

End of Intervention Letter to a Child - A practice tool

Social work involvement becomes part of a child's life story whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. When interventions end without explanation or a personal goodbye, children are often left with unanswered questions, partial memories, and adults who seemed powerful but then one day disappeared or stopped coming around.

In this tool, the suggestion is that we should write an end-of-intervention letter directly to the child, especially when we have worked with children for more than 3-6 months.

This would address this gap directly and it gives the child a clear, personal account of what happened and why, written to them rather than about them, helping transform confusion into understanding.

In addition, the letter leaves the child with something tangible and human to remember. It offers the child something to *hold onto* which, arguably, is a tangible reminder that an adult saw them, remembered them, and cared enough to put words to that relationship

Case files are impersonal and inaccessible; memories fade or become distorted. A carefully written letter becomes a stable reference point the child can return to over time especially when questions of identity, trust, or self-worth arise, offering reassurance that they were seen, valued, and not to blame.

It affirms that their experiences mattered, that difficulties were not their fault, and that the involvement of social services had reasons rooted in care and protection rather than punishment against them or their parents/carers.

This would also respect the child's right to understanding, dignity, and narrative coherence, and it ensures that when social work leaves a child's life, it leaves behind meaning rather than confusion.

What this letter can achieve

As mentioned above, and end of intervention letter to the child would have the purpose to:

Help the child make sense of what happened

Affirm the child's worth and strengths

Mark and explain the ending or transition with honesty and care

Leave the child with a coherent narrative, not confusion.

Give the child a narrative that they could go back any time when they need to make sense of what happened to them

Through this letter, we are not looking to write:

A case summary

A justification of decisions

A therapeutic intervention

A place for adult guilt, regret, or reassurance-seeking

This is a letter to the child, for the child, in a child friendly language, written by their social worker.

Ethical Principles

This letter should be underpinned by the following principles, so it does not leave the child more confused:

The letter is for the child, not the system:

This letter exists to support the child's understanding and sense of self, not to evidence good practice, justify decisions, or satisfy professional processes. It should never read like a report, a case summary, or a defence of actions taken.

If a sentence would make sense in a case recording but not in a child's hands, it does not belong in the letter.

No adult blame (including self-blame):

The letter must not blame parents, carers, professionals, or systems for what happened. Equally, it must not contain expressions of professional guilt, regret, or self-criticism.

Children should not be placed in a position where they feel they must carry adult responsibility, loyalty, or reconciliation. The focus is explanation, not fault.

No adult secrets:

The letter should never disclose information that belongs to adult processes, disputes, or decisions that the child is not equipped to hold.

This includes professional disagreements, legal strategies, or concerns shared in confidence by adults. Honesty is essential, but honesty must be developmentally appropriate and protective so it does not cause any harm.

No promises:

The letter must not promise future outcomes, stability, contact, or protection that cannot be guaranteed. Promises, even when well-intentioned, can create false hope and deepen later feelings of loss or betrayal.

Reassurance should be based in what is known and true at the time, not in certainty or possibility about the future.

No re-litigation of decisions:

This is not a space to argue, justify, or revisit decisions that have already been made. Children need clarity and coherence, not competing explanations or unresolved adult reasoning.

Decisions should be explained simply and calmly, as acts of responsibility and protection, not as debates or justifications.

No emotional weight/burden placed on the child

The letter must never suggest that the child was responsible for adult actions, decisions, or outcomes. It should not imply that the child needs to forgive, understand adults' struggles, or feel grateful for intervention.

The emotional weight should remain with the adults; the child's role is to be a child.

Age-appropriate language, now and later:

The letter should be written with both the child's present understanding and their future self in mind. Language must match developmental capacity, avoiding euphemism, jargon, or complexity that obscures meaning.

The aim is a letter the child can return to over time and still find clarity, dignity, and truth.

The letter belongs to the child:

It should be written in a way the child can keep, revisit, and interpret over time, not as a contemporaneous explanation only.

Truthful, but not exhaustive:

The letter should be honest without being detailed in ways that overwhelm, confuse, or retraumatise.

No reassurance that contradicts reality:

Avoid statements that attempt to comfort by minimising uncertainty (e.g. 'everything will be fine').

Clear distinction between care and control:

Where authority was exercised, this should be named as protection or responsibility, not framed as punishment or choice.

No expectation of response

The letter should not invite the child to reply or maintain contact, which can create emotional obligation or false hope.

Written with the child's future self in mind

Assume the letter may be read again years later, when the child has more context and different questions.

Culturally and identity aware

Language should respect the child's culture, identity, and lived experience, without assumptions or stereotyping.

Boundaried warmth

Care should be evident, but the letter must not blur professional boundaries or imply a personal relationship beyond the role

Ultimately, this letter should help the child think:

I mattered. I was seen. What happened makes some sense.

The letter should make the child feel seen, heard, informed, and remembered.

Structure of the Letter

1. Opening: Naming the Relationship and the Moment

Purpose

To guide the child safely in time and relationship. Endings can feel sudden or confusing, particularly for children who have experienced instability. This section is about who is writing, why they are writing, and what is changing.

What to include

The child's name

Who you are and your role

Why you are writing now (ending, stepping down, transition, change)

A calm, respectful tone

Avoid formality or jargon/case recording language.

Example

Dear John,

I am writing this letter to you because my time as your social worker is coming to an end, and I wanted you to have something written just for you, to explain what this time was about and to let you know that change properly.

2. Seeing the Child: What I Value About You

Purpose

Trauma often teaches children they are 'the problem'. Here, we need to restore balance by affirming the child's identity separately from the difficulties that led to social work involvement.

What to include

One or two genuine, specific qualities

Something you observed over time

Avoid exaggeration or generic praise

This should feel **true**, not flattering.

Example

One of the things I admire/like most about you is your honesty. Even when things were difficult, you were able to say what you felt and ask questions when you didn't understand.

3. Remembering a Kind Moment

Purpose

To humanise the relationship and show the child they were known as a person, not just a case. Shared moments help counter memories of authority without connection.

What to include

A safe, appropriate shared moment
Often something ordinary or light
Nothing that creates emotional dependency

Example

I still smile when I think about the time you showed me your drawings and explained every detail so seriously. It reminded me how thoughtful and creative you are.

4. Why Social Work Was Involved (Making Sense Without Blame)

Purpose

Children often blame themselves for social work involvement. This section is to provide clear, age-appropriate explanation focused on safety and support, not fault.

What to include

A simple explanation of concerns
Focus on adults' responsibilities and safety
Avoid detail that overwhelms

Example

You had a social worker because there were worries about whether you were always getting the care and safety you needed. My job was to help make sure adults around you had the right support to keep you safe.

5. Acknowledging What Was Hard

Purpose

To validate the child's emotional reality without dramatising or retraumatising. Ignoring difficulty can feel dismissive; over-describing it can feel overwhelming, so we need to maintain a balance

What to include

A brief acknowledgement of challenge
Language that normalises feelings
No graphic or detailed recounting

Example

Some of this time was not easy. Having meetings, new people involved, and changes at home can feel confusing or upsetting, and it makes sense if parts of this were hard for you.

6. Explaining My Role and What I Did to Help

Purpose

To demystify professional authority. Children often experience decisions without understanding *why* adults acted. This section restores transparency.

What to include

What your role involved
What you tried to do for the child
Focus on protection and support

Example

My role was to listen to you, talk with your family, and work with other adults to make sure you were safe and supported. Sometimes that meant asking difficult questions or helping adults make changes.

7. Noticing What Changed (Without Pressure)

Purpose

To recognise progress without implying responsibility rests with the child or family alone. This is about acknowledging movement, not measuring success.

What to include

Changes in support or circumstances
Use neutral, factual language
Avoid 'everything is better now'

Example

While we worked together, some things changed. There was more support around your family, and plans were put in place to help you feel safer and more settled.

8. Naming Presence and Consistency

Purpose

Children remember who showed up. This section is to reaffirm presence and reliability.

What to include

How often you saw the child
In a simple, non-boastful way

Example

I saw you most weeks after you had come back from school, and I appreciated the times you talked with me and shared how things were going.

9. What Happens Now (Supporting Transition)

Purpose

Endings without explanation can feel like abandonment. This section is to provide clarity and containment.

What to include

What changes now
Who will be involved next
No promises of contact

Example

From now on, another worker (her or his name if already allocated) will be involved to support you and your family. They know about what has happened and will continue to look out for you.

10. A Boundaried, Respectful Goodbye

Purpose

To close the relationship intentionally, not abruptly. This matters deeply for children with histories of sudden endings.

What to include

Warm but professional language
Confidence in the child's worth
No emotional reliance

Example

I want you to know that working with you has mattered to me. I hope this letter helps you remember that you were seen, listened to, and cared about. I wish you well as you grow up and hope you achieve all your dreams.

Lastly...

This letter should be a memory for the child that makes them feel:

Seen
Informed
Respected

The letter it is about saying the right things, in the right way, for the child, so any time they go back to it, they will find meaning and understanding.

Reflective note

Writing a letter to a child at the end of intervention is an act of professional courage. It asks to pause, to reflect, and to put into words a relationship that has often been held under pressure, scrutiny, and constraint.

For many, this can feel meaningful and affirming. For others, it may stir discomfort, uncertainty, or strong emotion. All of this is understandable.

At the same time, it is important to remember that writing a letter to a child is not a space for emotional discharge or personal processing.

The child is not the holder of the social worker's feelings, regrets, or unresolved questions. Writing well in this context requires restraint as much as warmth.

The task is not to say everything that could be said, but to say what is useful, truthful, and important for the child.

There is a real risk, particularly if you are thoughtful and emotionally attuned, of getting carried away of writing too much, revealing too much, or placing unintended emotional weight on the child.

This is something that comes from care. But care without boundaries can become blurred boundaries.

The letter should never ask the child to carry the social worker's sadness, pride, guilt, or sense of unfinished business. Those reflections belong in supervision, peer support, or personal space, not in the child's hands.

This letter should be approached with a clear internal question:

Is this sentence here to meet the child's need for understanding and dignity or my own need for expression or closure?

If it is the latter, it does not belong in the letter, however heartfelt it may feel.

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