

*Please Note: The information contained in this Guide is not intended as legal advice in any individual's case. There are many exceptions and variations in the parole consideration process. If you have questions, please consult with an experienced parole attorney.*

## HOW TO WRITE A LETTER OF REMORSE

This Guide is intended to help you through the process of writing letters of remorse to the victim(s) of your crime, to their families, and to the communities that you affected. Use this Guide as a resource to help you through your own journey of remorse, but do not feel tied to the advice given. This should merely be a starting point. If, after thoroughly reading this guide, you still have questions, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

**Who should I write a letter of remorse to?** Each case is different, but generally, you should write a letter of remorse directly to the victim(s). You can also write letters to the family of the victim, or anyone else that was impacted by your crime. This could include the victim's father or mother, their children, their spouse, their siblings, their friends, and other loved ones. Your crime might also have affected witnesses to the crime, the community that you came from, or the community that your victim came from. While you do not have to write a letter of remorse to each of these people or groups of people, it is important that your letters acknowledge the wide-ranging impact of your actions on others.

**When should I write a letter of remorse?** Writing a letter of remorse can be a very difficult exercise. In the months before you are scheduled to appear before the Board, begin drafting your letter of remorse and take your time with this exercise. If you have written letters in the past or for a self-help program, consider revising them. It can be beneficial to write letters of remorse every few years, because your understanding of yourself, and your reflections on your relationship with the victim, will undoubtedly change over time. Try to start writing your letters of remorse early on, because if your letters seem last-minute or rushed, the Board might doubt their authenticity and sincerity.

**What should I write about?** Letters of remorse should demonstrate your understanding of the impact of your actions. They should focus on expressing your remorse and empathy. They are not an opportunity to list the various self-help groups you have participated in, to explain your social history prior to the life crime, or to discuss who you are today. Instead, focus on demonstrating empathy for your victim and for their loved ones, and accepting responsibility. As you begin to write your letter of remorse, reflect back to the first moment when you really understood the harm that you caused, and consider the following:

- How did it feel the first time you truly accepted the consequences of your actions?
- What steps have you taken to make amends for your crime? How have you expressed your remorse and empathy?
- What do you think the victim would want to hear from you? What would you want to say to them? What do you think they would say to you, if anything?
- How would the life of your victim or of their family be different if you had not committed your crime?
- What hopes do you have for the future of your victims or for their loved

ones? As you begin to write the letter itself, follow these guidelines:

- **Avoid using generic language.** To help the Board see that your feelings are genuine, use language that is specific and personal. It should be clear from the text of the letter that it could have only be written *by you*, about the victim(s) in *your case*.
- **Use active, not passive words.** For example, write “I killed my victim,” instead of “my victim was killed.” Using active rather than passive words helps to show the Board that you are not minimizing your role or deflecting blame.
- **Keep your letter short and simple.** Letters of remorse should be between 1-2 pages.
- If you struggle with writing, **make another creation to express your remorse.** This can be a poem, a song, a rap, a painting or drawing, or something else. Think about ways you creatively express yourself that are not in writing.

**Will I actually send the letter?** No, letters of remorse should not be sent to the intended recipient. Instead, they will be presented to the Board. It is also possible that either the Board or the District Attorney’s Office will make your letters available to those who have been negatively impacted by your actions. Writing a letter of remorse is a way to show the Board that you have begun to make amends with your victim(s).