



## Letters

### Checklist

- ✓ It is vitally important to establish a paper trail when you are conducting serious advocacy work. When your requests are in writing, they will be acted upon. Letters are the best way to clarify issues.
- ✓ When you are planning to advocate
  1. Write your thoughts down when they are clear to you. Carry a notepad.
  2. Compose your first draft of the letter.
  3. Review it with a sensible friend. Do they understand the issue and request easily?
  4. Edit. Make sure that the letter is clear, succinct, and courteous before you send it.
  5. Congratulations. You have been proactive in a constructive way, and by doing so, you are making everybody's job easier and your relative's treatment potentially more successful.

When you advocate by writing, it is imperative to have a clear grasp of what you want to say. Find a friend and review your thoughts out loud. Think about the tone you wish to use and start jotting down thoughts. When you are clear, succinct, and polite, the reader is more likely to understand what you are saying.

When you sit down to write your next letter, read over the “Elements” of the type of letter you are writing. Samples of actual letters are included in this section for your use too. Approach your advocacy logically and thoughtfully as you would any other business in your life.

The following pages list important points: the “make-up,” and the “elements of good letters.” I have included samples of letters that succeeded for me in my advocacy work. Please feel free to use them as ideas in your own writing.

### Important Points in Letter Writing

- Have a clear grasp of what it is you want to say.
- Review it out loud with a friend if possible.
- Determine the tone you wish to use.
- Capture the tone by jotting down particularly appropriate phrases from your conversations about the issues.

## Letter Elements

1. Attention line
2. Reference line
3. Subject line
4. Salutation
5. Body of letter
6. Complimentary close
7. Signature
8. Address, phone number, fax number
9. Enclosure
10. CC

## The Makeup of a Good Letter

### Create the opening

The writer should make every effort to word his or her thoughts clearly. This statement is especially important in the opening paragraph of the letter. The first paragraph sets the tone for the letter. It should capture the reader's attention.

### State the purpose of your letter or reason for concern

- A. Use tactful easy to understand language. Simple words, clear-cut and direct, are easy to read and understand. Try to use natural, everyday expressions.
- B. Organize your language carefully and concisely. Give accurate precise information. Establish your personal credibility if necessary.
- C. State your personal commitment to be of assistance.

### Devise a friendly way to close

Thank the person by leaving the clear impression that you wish to work together.

### Review

Look forward to revising your letter. Do not be afraid to change or rearrange for the final letter.

## **Request to Director of County Mental Health Services Involuntary Treatment**

Thomas Jones  
Supervisor  
Involuntary Treatment, Podunk County  
Anytown, Anystate

Dear Mr. Jones,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce our family and express our serious concerns regarding the release of our relative, Roger Smith, from the State Prison on August 11th, 1990. We all care for Roger very much, however we know that he is seriously ill and he requires hospitalization.

At this time no member of our family is willing or able to care for or financially support Roger. We feel that his emotional problems and threatening behavior constitute a danger to which we cannot expose ourselves or our loved ones.

The serious nature of the crime committed in April, 1989, and his repeated statements to family members as recently as June 1990, that, "I had to do it to defend myself," show a serious disturbance in Roger's reasoning ability. In our belief this establishes him as a grave danger to society because he shows no remorse, and in fact could repeat this crime believing it to be a reasonable course of action against a perceived threat.

In the past, Roger has always turned to family members for both emotional and financial support whenever he has been faced with a troubling situation in his life. Of course, we have all tried to do our best to support him, but at this point, upon his release from the State Prison, Roger appears to be unable to take care of himself and is beyond our control.

Based on recent visits by family members to the state prison he is only able to present himself semi-rationally for short periods although sometimes for as long as two hours prior to exhibiting bizarre behavior. When we asked Roger what he was experiencing, he told us that, "I hear voices all the time, and I don't like what they are saying to me, I smell things all the time, and I can taste things like the dust on the floor." However, when asked to take responsibility for treatment he refused, (a reply which is typical of his totally uncooperative behavior) even with day to day activities. Enclosed is a listing of Roger's behaviors that have concerned us during recent years.

At this time we have felt it necessary to notify Ms. Goodwill, mayor of Small town, and the Police Department, in addition to local and state officials. We feel that all persons involved in this matter bear the responsibility for Roger's future behavior.

Since Roger has been incarcerated, we have all observed that he has become more seriously ill. He has not been willing or able to participate in treatment or placement planning, and accordingly will probably end up on the street if he is not hospitalized for supervised treatment. This lack of care would obviously be both a disservice to Roger as well as to the community in which he is forced to wander until another episode of his illness leads to a more serious offense.

As family members of Roger, and as responsible citizens of our communities, we want to prevent yet another person's property damage or injury. Please consider carefully all the information concerning Roger. <sup>77</sup>Only you can provide the opportunity for him to get the treatment he so desperately needs and deserves.

Thank you for your kind attention to this very serious matter.

Sincerely,

Signature

## Thank You and Request for Information

Ms. Sally Social Worker  
Supervisor  
Admitting Psychiatric Unit  
State Hospital  
Anytown, Anystate

Dear Ms. Social Worker,

Please accept my thanks once again for your attention and understanding regarding my brother Roger Smith, recently admitted to Ward E-1 under your supervision. As you may recall, I telephoned you August 10th about Roger's impending admission.

Since that time, he has been authorized to receive involuntary treatment until his next hearing date scheduled for August 29th. Although I have not spoken with any member of his Treatment Team, I imagine that he is undergoing a period of evaluation at this time.

My own background in Social Work, and my serious interest in the field of Mental Illness (due to my brother's disease) has led me to read Dr. E. Fuller Torrey's book "Surviving Schizophrenia A Family Manual". The attached pages titled, "The Ideal Diagnostic Workup" are my only frame of reference for the evaluation Roger is currently receiving. May I request that one of the Treatment Team Staff telephone to inform me of Roger's current condition, and also describe the procedures that he is now undergoing?

Again, I certainly appreciate your time and kind attention in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you or one of your staff members soon.

Sincerely,

Signature  
Home telephone:  
Office telephone: