

Letter Writing Ideas

Letter writing is one of the most important aspects of the sponsor-child relationship, because in a relationship, communication matters. Letters are the heart and soul of this ministry.

For many of us, deciding what to write to our sponsored children is sometimes more difficult than writing itself, and the letters we exchange are the closest we'll ever come to our sponsored children.

Even though we understand the importance of our letters, it still can be difficult to find the time to write a letter or know how to go about writing a letter to our sponsored child.

To help get you started, or to keep you motivated and writing regularly, we offer you this page of letter-writing ideas, tips and letter-writing prompts from our staff, other sponsors and even the children themselves. We hope you find the ideas helpful.

Tips for Writing Your Child

Your Letters don't have to be Long

In fact, we request that you keep your letter's length to one page of printing or double-spaced type. Shorter letters take less time to translate, which helps your message reach your sponsored child more quickly.

You are welcome to write longer letters, but you shouldn't feel obligated to do so. However much you choose to write will be valued by your sponsored child.

You can send us an email with your letter and some pictures or you can use the form listed in the resources section of this group. Write a few words, upload some photos, and you're done. It's a five-minute investment your child will never forget.

Write about topics your sponsored child is probably familiar with.

Here are some topics that work well:

- Describe your family. Share everything you are comfortable sharing that is age appropriate for your sponsored child.
Talk about your children, parents, cousins, siblings, pets. etc. Tell stories about family members and friends, and tell your sponsored child why you're thankful for them.
Talk about your favorite memories. Talk about your childhood. Share funny stories (remember that time Fido ate the Thanksgiving turkey right off the table when the

family wasn't looking?!).

Be sure to include photos of everyone. Sponsored children love to receive pictures of their sponsors' families.

- Discuss your favorite pastimes. Explain what you did on vacation. Talk about the hobbies or sports you enjoy.
- A description of your work, church or school would be of interest to your sponsored child. Work is an especially appropriate topic for older children. As you want to know what your sponsored child is learning at school, your child wants to know what you are learning at school or what your job is like. You might even find out you share a common interest.
- Talk about your relationship with Jesus Christ. Your words can help your sponsored child understand that God is real. As you share prayer requests and remind your child that you are praying for him or her, share favorite Bible verses, and talk about your own faith journey, this will help shape your child's journey as well.
- Explain customs for special holidays. Tell your sponsored child how you celebrate Christmas or why Easter is such a big deal to your family. Share Fourth of July memories and write about the history of the holiday. Just as you are interested to know about your child and family, your child is delighted to hear details from you. Be careful not to talk too much about gifts, though, as children in poverty rarely receive gifts.
- Provide a general description of the area where you live (no specific addresses, please). Share educational and fun information. Be descriptive and send photos if you have some.
- Encourage your sponsored child in any success or milestone he or she has achieved. It may seem like you aren't doing much, but you are! Your words of encouragement provide hope and fill your sponsored child with love.
- Include some artwork.

Make sure you have your child's last letter on hand when you write a new one. Your child may ask you questions that you can use as a starting point for your letter.

Ask Questions

Your questions will tell your sponsored child that you want to know him or her.

- Do a bit of research about Uganda, and ask him about any upcoming national holidays.

- Ask about church and her favorite Bible stories.
- Ask about school. What are your sponsored child's favorite subjects in school? Who are your child's teachers? Find ways to encourage your child's strengths by asking questions about the things he or she is good at.
- If you live somewhere where there are seasons, send photos with short descriptions. Most of the world doesn't have multiple seasons.
- Ask your sponsored children about their friends. Ask their friends' names, and what they like to do with their friends for fun. What sports and games does your sponsored child play?

Avoid these topics.

The list above is a good starting point for exploring together what you have in common. There are, however, a few things that might make your sponsored child feel uncomfortable or create expectations that can't be met. These include:

- Elaborating on your material possessions (for example, the size of your home or kind of car you drive). This will only accentuate the difference between you and your child.
- Suggesting that your sponsored child visit the United States.
- Using slang or colloquialisms that would be difficult to translate or understand.
- Asking what your sponsored child would like as a gift from you. In many countries we serve, such a question puts a child in a very awkward social position.

Allow your sponsored child the appropriate time to develop letter-writing skills.

Children love to receive letters, but they may find it very difficult to write them. Younger children, children who start late in school, and children in remote locations will have the most difficulty writing letters. We are working so you'll receive about two to three letters from your sponsored child, and your sponsored child will write those letters himself if he is able. Otherwise, center staff or teachers will assist your sponsored child in writing or you may receive just pictures and drawings.

In the learning process, some centers teach children to copy text from the board or use a "fill-in-the-blank" format to help them develop their writing skills. (Most children need some assistance until they reach the fourth grade; some children with disabilities need assistance throughout their time as sponsored children.)

This is a new addition to our Uganda Sponsorship so it may take some time to work out every detail as we strive to improve communication between the sponsors and the children. Thank you again for participating in this life changing ministry here at TSF.