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*Please note: This guide does not serve as legal advice. Every individual's situation is unique, and the parole process can vary widely. If you have legal questions, we strongly encourage you to consult a qualified parole attorney.*

## **Writing a Letter of Remorse**

This guide is meant to help you begin the difficult but meaningful work of writing a letter of remorse to the person or people harmed by your actions. That might include the direct victim(s), their loved ones, or even the broader community impacted by your choices. Everyone's path toward understanding and expressing remorse looks different — this is simply a starting point. If you have questions after reviewing this guide, please reach out to our team.

### **I. Who should I write to?**

Most often, you'll want to write to the person who was directly harmed in your case — the victim of your offense. You might also decide to write to others affected, like their family members, friends, or anyone else whose life was touched by what happened. These are often called secondary victims: children, parents, partners, siblings, or even witnesses to the crime. Sometimes, the harm stretches beyond individuals to entire neighborhoods or communities.

You don't need to write a letter to everyone affected. But it's important that the letters you do write reflect the full impact of your actions. If you write more than one, make sure each letter is personalized and specific to the person you're addressing. Avoid copying the same message — this is your chance to speak directly to each individual's unique experience. If you knew them personally, or learned about their life during your case, include those insights. Think about how your actions affected them emotionally, physically, financially, and spiritually.

### **II. When should I begin writing?**

Writing a letter of remorse isn't something to rush. This is more than a formality — it's a part of your healing, a part of making amends, and a way to show the parole board that your growth is real, not rehearsed. The earlier you start, the more time you give yourself to sit with the weight of what happened and speak from a place of sincerity rather than stress.

Start at least a few months before your hearing. You don't have to get it perfect on the first try. Just get your thoughts down. Then step away. Come back to it later. Let your words evolve as your understanding deepens.

If you've written remorse letters before — whether for prior parole hearings or during a program — don't just reuse them. Who you were then is not who you are now. Take time to reflect on what's changed. A revised letter tells the board that you've done the internal work, and that your insight is continuing to grow. That growth is powerful — not just for the board to see, but for you to own.

### **III. What should I write about?**

**A strong letter of remorse focuses on four core areas:**

**Remorse and empathy** — You're not just acknowledging what happened; you're connecting emotionally with the pain it caused. This is about humanizing the people who were hurt and showing that you see them as more than just part of your legal case.

**Accountability** — Own your role without excuses or blame-shifting. Use clear, direct language to describe what you did and the impact it had.

**Understanding of harm** — Show that you've thought deeply about how your actions affected others — emotionally, physically, spiritually, and even economically. The goal here is to demonstrate insight, not just guilt.

**Amends** — If you've taken action to repair the harm or live differently as a form of "living amends," share that. But don't focus on program checklists or accomplishments. Keep the focus on the people who were harmed and how you're showing up differently because of them.

This is not the time to list your achievements, explain your childhood, or ask for forgiveness. Keep the attention on the people your actions affected and your responsibility to them. Some reflection questions in the next section can help get you started.

### **IV. What should I reflect on as I prepare to write?**

This process is personal. It might bring up heavy emotions — shame, sorrow, fear, even gratitude for having another chance. That's normal. Let yourself feel those things. They're part of the work.

**Here are some guiding questions that can help ground your writing:**

- When was the moment you first truly grasped the pain your actions caused?
- What have you done, or what are you doing now, to take responsibility and make amends?

- What would the person you harmed want or need to hear from you — not just in words, but in tone and intention?
- If the victim or their loved ones have spoken about the impact of your actions, what stood out to you? If they haven't, what do you imagine they would say?
- How might their life — or the lives of their family — be different if the crime had never happened?
- What do you hope for them now? What kind of future do you wish they could have?
- Have you made living amends — changes in your behavior or life that honor what was lost? If so, how?

These aren't easy questions. But the more honest you are with yourself, the more meaningful your letter will be — not just to the board, but to your own journey of healing and transformation.

#### **V. What should I keep in mind while writing my letter?**

Be specific. General statements don't carry the same weight as personal, detailed ones. Let your letter show that you've reflected deeply. Talk about how your choices affected a real person with a real life — not just "a victim," but someone with a name, a story, and a family. Make it clear that this letter could only have come from you and that it speaks to your unique experience and understanding.

Use direct language. Avoid phrases that distance you from what happened. Instead of saying "a life was lost," say "I took a life." That kind of honesty matters. It shows that you're not avoiding responsibility or minimizing what occurred.

Keep it brief, but meaningful. A strong letter of remorse is usually one to two pages. It doesn't need to be long — it just needs to be real. Focus on the core truths you've discovered through your journey of reflection.

#### **VI. Will my letter be sent to the person I'm writing to?**

No. This letter is not intended to be sent to the victim or their family directly. Instead, it's presented to the parole board as a part of your hearing materials. Sometimes, the Board or the District Attorney's office may share it with those who've been impacted — but that decision is not yours to make.

The goal of writing this letter isn't to get a response. It's to show the Board that you've taken steps to face what you did, and to begin — in whatever small ways are possible — the work of repairing what was broken.