A Guide to Connecting with Your Donor’s Family

The Gift of Life
Donor family thoughts ...

“It was very comforting to receive notes from the recipients. If there is some way to let prospective recipients know how helpful those notes are, and to encourage them to write it would be helpful.”

"Receiving a thank you letter from one of Bruce's recipients was most touching! My beloved husband lives on." "The letter I received from the recipient. Mark really helped this person and brought tears to my eyes how grateful she was."

“The card from Robin the recipient of my mom's donation meant a lot knowing that my mom could help someone after her death, as she did before. I now know that "Mah" is with us in more ways than I thought possible.”

“I was glad to get a letter from one of the recipients. At the time it was too soon to write back.”

“The letter I received from a recipient made me feel so sure about my husband's donation.”
Recipient thoughts ...

“Writing provides an opportunity to share your appreciation.”

"Share your life and how it has turned around since receiving your transplant.”

“Place yourself in a donor families shoes—would you like to know how your recipients loved one’s are doing?”

“You do not need to wait one year before writing to a donor’s family. Write as soon as you feel ready.”

“Don’t wait for the ‘perfect time’ to write—do it now.”

“Your letter or card may help your donor’s family with their grief—often hearing how their loved one’s gift has improved your life brings a sense of comfort and solace.”

“A simple THANK YOU goes a long way.”
Dear Donor Family,

We have tried to write this letter so many times, the right words never came. We could never figure out how to say thank you for the gift of life you gave to our son. We think of you often and are forever grateful.

Let me start by saying that I'm sorry it has taken so long to write this letter, but I've started it so many times in my head and it just never sounds right. There are no words that I can say that will take away your loss. I have no way of knowing how you feel. I hope that your family has found peace, and if not yet, then soon, you will find joy again. I would like to tell you what you have given to me and my family, though, and thank you for that gift. We will always cherish your sacrifice as it has given us back our little girl.

It is with the most amount of gratitude and uncertainty that I write this. We have the life of our son to celebrate, yet you lost a life and we also acknowledge your great loss. Our son was losing energy and getting sicker – now thanks to his donor heart, he is living a wonderful life! He grew three sizes and is starting to experience activities he has never been able to do. We are so thankful for this. Our son now thrives because of your kindness. We are eternally grateful!

Before the transplant, we would often think, "how can she be so sick, when she seems so good". She would smile a lot and developmentally was doing so well. But seeing her after the transplant, she must have been feeling awfully sick and just surviving because she truly is a different baby. She has a laugh that comes from her toes and she laughs constantly, she is on the move non-stop, walking, dancing and harassing her big brother, she eats with abandon and is keeping all those calories to herself and it shows! No more thin arms and legs, she is chubby!

She is a miracle, you are a miracle and we are forever thankful.
Communicating with Your Child’s Donor Family

**Should you thank the family of the donor who made your child’s transplant possible?**

New England Donor Services (NEDS) works closely with the families who compassionately enable organ and tissue donation to occur after the death of a loved one. It may help you to know that time and again families express appreciation for the letters they receive from recipients and their families.

A simple thank you note or card from your family can bring great comfort to a grieving donor family. Your words can help them to know that their loved one’s gift has made a difference and is appreciated.

Children’s Hospital staff work in conjunction with NEDS to facilitate written correspondence between transplant recipients and the donor families. All communication is completely anonymous and identities are kept confidential.

**If you wish to write to your donor’s family:**

- Please address your letter “Dear Donor Family.”
- Identify your child by his/her first name only, and/or by the organ(s) or tissue(s) he/she received.
- Place your card or letter in an unsealed envelope.
- On a separate sheet of paper, please write your child’s full name, transplant hospital, and the date of transplant. This information will not be forwarded to the donor family. Mail or give both pieces to your transplant social worker.

Your card or letter will be reviewed by your transplant social worker and NEOB to ensure confidentiality (information that may breach confidentiality may be blackened out) and will then be forwarded to the New England Donor Services. Since your card or letter must be mailed to New England Donor Services and then forwarded, it may take a few weeks for the donor family to receive your letter. This is important to note if you want to send a card or letter in time for a specific holiday or anniversary date.

**Information you may want to include:**

**About your child:**

- Share information about the family (parents, siblings, grandparents).
- Hobbies or interests – things that your child enjoys doing.
- Since the religion of the donor’s family is unknown, please consider this when making religious comments.
**About the transplant experience:**

- Use simple language in describing the condition that led you to your child needing a transplant.
- Explain how the transplant has improved or changed your child’s life.

**About what has happened in your life since your transplant?**

- Can your child take part in activities now that they couldn’t have before the transplant (i.e. Sports, extracurricular, etc.)
- Has your child celebrated another birthday, holiday, etc.?
- Have your child returned to school or pursued a new venture?
- What are you and/or your child looking forward to in the future because of this “Gift of Life?”

**Closing your card or letter:**

- Sign first name(s) only and the organ(s) and/or tissue(s) your child received.
- Do not reveal last name, address, city, phone number, email address or transplant center in your card or letter.

**Can you expect to hear from the donor family?**

You may or may not hear from the donor family. Like you, their decision to write is a very personal one as well. Some families have said that writing about their loved one and the decision to donate helps them through the grieving process. Others are simply grateful to know that the recipients are doing well and choose to maintain their privacy.

**Can you meet your donor’s family?**

New England Donor Services is often asked if individuals can meet their donor family. The decision to donate is confidential, and New England Donor Services is dedicated to keeping that confidence. At the time of donation, the anonymity of the process is explained and the chance to meet recipients is not promised. If, after significant communication, the shared desire of both the donor family and recipient is to meet, New England Donor Services helps facilitate that process.

Several steps must be met for donor families and recipients to meet:

- Significant independent written communication between both parties (notes, letters, or cards).
- Written notice has been given to an Aftercare Coordinator at New England Donor Services stating that you want to meet the donor family.
- Donor family and recipients agree that they are open to the request.
- The donor family and recipient must both sign a general release of confidentiality and return it to New England Donor Services.

If you have more questions about having contact with your donor family, please feel free to call an Aftercare Coordinator at NEDS at 781-373-7945.
Correspondence & Social Media
Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

The Aftercare Department at New England Donor Services believes letters between donor families and recipients can be very meaningful. We recognize you may want to share them with those closest to you. In doing so, we ask you to be considerate of the author of the letter and to NOT share the correspondence on social media of any kind without the permission from the author. Please keep in mind:

- It is often emotionally difficult to write a letter about a loved one who has passed away or to share the many mixed emotions a recipient may feel. These letters are often tender expressions of deeply personal experiences.
- The author trusts that their personal messages are safe with those for whom they are intended.
- Most letters that are written are intended to be anonymous; once they are put on social media it is less likely that they will remain so.

Thank you for your consideration of the impact that social media can have on the donation experience. Our hope is to increase the opportunity for correspondence while maintaining the rights of each family.

Please contact us at: (781)373-7945 or aftercare5@neds.org with any correspondence questions you may have, and we will be happy to assist you.
New England Donor Memorial

The “Young Tree of Life” represents new and renewed life. Emerging from the tree stump, it shows a richness of fresh growth—out of death comes the gift of life. The donor is reborn in the life of the recipient.

The tree stump, although it is depicted with many rings, is a life cut short. But it has the chance to foster the growth of these young leaves. Each leaf is unique to embody the variety of situations and lives that are affected. If you look closely, you can see oak, maple, birch and many other shapes taken from nature and the imagination.

The rich bronze patina’s subtle reds and greens have the effect of bark, wood, and foliage—a physical manifestation of the richness of life made possible because of the generosity of donors.

Resting “Butterflies of Rebirth” have nestled in the leaves, and in their metamorphosis, they also become a symbol of rebirth. They are gilded a shiny silver tone and lend an association to a brand-new existence.

Though “The Tree of Life” has deep symbolism, its design is not complex. The natural imagery is intended to be simple and uplifting to those who visit.

The memorial is now a place to come and reflect for both the donor families, recipients and all others affected positively by the mission of the New England Donor Services.

We encourage you to visit the memorial at 
New England Donor Services
60 First Avenue, Waltham, MA 02451