

What Happens Once the Letter of Intent Is Written?

Once you've written the Letter of Intent about your son or daughter, the first, most important thing to do is to let people know that there is a Letter of Intent available to be consulted. This might mean telling your other children (or relatives, neighbors, friends, workshop director, pastor, or case manager) why you have written the Letter, what type of information it contains, and where the Letter can be found. Put the Letter in an easily accessible place, and make it clearly identifiable. Many parents also make copies of the Letter and give it to their other children (or persons such as a neighbor).

Secondly, you should update the Letter on a regular basis. Select one day out of each year (such as the last day of school or perhaps your son or daughter's birthday) where you will review what you have written and add any new information of importance. Talk with your child each time and incorporate his or her ideas. After each addition, sign and date the Letter. Should something change in your son or daughter's life, such as his or her caseworker or the medication he or she is taking, update the Letter immediately.

In Conclusion...

Will your Letter of Intent overcome all of the obstacles to your son or daughter's transition into someone else's care? No, of course not. However, the Letter is of immediate usefulness in coping with your son or daughter's changed situation and, in the long term, will certainly help care providers understand and care for your loved one.

An Example For Writing a Letter of Intent

Titling a section of her Letter "Housing/Residential Care," Mrs. Sanders writes that Chris has always lived at home and had a room to himself. She briefly describes the family home and the articles in the home that give Chris special pleasure, such as his portable radio.

She then describes his daily and weekly routine, including the fact that Chris finds great joy in going to dances each week at the local Arc. She briefly lists his favorite clothing, food, games, and so on. She also mentions that each year Chris visits his sister for a week in the summer.

Mrs. Sanders then considers what future living arrangements might be suitable for Chris, and she uses the worksheet at the end of this article ("Letter of Intent Worksheet") to jot down three options. Before she transfers these options from the worksheet to her Letter of Intent, she discusses each one with Chris. She does so because he needs to be a key member of the team planning his future life.

Following her talk with Chris, Mrs. Sanders lists the agreed upon information in her Letter of Intent. The first option she lists is the possibility that Chris might live with his sister. As a second possibility, he might live with an old family friend. The third option is residence in a group home. Because this last option may indeed be the one that is finally selected for Chris, Mrs. Sanders takes care to describe the type of group home she thinks he would enjoy. As a mother and lifelong friend to Chris, she sees past his limitations to his strengths, and she notes these down in some detail. Lastly, she expresses her desire that the group home will give him room to grow and build upon those strengths.

"Residential Care" is just one important area for Mrs. Sanders to cover in her Letter of Intent. It takes her a week to complete the other sections. She finds that describing the past is not nearly as difficult as considering the future, but she methodically and systematically works her way through each area, using the worksheet when planning is necessary. The end result is a Letter of Intent that is twelve pages long, handwritten. She feels comfortable that anyone picking up this Letter of Intent will have a head start in getting to know and care for Chris.

LETTER OF INTENT WORKSHEET: CONSIDERING YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER'S FUTURE

For each applicable area below, consider your son or daughter's future. List 3-4 options to guide future caregivers in decision making and interaction with your child. Draw upon what you know about your son or daughter, through observation and through discussion with your child, and share what you've learned!

Residence:

If something should happen to you tomorrow, where will your son or daughter live?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Education:

You have a lifelong perspective of your son or daughter's capabilities. Share it!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Employment:

What has your son or daughter enjoyed? Consider his or her goals, aspirations, limitations, etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Medical Care:

What has and has not worked with your son or daughter? What should future caregivers know?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Behavior Management:

What consistent approach has worked best in your absence during difficult transition periods in your son or daughter's life?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Social:

What activities make life meaningful for your son or daughter?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Religious:

Is there a special church or synagogue or person your son or daughter prefers for fellowship?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Additional Considerations

Advocate/Guardian: Who will look after, fight for, and be a friend to your son or daughter? (List 3-4 options.)

Trustee(s): Who do you trust to manage your son or daughter's supplementary funds? (List 3-4 options.)