



## The Letter of Intent

The Letter of Intent can be compared to a letter you might leave for a babysitter, outlining where things are and what to do in case of an emergency.

**The Letter of Intent is the Glue that holds together all the  
Pieces of your Child's Life Plan.**

The Letter of Intent is a document written *by you* that describes your child's history, their current status, and what *your* hopes and dreams are for their future. It is not a legal document, but the courts and others rely upon the Letter for guidance in understanding your child and the wishes of you, the parents.

The Letter serves many purposes. First, it spells out the background and history of your child and his or her present situation. It also describes your wishes, hopes and desires for his or her future care and where possible, your child's feelings about the present and desires for the future. Whenever possible, you should include your child in the process.

When you are no longer able to take care of your child due to death or illness, the Letter gives your son or daughter's future caregivers some insight into how to care for him or her. If your child has a severe disability, precious time will not be wasted by the caregivers with regard to what the most appropriate behavior or medical treatment techniques would be.

The Letter should provide very concrete information and much more, including valuable information about the personality of your child, his or her likes, dislikes, talents, special problems and strengths.

### **When Should Parents Write the Letter of Intent?**

Start now! Start today! None of us can predict the future. What will happen to your son or daughter if something happens to you? The Letter is a way to help protect your child from unnecessary chaos and turmoil when he or she must depend upon someone other than you for the care and support that is necessary.

### **How Do I Write The Letter of Intent?**

The procedure is fairly simple. You can write the Letter out in longhand, or you can use a computer (which makes it easier to revise as time goes on and circumstances change). Remember that spelling and grammar do not count. The only concern is that anyone who reads it in the future can understand your intentions, what you meant and what you would like to see happen in your son or daughter's life. Begin by addressing the Letter: "To \_\_\_\_\_ (your child's name)'s Future Caregivers."

The first paragraph should contain current names, addresses and telephone numbers of the people who should be contacted if anything were to happen to you (for example, other children, case manager, your son or daughter's school principal or employer, lawyer, financial planner, priest, etc.). Briefly state the family history. Include names, birthdates, and addresses and telephone numbers of family members.

## **What Information Goes Into the Letter of Intent?**

The Letter should focus upon several major areas of your child's life. Depending on your child's needs, these areas may include: housing/residential care, education, employment, medical history and care, behavior management, social environment, and religious environment. Summarize your child's background and present status in each of these areas. Then summarize your wishes, hopes and desires for his or her "best" future. List some options for each area.

## **What Do I Do Once I Have Written The Letter Of Intent?**

Once you have written the Letter, the first and most important thing to do is to let people know that there is a Letter of Intent and that it should be consulted. Tell your other children (or relatives, friends, etc.) why you have written the Letter, what type of information it contains, and where the Letter can be found, "**...In the Big Ugly Green Book...**" In addition to placing it in your green book, many parents make copies and give it to family members.

You should also update your Letter of Intent on a regular basis (perhaps each year on your child's birthday). Review what you have written and add any new information of importance. After each addition, sign and date the Letter.

## **In Conclusion**

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