be written as a physical letter or card and sent via mail, or as an email attachment.

Please do not include a gift or photo, as these cannot be passed on. Just your heartfelt words will mean a lot.

If sending correspondence by mail, please place your card or letter in an unsealed envelope. On a separate piece of paper please write:

- your full name
- your contact information – email or mobile – to allow staff to notify you when your correspondence has been sent
- the donor’s full name, and
- the date of their death.

If sending via email, please include the above information in the main email text and attach the correspondence.

We will use this information to correctly identify the transplant recipients. If you don’t provide this information, we may not be able to make a match.

To ensure confidentiality is maintained, DonatLife staff will open and check your correspondence for identifying information. A copy of your correspondence will be kept on file by DonatLife and the transplant unit.

If your correspondence includes identifying information, DonatLife will contact you to discuss amending your words and can help you with these changes.

DonatLife will send the correspondence to the transplant hospital responsible for the recipient’s care. The responsible transplant coordinator will then send it to the transplant recipient. It may take several weeks for your correspondence to reach the transplant recipient. If you are hoping that your card or letter will reach the transplant recipient by a certain date, please start the process as early as possible.

Sometimes, correspondence may not be sent. The correspondence might have contained information that may publicly identify the donor or DonatLife was unable to identify a match. It may also be because the recipient does not wish to receive correspondence at this time. In this case, it will be kept in the transplant recipient’s file, ready to forward should they change their mind about receiving correspondence.

If your correspondence cannot be sent, a DonatLife staff member will explain why and try to help resolve any issues.

Will I hear from the transplant recipients?

Writing to donor families is a very personal decision.

Please remember that all recipients have experienced a debilitating or life-threatening illness, and many will require ongoing support and care post-transplant. Recipients may experience feelings of anxiety, depression or guilt post-transplant, which could affect their ability to write to their donor’s family. While some recipients may respond immediately, others may find it difficult to respond so they may take longer to write back or they may never write at all. This does not mean that they are not grateful.

If a transplant recipient chooses to write, their letters will be sent to you with the same care taken to maintain confidentiality.

‘Writing the letter was quite challenging, but it gave me a very big sense of relief and realising how thankful I am to my donor’s family because I wouldn’t be here without them today.’