

HAWAI'I FRIENDS OF JUSTICE & CIVIC EDUCATION

Restorative & Solution-Focused Gratitude & Apology Letter Guidelines for Loves Ones

Sometimes we hurt people unintentionally or intentionally who we care about and are grateful for. In these cases you can address the harm by writing a letter about how you have changed, express your gratitude, and apologize.

If there is a protective order preventing you from contacting anyone you must respect that. Even though you are sorry and grateful for the person you hurt, you must never cause further pain by attempting to make amends. If your situation is serious and there is no protective order but you believe the person you hurt may be afraid of you, do not send the letter directly to them and instead ask another third party who knows you both to deliver the letter.

If your case is serious and you are incarcerated show your letter to someone who works at the prison such as a Chaplain or a counselor and ask them to review it and sign it with a statement that they reviewed it, and ask them to contact your harmed loved one and request their permission for the letter to be sent to them. You never want to risk furthering harming someone.

The following letter guidelines are based on work by Martin Seligman, PhD, founder of positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, Ben Furman, MD, psychiatrist from Finland; and Loren Walker, JD, MPH Hawai'i public health educator & conflict management lawyer. Furman and Walker also developed www.apologyletter.org.

*[Fill in [bracketed] information with the specific facts about your situation and **copy what is in bold**]*

[Write your name & address on letter]

[Fill in date you are writing letter]

Dear *[person's name you are grateful for and who you have also hurt. If more than one person is involved please write each person a separate letter]:*

First, I want you to know that I have come to appreciate how precious life is and realize I want to do better for those I care about and for myself. I am not just saying this. I have worked hard and have *[List all accomplishments you have made since you hurt who you are writing]*

Second, I want to thank you. I am grateful to you for *[Describe what specifically the person did that has made a meaningful difference in your life that you are grateful for]*

You have made a difference because *[Describe the meaningful difference the person you are thanking has made for others, e.g. "Your taking care of (child's name) has helped (her or him survive in my absence), etc..."]*

I deeply appreciate all your hard work and kindness in *[doing whatever they did that you are thanking them for]*

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Third, I want to apologize to you for *[Describe what you did to the person you're writing that was hurtful, wrong, or unfair towards him/her]*

My actions were hurtful and I want you to know that I truly regret my behavior.

I have been thinking about what happened and I feel that I have learned a lesson. I have learned that: *[Describe what you have learned]*

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Please know I will never do anything similar again, to you or to anyone else. I am determined to deal differently with similar situations in the future. In the future, in similar situations, instead I will: *[Describe what you will do different in the future]*

I wish there was a way for me to try and make up for what I did to you. If you have any ideas for how I might repair the harm I caused, I will try my best to do it. One possibility I thought of is: *[Describe what you might do to make it up to the person you have hurt]*

I am also willing to listen to you and meet with you in person to discuss this situation too if you wish. Please let me know if you want to meet, or if there is anything else I can do to make things right.

You are free to accept or reject this apology. I have wronged you and I don't want you to feel any pressure from me to accept my apology. That is a different matter and totally up to you.

Yours sincerely *[or love, aloha, etc. & your name]*

[sign your name & if you're incarcerated and it is a serious case, ask someone who works at the prison to please sign the letter stating:

“I have read this letter and believe it is written sincerely.” Also ask that person to call the harmed person and ask for permission to mail them the letter – do not risk inflicting further harm to anyone.]