

Letter of Intent

A “letter of intent” communicates and documents your preferences to others. It provides a guideline to others who may become responsible for decisions about your child.

The “letter of intent” is a personal letter drafted by you. Your letter will express your preferences in services, supports and other personal areas about your son or daughter. This letter differs from a will because it does not convey legally binding directions like those in a will.

Important points to remember when writing this letter are:

- Parents, brothers, sisters, other family members and especially the person for whom the letter is intended should contribute to the letter.
- The contents of your letter should reflect your desires. Future circumstances may make it difficult for others to carry out strict demands for your son or daughter.
- You should gear the preferences in the letter toward enhancing your son or daughter's independence and growth. Your requests should not be for the convenience of other family members or service providers.
- The letter should be written in non-technical language by you. It should communicate your heartfelt desires for your son or daughter.
- A letter of intent is not legally binding like a will. However, its content should not contradict your other legal documents. Have your attorney read the letter to be sure it agrees with the will.
- Periodically review and, if necessary, update your letter. Make sure it still reflects your desires and the preferences of your son or daughter. Age and changes in other circumstances may alter what you want in the letter.

Your letter should begin by stating the individual's full name, date of birth, place of birth and Social Security number. You should also name the agencies that relatives, trustees and guardians should contact for advice and help (e.g., local chapter of The Arc, attorney, adult protective services). Other items to describe the letter may include:

Financial and other supports:

- Government benefits which your son or daughter receives or may be eligible to receive.
- Any arrangements with a corporate guardianship or cooperative master trust program for your son or daughter's continued care. Include the program's name and location plus any special instructions for this program.
- Your son or daughter's current employment or the type of employment you think he or she would like.

Living arrangement:

- The type (e.g., live with a particular relative, small group home, apartment with support).
- Location
- The qualities of the living arrangement (e.g., non-smoking home, adhere to a certain religion).

Programs/services:

- The type of school or day program setting you think would best meet your son or daughter's needs.
- The type of services, therapies or medical interventions that are needed or may be needed (e.g., job training, speech therapy).
- Routine medical care (e.g., regular check-up, annual eye examination) and the names and locations of preferred medical professionals. Include any health insurance that should be maintained.
- Regular routines in the person's schedule (e.g., daily schedule of getting ready for school, weekly appointments).

Personal preferences:

- Grooming and hygiene preferences (e.g., type of clothes, hair style, preferred toilet articles).
- Likes and dislikes about food, chores and other areas.
- Favorite personal items (e.g., personal radio, certain furniture).
- Personal habits important for someone else to know about.
- Friends and close relatives, their locations and how often your son or daughter likes to visit those people.
- Favorite recreation and other leisure activities and your son or daughter's level of independence in these activities. Include how often he/she likes to participate in activities.

Abilities:

- Level of independence in getting around the community (e.g., can take public transportation, independence in shopping).
- Abilities in handling money (e.g., change-making, independence in purchasing items).
- Abilities in reading, writing, communicating and understanding what others may tell him or her. If your child does not use verbal communications, how he or she communicates desires or replies to others.

List any other information that is important for your son or daughter. Both parents should sign the letter. After having your attorney review the letter, keep a copy for yourself and a copy with your legal will. Distribute the letter to those who may be responsible for decisions about your child.

This information was excerpted from "A Family Handbook on Future Planning", Sharon Davis, Ph.D., Editor, the ARC of the United States and the Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Aging & Developmental Disabilities, Dept. of Disabilities and Human Development, College of Applied Health Science, University of Illinois at Chicago, Dec., 2003. See <http://www.thearc.org>