



# Children of the Nations International (COTNI) Partner Correspondence Policy

## General Correspondence

We want you to have a meaningful and healthy relationship with your sponsored child! While there are great benefits to living in a digitally-connected world, we trust you understand how increased access can be harmful and make it difficult to protect children. Children of the Nations cares for vulnerable and traumatized children – it is important we protect the privacy and security of these children who may be delayed in developing good boundaries, both socially and emotionally.

In order to best protect you and your sponsored child, **we ask that you do not correspond in private\* with your sponsored child via email, phone, or social media**. Public\* correspondence is encouraged only in the context of a healthy relationship that has been developed over a period of time.

Your privacy and security are very important to us, so we also discourage children in our sponsorship program from contacting partners outside of COTNI monitored communication.

**Here are a few reasons communication outside of COTNI-monitored correspondence is not in the best interest of partners (you) and the children in our care:**

- Unfortunately, some partners may interact with children in an unhealthy way. Examples include: making false promises, posting provocative pictures, asking questions about past traumatic experiences, or undermining the authority of our in-country staff by acting like a child's parent.
- Unmonitored communication creates a temptation for children to ask for inappropriate things such as money, resources, or gifts. While these may seem like harmless, even justified requests, we do not want children to see partners as a means to an end.
- It is not uncommon for individuals who know a sponsored child to take advantage of their situation by impersonating the child and using their account to ask for money. If money is not sent, the child may be threatened.
- When communicating cross-culturally, it is easy to mistakenly say or post something inappropriate or offensive due to cultural differences.

COTNI is not liable for any unmonitored communication between children and partners.

**\*Private Correspondence:** Communication between two individuals where the communication cannot be viewed by other people. Examples: Emails between two individuals only, private messages on Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram messages between two individuals only.

**\*Public Communication:** Communication between one or more individuals where the communication can be viewed by other people. Examples: Accepting a friend request on Facebook, writing on an individual's Facebook wall, making a comment on an Instagram photo.



## **Letter Writing**

Children of the Nations has established specific letter-writing guidelines to protect our children and allow for healthy relationship building between sponsors and children. Sponsors may only write to the child/children they sponsor – we do not facilitate letter writing to other children in our program.

All mail must be screened at our COTN-International office located in the USA. This includes reading all letters— both coming from and going to children.

Mail your letters to:  
P.O. Box 3970  
Silverdale, WA 98383

Include your name as well as your sponsored child's name and reference number on the letter so we can ensure it reaches your sponsored child.

**If you are writing to a child in the Dominican Republic or Haiti, please leave room in your letter for translation.**

### ***Things we encourage:***

- Write plainly and clearly, or type your letters. Cursive can be difficult for the children to read.
- Write about things that your sponsored child will understand, like family, pets, work, church, hobbies, tastes in food, music, and activities.
- Encourage your child's learning and relationship with the Lord.
- Send photos! Dress standards may be different in your child's country, so please send pictures where everyone is dressed modestly.
- You may include a single sheet of stickers no larger than 5 x 9 inches.

### ***Things to avoid:***

- Signing your name "Mom" or "Dad." Terms such as "Auntie" or "Uncle" are permitted as they are cultural signs of respect.
- Sharing any contact information (address, email, phone number, Facebook page, etc.).
- Asking your child if there is anything they need or desire.
- Discussing politics or governmental issues. In many of the countries COTN serves, families have very strong views regarding politics.
- Discussing money & possessions, these things may cause your child to feel jealous or ashamed.
- Items that can't be sent include any flat items other than a letter (includes greeting cards), photos, and a single sheet of stickers.
- Sending letters and photos **greater than 6 x 9 inches** in size and **over 1 ounce** in weight.
- Writing to your sponsored child **more** than once a month.

Any mentions within a letter that include personal contact information, photos, or content not consistent with COTNI's Child Protection Policy or Letter Writing Guidelines may not be sent to children.



## **Gift Giving**

We ask that partners **do not mail or bring gifts for COTN children** when they travel on a Venture team (see reasons gift giving is not permitted below).

Partners may give in the following ways to benefit COTN children (donations may not be designated for specific children) including:

- Giving top priority needed items for children found at [cotni.org/for-existing-sponsors](https://cotni.org/for-existing-sponsors).
- Giving books through COTN's Amazon wish list to benefit school libraries. A link to this wish list can be found at [cotni.org/for-existing-sponsors](https://cotni.org/for-existing-sponsors).
- Purchasing a gift through COTN's online gift catalog. Items can be found at [cotni.org/gifts](https://cotni.org/gifts).
- Sending annual Christmas and Easter cards and participating in specific giving opportunities during these times.

Partners who sponsor children **may send photos and single sheets of stickers** to their sponsored children, to be included in letters (see letter writing guidelines outlined above).

Understanding relationships and experiences are highly valued in the countries where COTN works, COTN will arrange **"Special Experiences"** for sponsors to enjoy with the child they sponsor and their siblings/friends when traveling on a Venture team.

- Experiences will vary based on country and availability.
- Sponsors will have the opportunity to contribute financially to a "Special Experience" when they travel on a Venture team.

### **Here are a few reasons it is not permitted to give gifts to children:**

- COTN seeks to empower in-country staff to be in authority over COTN children. We believe they are the best people to make decisions regarding the welfare of COTN children and gift giving can undermine this.
- COTN provides care for vulnerable and traumatized children. We work to protect the privacy and security of these children who may be delayed in developing good boundaries, both socially and emotionally. Gift giving does not allow COTN to adequately do this.
- Gift giving creates inequality among COTN children. For reasons of character, personal history, job descriptions and proximity, it is common for the same children to receive special attention and gifts from visitors.
- Gift giving can cause failure for COTN children.
  - Gift giving can encourage children to behave in certain ways to certain partners in order to be rewarded, which encourages hypocrisy.
  - Gift giving encourages children to view guests as a means to an end. This can damage genuine relationship building with future visitors.
  - Gift giving makes it harder to track where belongings come from. This is a concern and potential danger when often gifts are used to show romantic/sexual interest in the cultures where COTN works.



### **Communicating with In-Country Staff**

COTN will not facilitate the exchange of letters or gifts between partners and in-country staff members.

When traveling on a Venture team, COTN asks that partners **do not** tip in-country staff. If you would like to thank our staff, each country has a Staff Well-Being Fund on the COTN website where you may donate.

Please note that in-country staff are prohibited from soliciting monetary or physical gifts from partners – doing so may put their employment in jeopardy.