THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Writing Letters a Child Wants to Keep

Co-Parenting & Communication · Parent-Child Connection

For parents inside: what to put in a letter so a child reads it more than once.

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A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Not every letter reaches a child the way it was meant to. Some go unread because they arrive irregularly and the habit of expecting mail never forms; some get read once and forgotten because nothing in them was specific enough to remember; some are skipped by a caregiver worried about the tone before the child even sees them.

A letter that lands is not necessarily a better-written letter. It is one built with the reader in mind — the actual child, their age, what they care about right now — rather than written as a general expression of love that could be sent to any child at any age.

This lesson is about the craft of writing letters a specific child will actually read, keep, and feel something from, building on the habit of writing often that the previous lesson covers.

WRITE TO THE CHILD IN FRONT OF YOU, NOT AN IDEA OF THEM

Children change fast. A letter written with an eight-year-old in mind can miss entirely if the child is now ten and has moved on from what used to interest them. Ask the caregiver what the child is into lately — a show, a sport, a friend group — and write to that, not to a memory.

Address the child directly by name and by what makes them them, not by generic terms that could apply to any kid. "You and your dinosaur facts" lands; "my wonderful child" does not, even though both are loving.

For very young children who cannot read yet, write knowing the letter will be read aloud by a caregiver. Short sentences, concrete images, and a simple structure make it easier to read aloud well and easier for a young child to follow.

SPECIFICITY IS WHAT GETS REMEMBERED

A letter full of general encouragement — "be good, work hard, I love you" — is easy to write and easy to forget. A letter that mentions the actual spelling test, the actual soccer game, the actual friend by name proves the parent was paying attention, and children remember being paid attention to.

One useful habit is to ask one specific question per letter and actually wait for the answer before asking

another, rather than stacking five questions the child will only answer one of. It turns the letter into a real exchange instead of a monologue.

Include a small detail about your own day inside, appropriate to share — what you read, a joke you heard, something you're looking forward to. It gives the child a small window into their parent's life, which matters especially as kids get older and start wanting to know their parent as a person, not just as someone who writes to them.

+ PHYSICAL TOUCHES THAT MAKE A LETTER MATTER

A drawing, even a simple one, a pressed flower if allowed, handwriting instead of typed text where possible — these small physical details make a letter feel handmade rather than generic, and children often keep the letter because of the object quality as much as the words.

Consistency in appearance also helps: if letters always come on the same kind of paper or always include a small drawing in the corner, a child starts to recognize them instantly, which builds anticipation before they even open the envelope.

Check with the facility about what is allowed to be included — stickers, drawings, certain paper types, and photographs often have specific rules that vary by facility, so it is worth asking rather than guessing and having mail rejected.

+ TIMING AND RHYTHM MATTER AS MUCH AS CONTENT

A letter that arrives on a predictable rhythm — every week, every two weeks — becomes something a child watches for, and the watching itself is part of the connection. An irregular pattern, even with excellent letters, does not build the same anticipation.

If mail delays are long or unpredictable where the family is, it can help to tell the child roughly what to expect: "letters usually take about ten days to get here," so gaps do not feel like being forgotten.

When a reply is wanted, ask for it plainly and make it easy: a single question at the end, addressed directly, gives a child or caregiver something simple to answer without needing to compose a full letter back.

+ THE LETTER THAT FINALLY GOT AN ANSWER

A father had been writing his eleven-year-old son long letters full of advice and encouragement for months, and getting nothing back. His son's mother mentioned the boy had started sixth grade and gotten into a card game his friends all played.

His next letter was four sentences: he asked what the game was called, admitted he had no idea how it worked, and asked his son to explain the rules to him like he was five. He also asked one direct question and stopped there.

He got a two-page letter back explaining the entire game, complete with a hand-drawn diagram of the cards. It was the first reply in months. The advice-filled letters had been well-meant; the specific, curious one was the one his son wanted to answer.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Asking a caregiver for current details before writing

Said or written ahead of a letter.

“Before I write this week, can you tell me one thing she's into right now? A show, a game, a friend, anything specific I can ask her about.”

A specific, curious letter

Model for writing to an older child or preteen.

“I heard you're really into [specific thing] right now. I don't understand it at all — can you explain it to me like I'm five? Also, how did the [specific event] go?”

Making it easy for a child to write back

Closing line of a letter.

“You don't have to write much back — even one sentence about [specific question] would make my whole week.”

Setting expectations about mail timing

Caregiver talking to a child about delays.

“Letters usually take about [timeframe] to get here, so if we don't hear back right away, it doesn't mean anything's wrong — it just takes the mail a while.”

+ WRITE ONE LETTER THAT LANDS THIS WEEK

- [ ] Ask a caregiver for one current, specific detail about the child.
- [ ] Address the letter to the child they are now, not who they were a year ago.
- [ ] Include one specific question and leave room for one answer.
- [ ] Add a small, appropriate detail about your own day.
- [ ] Include a drawing or handwritten touch if the facility allows it.
- [ ] Check facility mail rules before including stickers, photos, or extras.
- [ ] Send it on a rhythm you can actually repeat.
- [ ] Make replying easy: one clear question, not a list.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Am I writing to who my child actually is right now, or who they were?

What is the last specific detail I included in a letter?

Is there a small physical touch I could add that reflects our family?

What rhythm of mail could I honestly sustain for a year?

YOUR NEXT STEP

Write one letter this week that ends with a question your child can answer.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.

This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.

For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.

You do not have to do this alone.

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