



Imani Milele Children Inc.

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SPONSOR'S LETTER WRITING GUIDE:

Be encouraging! And please be sensitive to the child's economic situation. Avoid discussing the material aspects of your life, and please do not include your address, phone number, or email.

- Describe your family (e.g., where they live, what they look like, their interests, type of work they do, pets, etc.).
- Include a small paper gift — photos, postcards, bookmarks, greeting cards, etc.
- Explain special holidays and family customs.
- Talk about important events — weddings, graduation, trips, new jobs, holidays, etc.
- Mark your calendar and send a card to celebrate a holiday or festival that is important to your child. (Christmas, Easter and New Year's) or Birthday if known.
- Share your dreams and the daily activities of your life.
- Write about the terrain/climate/people where you live.
- Reminisce about your childhood - discuss a person who influenced you. Talk about an important life lesson you learned, something you learned in school, or something you're learning now.
- Describe how you overcame a challenge or met a goal.
- Share your favorite Bible stories and verses. Remind your child that you pray for him or her regularly. Mention specific items your child has mentioned in his or her letters.
- Explain how your family includes your sponsored child in daily life (e.g., praying for him or her or displaying his or her photo in your home).
- Share your prayer requests and praise reports.
- Express what a privilege it is to be your child's sponsor.
- Affirm that God loves him or her and has a great plan for his or her life.
- Encourage your child to write back and/or draw pictures for you.

WHAT TOPICS SHOULD I AVOID?

- Discussing the material aspects of your life (e.g., the size of your home or the kind of car you drive).

- Sending photos that show your possessions.
- Sharing your home address, e-mail address or telephone numbers.
- Using colloquialisms and slang.
- Suggesting your child come for a visit or that you'll send a particular gift.

HOW DO I CONVEY PERSONAL ISSUES LIKE DEATH AND DIVORCE TO MY SPONSORED CHILD?

Honesty and openness invite a child to a deeper, more personal relationship with you. Euphemisms, such as "passed away" in reference to a death, don't always convey the message you intend.

When discussing personal issues such as death and divorce, the best approach is to state the fact — "My mother died" or "Susan and I are getting divorced" — rather than explaining the details or using indirect expressions.

Because your child's perspective is different from yours, based on his or her culture, age and personal experiences, the child might not ask additional questions.

HOW DO I ASK PERSONAL OR SENSITIVE QUESTIONS, LIKE THOSE RELATED TO HEALTH, WITHOUT OFFENDING THE CHILD OR HIS OR HER FAMILY?

Personal issues require great sensitivity, particularly when communicating through letters and across cultures, and when the questions deal with health matters, which can often carry strong cultural stigmas.

Whether or not you should ask a particular question depends on your relationship with the child and the nature of the question. If you are uncertain, please consider delaying the question until you have built a stronger relationship with the child or have a better understanding of the culture.

Invite your child into a deeply personal relationship by modeling trust and honesty. Share with your child first. Allow him or her to see your courage and to take the first step. Remember you are a mentor. Show your child you care by being patient, open, inviting and, most important, involved.

HOW DO I TELL MY CHILD THAT I CANNOT CONTINUE TO SPONSOR HIM OR HER?

Speak to your child honestly and clearly. It is not necessary to go into detail about why you cannot continue the sponsorship. Instead, focus on the positive aspects of the relationship. For example, you may consider talking about:

- What you enjoyed most about the relationship.
- How you grew stronger in your faith or as a person.
- What you learned from your child — about his or her country, culture or even about yourself.
- How proud you are of him or her.
- That you will continue praying for him or her.

CAN I WRITE DIRECTLY TO MY CHILD?

Our experience has shown that routing letters through the Imani Milele Children system is the most efficient way to handle correspondence.

- It allows us to secure the appropriate translation service you and your child need for effective communication.
- It allows us to obtain the quickest delivery method, which for children in remote or highly transient areas is hand-delivery.
- It allows us to protect your privacy.
- It allows us to protect the children.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I WRITE?

You may write to your sponsored child as often as you like. We encourage you to write at least 3 times a year, even if it's just a brief note or card. In fact, short, simple letters help with translation and are preferred because your child receives your letters sooner.

CAN I SEND PHOTOGRAPHS TO MY CHILD?

Certainly! We recommend you send a picture of yourself in the first letter and lots of pictures after that. You can send landscape photos, artistic pictures, pictures of your pets, the town you live in, your family and friends, etc.

Please avoid sending pictures that may accentuate the economic differences between you and your child (e.g., homes, cars, etc.). Be aware of what is in the photo's background. If you happen to send a photo that our staff considers inappropriate, we will return it to you.

Please remember to include your sponsored child's name and your name on each item you send.

DO I HAVE TO SEND A PHOTOGRAPH TO MY SPONSORED CHILD?

No. But since photographs are not as common in the developing world as they are in the United States, they are particularly valued. A photograph of you, the caring person from another part of the world, adds another dimension to your relationship; it personalizes your correspondence and helps deepen the connection the child makes.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING THE CHANCE THAT MY QUESTIONS GET ANSWERED?

To help the translators recognize that you expect an answer to the questions:

- Number your questions (1, 2, 3).
- Highlight the questions.

- Keep the questions brief and to the point.

WHY CAN'T I INCLUDE MY ADDRESS, E-MAIL ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER IN MY LETTER?

Your cooperation by not including this type of information within the letter allows us to protect your privacy.

I'M WRITING AS PART OF A GROUP. CAN GROUP MEMBERS TAKE TURNS WRITING LETTERS?

Your group can write the letter together, or can take turns writing, but it's best to have the same person consistently sign each letter. It's far less confusing for a child to talk with one person than to a group of people.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM THE LETTERS I RECEIVE?

Please do not expect a pen-pal relationship. Your child is living and learning under circumstances much different from those in the United States. Sometimes letters are written as part of a class exercise and may seem a little impersonal or formal. And cultural differences may cause your child's letters to seem excessively pious or grateful.

Your sponsorship is an opportunity to mentor your child. As your relationship slowly develops, your consistent presence fosters trust and tells your child "I care about you and want to be a part of your life." Your relationship should improve over time, as your child matures and learns to write more personal letters.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR MY CHILD TO RECEIVE MY LETTER?

Correspondence between you and your child is not "overnight mail," but it is efficient — given the remote areas many of the children live in. Delivery may take a few weeks, but we are committed to a quick turn-around time.

WHY DO MY CHILD'S LETTERS SEEM IMPERSONAL?

Communicating between cultures is difficult; this is especially true with written communication. It becomes even more apparent when the written communication is between an adult and a child in different cultures.

Many children in developing countries can't imagine that anyone would be interested in the details of their lives (e.g., how tall they are or how much they weigh). They may not think the sponsor really wants to know, or it may be considered vain to discuss personal things.

A child may be reluctant to open up because sharing is emotionally risky or the child may fear a cultural stigma or repercussions. However, children are encouraged to discuss their faith and to share what is happening in their lives and the lives of their families.

Developing trust in a relationship is difficult enough without having to cross cultural, geographic and age boundaries. Your consistent letters and your messages of love and support are invaluable and immeasurable. Your words of encouragement give inspiration and hope to a soul living with despair and rejection. As a mentor, your letters plant seeds that will bear fruit in your child's life and in the lives of your child's family and friends.

WHY DOESN'T MY CHILD ANSWER MY QUESTIONS?

Many children in the developing world don't immediately grasp the concept of "conversations" by mail and must be trained to develop the skill. Your love, understanding and encouragement should help you see progress over time as the child's writing skills mature.

Often, when a child receives a letter from his sponsor, he takes it home to show his family and then saves it in a "special place." The staff schedule a time for children to write letters to their sponsors and the children may not have the last letters with them and may not be able to remember the questions that were asked.

Sometimes a teacher will sit down with a younger child and write on the child's behalf. Questions can sometimes be overlooked or forgotten because of this.

WHY IS MY CHILD'S NAME SPELLED IN DIFFERENT WAYS?

When children are registered, they are often too young to spell their own names. A guardian, who is often illiterate, will spell the name for the child, as best as they can. In time, the spelling may be determined to be incorrect because a family member learned how to spell it correctly or the child's birth certificate has been found (if there is one).

Additionally, in many cultures there is more than one correct way to spell a name; therefore, a child's case study may give different spellings each time it is processed.

WHY WAS MY LETTER NOT DELIVERED?

We reserve the right to decline to forward any letters and materials that we view as incompatible with our approach or might be considered inappropriate in the child's culture.

- Threaten the safety of the child in any way.
- Depict or describe the use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, unlawful drugs or materials or activities that we regard as dangerous.
- Depict persons dressed in immodest clothing.