

The following is part of an article written by Curry - Some very good points, please read.

Making Contact After the Search

## **Making Contact After the Search By Curry Wolfe-1997**

When the time to make connect finally arrives, everyone is eager to move forward. Contact should be made when you are ready. Don't let others force or influence when you make contact! There are some basic things to remember about reaching out to someone that doesn't know that they have been the main focus of your life for some time.

Contact may be the most difficult part of the search process. It becomes important to determine if the letter or the phone call is going to be your mode of contact. Many factors play in this decision. The most important thing to remember is - **CONTACT IS THE FIRST IMPRESSION MADE AFTER MANY YEARS OF SEPARATION!** It is time to put your best foot forward.

How to chose between letter or phone?-Selecting the phone call or the letter depends on the information you have been able to gain during your search. You may have a full address and phone number. Or you may just have the address or phone number. It is not always necessary to obtain all information, if you are certain that the information you do have is accurate.

Many searching want to have all information about the family member before contact. That is not necessary. Learning about your family member can come after your contact has been made. Over investigation may be viewed by the receiver as an invasion of privacy!

Once you are sure that you have the correct information, it is important to determine your contact method. You can be thinking about this during the search process. This all depends on YOU! It is time to look deep inside yourself and ask how you would like to be contacted if the shoe was on the other foot.

Ask yourself if you would like to be contacted by a simple letter. Or would you prefer to receive a phone call. You know if you are a letter person. You know if you are a phone person. There is a good chance that your family member may have similar feelings as you. There are many different views on the phone call vs. the letter contact. There are not any right or wrong answers to this question. As stated above, it is important for you to determine what is the best form for you to follow.

The Phone Call-The phone call is the direct way of reaching the person and having an instant answer to your important questions. It allows you to hear the receiver's voice. You get at true sense of how they feel about being contacted. When making the phone call you are able to make sure you are speaking to the right person and no one else can intercept the call.

Simple suggestions to prepare for the call:

1. Make your call at a reasonable time. Don't call early in the morning or late at night. Always be aware of time zone differences. It is not considered proper to call before 9:00 a.m. or after 9:00

p.m. It is not the best idea to call anyone at work. It may be against company policy to receive personal calls or it could disrupt their work day.

2. It is not advised to call during the dinner hour. We know that the dinner-hour is not the same in all homes. If you know there are children within the home, it is likely that there will be dinner preparation and family time going on anywhere between 5:00 thru 8:00 p.m.

3. It is not appropriate to call on a holiday. Many searching want to attach the contact with a birthday or a holiday. This is not always appropriate. Making the holiday an important part of your contact may set you up for hurt feelings and disappointment.

4. Have someone with you when you make the call. Many times the callers have actually lost the ability to speak due to total excitement. It is a good idea to have someone there to step in, if necessary. It is nice to have someone with you after you get off the phone for sharing.

5. Record the call if you can. Many answer machines have 2-way calling which should allow you to record the call. Have several tapes handy in case your call is lengthy! The excitement level is so high when making the call, many don't remember much of the call until days later.

6. Make sure that you have time for a lengthy call. You don't want to feel rushed. Make sure that children are cared for in another room or away from your home. This is not the time for that kind of interruption!

7. If you can use the \*70 feature of blocking any incoming calls, it is best to do that before dialing. You don't want to be interrupted by other calls at this time. If you don't know about \*70, call your local phone company and inquire if this feature is available to you. If you are not able to block call-waiting-DON'T ANSWER CALLS COMING IN. IF IT IS IMPORTANT THE PERSON WILL CALL BACK. This is not the time to be interrupted by a busy phone!

8. Be prepared when making the phone call. Have some questions written down ahead of time so that you will be able to gain the specific information you seek. Write your questions on lined paper and leave blanks for taking notes. These may be very important to you at a later time. You may wish to rehearse your call with someone, so that you know what you will be saying in the beginning of the call.

9. Don't leave a contact message on an answer machine. This contact is far too important to leave on a machine! If you have tried to reach the person several times, and there is never an answer, try calling at a different time. They may work unusual hours. If you are calling during a holiday or vacation time, keep in mind they may be away.

10. When you have reached the correct person-speak clearly and slowly, but not unnatural. Ask if they have time to talk privately, because you have something you would like to discuss with them of a personal nature. They will most likely ask who you are at this point. Give them your name and ask that they write it down with your phone number, in case, you get disconnected for any reason.

Then it will be time to start into why you are calling. It can be very simple by stating the birth date involved with your search and the location of the birth. If this doesn't get an instant response, then you will have to mention adoption. From this point on, the conversation will take on a life of it's own. If you become overly excited, take a deep breath. This will calm you down and allow the receiver to respond.

Keep in mind that this is a shock to the other person, even if they are thrilled that you have made contact. Their mind may be working a mile a minute trying to determine how they are going to deal with this in their life. There may be many pauses in their conversation. You, as the caller, will have to allow them time to process and keep the conversation going. Be prepared!

If the receiver denies the relationship, have some prepared points of fact available in your notes to ask them. But don't hit them with a barrage of questions. This may frighten them and put an end to the conversation.

If the receiver becomes upset and doesn't wish to continue the call. Understand that they may need some time to think things over. Offer to contact them at another time. Or offer that they call you back. It is not good to push the issue if the receiver is not able to continue with this call. Kindness and understanding is the word of the day!

Never make promises that you cannot keep. If the receiver is upset and doesn't want you to contact again. Don't make that promise! So many times the caller makes promises that they know in their heart will not be kept. Just be understanding and end the conversation.

Of course, you wish that your contact will be well received. You should be prepared for the possibility of a negative reaction. This doesn't mean that there will not be a relationship. It may only mean that the receiver needs time to share this with family or someone close to them.. You have had the time to process your feelings during the search. Plus you have been able to understand the reason for the search and contact. Now, you may have to give some needed time to the receiver. It is hard to be patient, when you are so excited and are wishing for an immediate and open acceptance. Patience is the key!

In all cases, it is appropriate to follow up the phone call with a letter and pictures. Do this very soon. If you have received a less than positive response, sending a kind and tender letter of reassurance with pictures may make all of the difference in the world.

Using an Intermediary-Many searchers and organizations encourage the use of an intermediary person for contact. Don't feel pressured into using this form of contact, if you are not comfortable with it. There is always the chance that a well intended person could jeopardize your contact. You will never know for sure if the contact goes poorly.

If you wish to use an intermediary, make sure they have experience in making contact. They should be totally familiar with your search. And if at all possible, you should be there when the call is made. All of the suggestions about the phone call apply to the intermediary call. Many

states now have Intermediary Systems in place for the search and contact. In those states, you will need to follow the rules that apply.

The Letter-The letter is a very nice way of reaching out after many years of separation. It allows the receiver to read the letter over and over. It becomes a keepsake forever.

The letter does take time for a reply. It is not as instant as the phone call. But it may be the best way of reaching out if you are not a phone person. It maybe the only method available if you have not been able to obtain an accurate phone number (more and more people are requesting non-published phone numbers, this makes the letter your only option).

Many are concerned that the letter may fall into the wrong hands. In most case, this doesn't happen. Make sure you address the letter correctly. It is not advisable to send the letter by registered or certified mail. This only brings attention to the letter and may cause problems within the household. It seems that many times anyone can sign for a registered letter, so there is not really a guarantee the person it was addressed to got it!

Go greeting card shopping. There are many lovely blank cards available that would be very appropriate for a first contact. You may even find a card that does state your feelings exactly. Take some time and you will find something that is right for you. If your contact is in a card, it will probably not draw any undo attention within the household.

Writing the Letter-Even if you end making a phone call, it is a good exercise to write a letter to clarify your thoughts and get ready for the contact.

Writing the letter doesn't need to be an overwhelming task. The letter should be short and simple. Always keep in mind that this is your first contact in many years. It is not the time to express sorrows and great needs. It is a simple contact asking for communication.

The letter doesn't need to be lengthy. It can be as short as 5 paragraphs! The following is a simple listing of the paragraphs and the kind of information you may wish to express in your first contact.

1. Introduce yourself in the first paragraph. State your name and the connection date of birth. Offer the city and state. Then state your triad position in relationship to them.
2. The second paragraph is a good place to say why you have written. Keep this simple! It is not the time to express deep pain, hurt or unfortunate circumstances pertaining to your adoption experience. Simply state that you wish to share medical and heritage information or to gain this information. You may wish to state that you have always wanted to learn more about the other person.
3. In this paragraph you can state some data about yourself. It is not necessary to tell your life story. That will come after you have received a reply. You may wish to share your education, family structure and interests.

4. This is the paragraph where you state what you want. You may wish to receive a letter or phone reply. You may want to state that this letter may be shared with the adoptive or birth families. If pictures are very important to you, state that here. You may want to ask for letters, phone conversations or a possible meeting. Keep in mind not to ask for too much in the beginning. Your contact may be overwhelming, be understanding that asking too many questions may offend or confuse the receiver. (For adoptees-this is not the place to ask who your birthfather is!)

5. The closing paragraph should state how they can reach you. If a collect call is acceptable, state that. Make sure you offer the best times to reach you. This is very important for those that have odd work hours. Or if you are not comfortable with the phone at this time, ask that they write you back. Always ask for a note of acknowledgment. This will inform the receiver that you are waiting for a reply.

6. Selection of a closing word or phrase is difficult for many. Select a word that you feel comfortable writing: Always, Fondly, Love, Sincerely, Yours, etc. You will need to find the word that fits you best.

You may wish to include a picture or two in your letter. A picture is worth a thousand words. Of course, only send pictures that are flattering!

It is not possible to sit down once and write the perfect letter. Plan on writing several drafts before formulating your final letter. Take out some lined paper (lines help keep your thoughts in order.) Write a letter. Then put it away. Then, write another letter. Write as many as you need. Then take out all of your letters and mark the parts you like the best.

With those marked portions, write a new letter. This way you will be able to express yourself well. Once you have come up with the letter you feel shares your feelings and wishes, have someone else read your letter-a friend, spouse, your searcher or group leader. Accept their remarks and suggestions on if you agree with them. If you are not a great speller or your grammar is not the best, make sure you have someone review your letter for spelling and grammar. You would hate to find that the person you are writing to is a English teacher!

Then make a final draft of your letter. Reread your letter and decide if it expresses your feelings and needs for this first contact. Write your letter in the card you have purchased or write it on separate paper to be inserted in the card. If your handwriting is not readable, it is appropriate to type your letter. But state this is why it is typed. Otherwise, always hand write your letter. It is more personal. Address the envelope and get it ready to mail.

If you are not ready to send the letter, put it out where you can see it daily. Ask yourself when you see it, if this is the day to mail it? You will know in your heart the right day! Most like to take the letter to the post office and drop it into the slot to guarantee that it is mailed.

Now, you will have to wait for the letter to be delivered and processed by the receiver. This does take time. You may become concerned that you didn't hear back the day the letter should have been received. Don't let this get you down. Remember how long it took you to write the letter. It may take the receiver that much and more time to process and reply. Or they may just pick up the phone.

Waiting for a Reply-What to do if you have not heard back in a couple weeks? Wait at least two more weeks! The letter is a slower way of receiving a response. But it does offer the receiver time to process and reply. The receiver is not aware that you are sitting on the edge of your seat and that you have developed a close relationship with your postal carrier as you wait at the mailbox daily! All they know is that they need to reply, but the sense of urgency may not be there.

If you have not received a reply in 4-6 weeks, you may wish to place a phone call. Or simply write a new note stating that their reply is of great importance to you. You should not have to totally rewrite the letter.

Other Suggestions-Knocking on the door is NOT acceptable. It has been done with great success, but by confronting someone without warning may start the reunion off on the wrong footing. This action may take years to recapture.

Many times a drive-by may be possible. If you are able to do this-don't stop and stare. Don't bring attention to yourself. That last thing you want is to have a neighbor calling the police because they have an active Neighborhood Watch program in effect!

Always keep in mind that you are looking into the lives of others that are not aware of your search. Be respectful on all accounts. It will pay off.

Curry Wolfe