

Writing to your donor's family

As a transplant recipient you may like to write to your donor's family to acknowledge their donation and say thank you. There is no time limit for writing to your donor's family and only you will know when the time is right for you.

Receiving a card or note of thanks can provide your donor's family with a sense of comfort, knowing that the donation has made a difference and helped others.

Similarly, some transplant recipients report that writing to their donor's family assisted them in their recovery post-transplant.

'Receiving the letter of thanks from the single recipient reinforced that our decision was the correct decision.'

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

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.

You can write **anonymous** correspondence to your donor's family via their hospital transplant unit. The transplant coordinator will forward the correspondence to the relevant DonateLife agency, who will then forward it to the donor's family.

This process exists to maintain confidentiality.



If you have any questions about the correspondence process, please contact your relevant transplant coordinator/unit for assistance.

'At times I wish that they would write back but I know that it would be hard for them to do so.'

Organ and Tissue Authority

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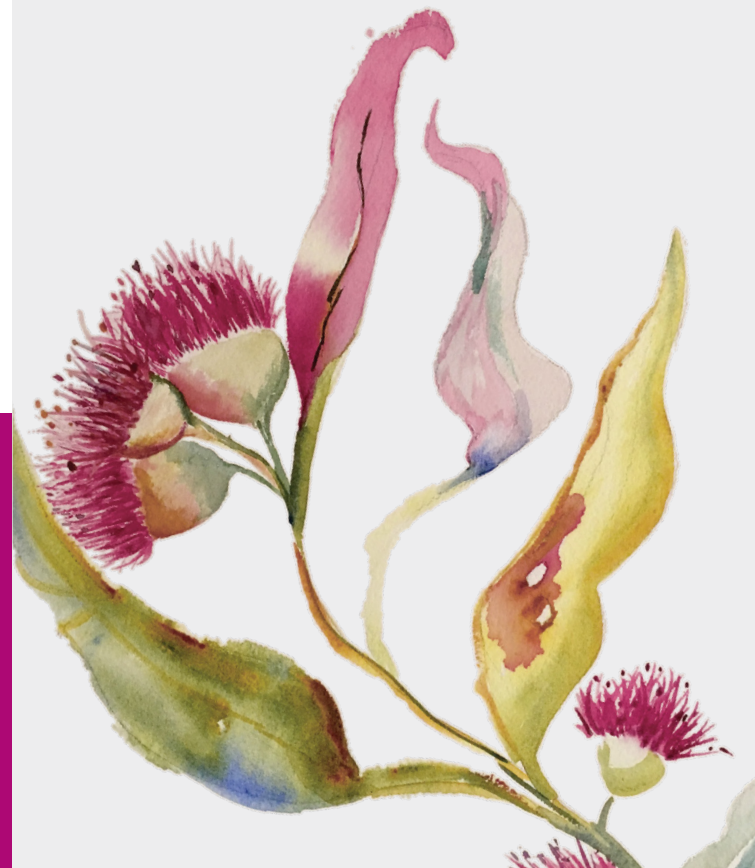
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DonateLife

Correspondence guidelines

Transplant recipients



What to write

Many transplant recipients struggle when writing to their donor's family. Some recipients worry that writing will add to the donor family's grief or that sharing the story of their recovery may be hurtful to the family.

Please know that this is not the case. In our experience, donor families are interested in knowing how their decision has changed someone's life and appreciate hearing from recipients or their families.

'It made a big difference hearing from the recipients and knowing how much better their lives have become through my husband's donation.'

To begin your letter or card, you may like to start with **'Dear donor family'** or make it more personal by saying **'Dear friend'**.

Use simple language and be sensitive to the feelings of your donor's family. You may wish to say a few words about why you needed a transplant, how your life has changed since the transplant, or you may like to simply say 'thank you'. The length and information of the correspondence is up to you.

Example

Dear donor family,

I am the recipient who received the precious gift of life from your loved one.

While I'm blessed with a new life, I am saddened that someone you loved lost theirs.

No words can truly express my feelings for your family.

Thank you for the ultimate gift that has allowed me to live.

From a grateful recipient

Correspondence between recipients and donor families is anonymous and confidential. It is important that you do not include your name, address or any other personal contact details. Please do not include the name of your transplant doctor, the hospital where you had your transplant, or any other potentially identifiable information.

When ending your letter or card, consider signing off with a phrase such as 'from a grateful recipient' or a similar phrase that reflects your feelings.

Some people find it easy to write, but for others writing may take time and it may take several attempts. If you are finding it difficult to write, your transplant team can help you during this process.

'She said, 'I'll never know you but I'll be eternally grateful.' And it's just to see that in words is really, yeah it's awesome.'

Sending your correspondence

You can send your correspondence to your transplant unit, or you can bring it to a follow up appointment with your transplant coordinator. Your correspondence 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 the following:

- your full name
- your contact information – email or mobile – to allow staff to notify you when your correspondence has been sent
- the date of your transplant
- the type of organ received.

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

We will use this information to make sure we can identify your donor's family correctly. If you don't provide this information, we may not be able to match your records with the donor's family.

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

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

The transplant unit will send the correspondence to the relevant DonateLife agency. DonateLife staff will then send it to the donor's family. It may take several weeks for your correspondence to reach the donor family. If you are hoping that your card or letter will reach the donor family 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 recipient or if DonateLife was unable to identify a donor match. It may also be that the donor's family does not wish to receive correspondence at this time. In this case, it will be kept in the donor family's file, ready to forward should they change their mind about receiving correspondence.

If your correspondence cannot be sent, your transplant coordinator will explain why and try to help resolve any issues.

Will I hear from my donor's family?

Everyone has a different way of coping with the loss of someone they love. If you do not receive any correspondence, it may be that writing to you is very difficult for your donor's family to do.

Some donor families have said that writing about their loved one and their decision to donate helps them in their grieving process. Other donor families, even though they are comfortable with their decision to donate, may prefer privacy and choose not to write.

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