

Writing Your Letter

7-point Format

Intervention letters use love and honesty to break through denial. Letters also provide a vision for the future, giving loved ones a sense of purpose beyond addiction. Finally, letters end with a call for action. Below are seven points that can help you compose letters. Letters are typically one-to-two-pages in length, handwritten or double-spaced. Write from the heart and with love.

1. Introduction: Write a brief opening statement of love that specifically states the nature of your relationship (“Jack, I have been very lucky to have you as my best friend for over 20 years. Not many people in this world have the good fortune to have a friend like you.”).

2. Love: This is the longest part of the letter. Do not bring up problems related to addiction in this part of the letter. Instead, give specific reasons why you love and care about the person, remembering times when you were proud of them, when they were there for you, fun times you experienced together, examples of their best character traits. This part of the letter must be sincere, avoiding empty flattery. If the addict’s behavior has been difficult for a long time, remember back to better days (“Carrie, I can remember back, like it was yesterday, the day I asked you to marry me. You were so beautiful as we walked through the snow. When I looked at you, I thought my heart would burst. I’d never before known a girl like you...”).

3. Reframing: Shift from the love section to a discussion of the problem. Talk about the need for professional treatment. If other people in your family have suffered from alcoholism, mention that it runs in the family.

4. Evidence: Briefly state that you know he or she is hurting and that their decisions and their lives are reflecting just that.

5. Commitment: Make a personal commitment to stand by the alcoholic and help him or her in any way that is possible and appropriate. It requires that we all participate in the recovery process. Together, we will heal and we will grow. It'll be a wonderful journey as a family.”)

6. Affirmation: End on a positive note, painting a positive picture of the future. Give your loved one a reason to want to get sober. Speak of ways the addict is important to you and others. Give him a sense of purpose. Express faith in his ability to follow through and succeed. (“Dad, I need you in my life. You are my rock. I’m graduating from college next year, and Sean and I have been talking about getting married. I need you healthy to walk me down the aisle. I want you to be the best grandfather for my children. I need you to lean on in the tough times and celebrate with in the good times. I love you, Dad. I want you back.”)

7. Ask: This is a direct request that the alcoholic immediately accepts the treatment program being offered. End the letter with-Will you accept the help we’re offering you today.”)

The letter should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to write. Some people prefer to write their letter one day, then revise it the next. Take your time, and write from the heart. I will make necessary edits well before the intervention takes place.

During the rehearsal we will read the letters aloud to get the desired pace. Remove any language that could make them angry or defensive. Rewrite your letters to incorporate changes. Write on a MS Word document if possible. If not don’t leave scribbled out parts or add things in the margins—they will likely be keeping these letters for the rest of their lives.

Always use loving, non-judgmental honesty when talking about the problem. Don’t skimp on the love section of the letter. Family members should keep a copy of the letter they wrote for the intervention.