

WRITING AMENDS LETTERS TO THE PEOPLE YOU HAVE HURT WITH YOUR CONTROLLING, DISRESPECTFUL, AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

A critical part of the recovery process around issues related to anger, disrespect, control, and abuse (for both you the abusive person and for others you have hurt, especially if you are trying to reconcile with a partner) is to write letters to the victims of your controlling and disrespectful behavior. This can include your current or most recent partner and you can also write letters to your children or others, if you wish. The purpose of this letter is to clearly and specifically identify some of your disrespectful and intimidating actions; your emotional, verbal, and physical abuse; your other controlling attitudes and behaviors; and anything else you have done in the relationship that you do not feel good about as you read through and think about what you read in this website. This letter also involves directly recognizing the pain you have caused in the other person's life by what you said and did. It is an opportunity to clearly acknowledge that what you did was wrong and that this is not who you wish to be in the future. For the purposes of this letter, it is primarily a commitment to yourself about how you want to live from this point forward.

Some people offer global statements such as *"I'm really sorry for everything bad I've done to you"* or *"I'm sorry you feel so bad about what happened in the past"* and expect this to suffice when it comes to making amends. This sort of statement, however, shows little or no insight and understanding about what you have actually done with the other person. Nor does it address the very real and hurtful emotional impact you have had on them. This kind of statement more often serves as a way to really say, in a very blaming fashion, *"I'm tired of hearing about this stuff over and over. Why don't you stop talking about the past and just move on?"* with the underlying message being blaming and hurtful itself, *"You're the one with the problem. What's the matter with you?"* In fact, it can be very helpful and healing for a victim of controlling, hurtful, and abusive behavior to hear clearly and specifically what you have said or done that you truly feel badly about and to hear that you understand how you have affected them with your behavior.

This letter allows you to take full responsibility for what you have done and to make clear amends and apologies to the victims of your disrespectful, controlling, and abusive attitudes and behaviors for what has previously been a significant part of how you have related to them. This letter enables you to think and write about the ways you have emotionally impacted your partner, your children (if you have any), and others in your life who have been hurt, shamed, punished, demeaned, and damaged by your controlling and disrespectful attitudes and behaviors and the letter offers you the chance to think and write about how you feel about having done the things that you have done. In addition, it is also recommended that you talk about some of the specific things you have learned through your reading (on the website or from other resources) or participating in a class or counseling that have helped you understand more about the pain you have created in others and about how you can actually intervene effectively in your controlling and disrespectful attitudes and behaviors in the future. Finally, the letter allows you to make a concrete and realistic commitment to being respectful in the future and gives you the opportunity to talk specifically about how you will make that commitment come to pass (which is significantly different from "hollow promises" to change that you may have made in the past with the people around you).

This is also **NOT** intended to be a letter where you should ask for or expect anything in return from your partner or others to whom you are writing. Stay aware of subtle controlling messages such as asking your partner or others to forgive you, thanking them for still being with you, or communicating the hope they will reconcile with you, “give you another chance,” or continue to love you. These kinds of expressions have the potential to communicate to them in an overt or covert way that **they owe you something** for all the work you have done on yourself in this process of learning more about yourself, which in itself can become controlling (i.e. “*I’ve done all this for you...now you have to do something for me*”). This is **not** the goal of the amends letter.

As noted above, however, the major purpose of this letter-writing is to clearly and specifically recognize and make amends for the hurt and pain you have caused people whom you have claimed to care about in the past. In this way, it can be a positive and powerful step in reducing the shame you have felt about your controlling and disrespectful behavior and in forgiving yourself for the significant mistakes that you have made in the past by your being controlling and disrespectful with the important people in your life. A critical part of truly forgiving yourself is making a clear commitment to work a recovery program from this point forward which will help you avoid repeating the same mistakes you have made in the past (with your current partner or anyone else).

This letter does not need to be sent or even communicated directly to the victim(s) of your controlling and abusive behavior if you do not wish to do so. However, actually sharing it can be a helpful step in re-building trust and safety in your relationship if both of you wish to reconcile and truly heal the relationship that has been so violated and damaged through your use of control and disrespect. Sharing this letter with a partner can actually be a useful way to clearly acknowledge what you have done, to recognize how it has affected your partner, to communicate your understanding of why you have done what you have done (this is not to be used as an “excuse” for what you have done, but if you don’t really understand why you have done what you have done, you are much more likely to repeat your controlling and disrespectful actions in the future), and to make a clear commitment to work hard at an ongoing recovery program so you will not repeat the destructive behaviors you have demonstrated in the past.

It does not make any sense to share this letter with a partner or anyone else, however, if you do not plan to continue to actively work the recovery program you have started by doing this anger management work in the first place. That would make this letter simply another “hollow promise” that you probably have made in the past which you failed to follow through with. The true path to healing, growth, and reconciliation (if your partner is or others are willing to do this with you) involves a consistent pattern of attitude and behavior change over time which clearly demonstrates that you understand what has happened and are willing to continue to work hard to change this part of you to help create a safe, trusting, and loving relationship with your partner and the other important people in your life.

When you are ready, you are encouraged to write this amends letter to the primary victim of your disrespectful anger and abusive or punishing behavior and present it in class or to your therapist and then get feedback from other class members or from your counselor about what you have written. You are also encouraged to write and read letters to other people you may have victimized (e.g. your children, past partners, even acquaintances or strangers whom you have hurt in the past) if you wish to do so. Some examples of Amends Letters men have written to their partners and children are below.

THE FOLLOWING ARE FOUR EXAMPLES OF AMENDS LETTERS THAT MEN HAVE WRITTEN IN THE PAST TO THEIR PARTNERS

Dear Sandy,

I have reached the time in my anger and abuse recovery program where I am ready to write this letter to you. First of all, I want you to know how sorry I feel about what I have said and done to you in our relationship. I have been controlling, disrespectful, and abusive to you in countless ways and situations. My behavior throughout much of our time together has been deplorable. When I think about all the controlling and hurtful things I have done to you, I feel very sad for you. You did not deserve this from anyone, especially from someone who said again and again that he loved you.

You have endured many of the worst moments of my life and, sadly, you became the scapegoat for much of the emotional pain I was experiencing in the present and for the emotional pain I have carried forward from my childhood. I've abused you physically by standing in your way and blocking you from going around me and by grabbing and pushing you. I've abused you verbally by yelling and screaming at you, calling you awful names and putting you down, swearing and cursing at you, and constantly talking over you and interrupting you when I didn't like what you had to say. I've abused you emotionally by making you feel guilty about who you are, playing "mind games" with you so you ended up feeling confused and crazy, lying to you, being abusive to you in the presence of our children, and making fun of you and trying to humiliate you in front of our family and friends. I've intimidated and threatened you by glaring at you when we disagreed about something, using my size to make you feel afraid of me, and by throwing, hitting, and breaking things around the house. I've abused you financially by excluding you from big money decisions, making you ask for money as if we were not really a team, and even hiding money from you. And all the while, I have minimized, justified, denied, and even blamed you for my controlling and abusive actions. I now realize that this is abuse in and of itself and is wrong.

Sandy, I no longer blame you for any of my disrespectful and abusive actions. I take full and complete responsibility for all of my abusiveness toward you. I was always in control of my behavior and making choices about how I wanted to act. I knew exactly what I was doing. And no matter what the situation was, I did have other ways I could have responded. Unfortunately, I made far too many bad decisions in our time together.

Many of these bad choices were related to my low self-esteem and my overwhelming desire to be in control of you and everything around me because I thought that would help me feel better about myself. Nonetheless, I clearly chose to be disrespectful and abusive with you. And I can see now how my abusive behavior has hurt and frightened you and diminished your trust in me and our relationship. I feel very sad that I have affected you this way. You came into our relationship looking for a life filled with love and happiness and I destroyed what we could have had with my controlling and hurtful behavior. I know that, only after much time of being respectful and non-abusive, is there any possibility that we might be able to develop a truly loving and healthy relationship.

I have learned so very much in going through this anger program over the past eight months. Among other things, I now know how negative self-talk that is part of much of my disrespectful behavior can be turned into positive self-talk with great results; how being assertive

(rather than aggressive) reduces my stress level and leads to better communication with you and everyone else in my life; how controlling myself and my actions instead of trying to control you is easier and works a lot better; how noticing and feeling my emotions is not only okay but is actually a positive and healthy thing to do; how reducing my shame is so very empowering; how being open and honest may at first be the hard way but is ultimately a much better path for any relationship. And, most important, I've learned that this recovery process from being controlling and abusive takes a long time. There is no "quick fix." The important thing for me is to take "one day at a time" and to continue to use the knowledge and skills that I have gained in this counseling process.

Sandy, I pledge to you that I will never be violent to you again. Furthermore, I will continue to work to eliminate the other types of control and abuse that I have done to you and others around us. I can't believe that I expected you to be the scapegoat for all the pain that I was carrying within me. But I did. And I am deeply sorry for the emotional pain that I have created in your life as a result.

Paul

Dear Amanda:

I know now that I was abusive to you for a long time throughout the course of our marriage. I want to write this letter to you to tell you that I'm sorry for all the times I made you feel threatened and afraid. I was wrong. You did not cause me to do this or deserve to be treated that way.

There is no excuse for making another person feel frightened or hurt, especially when that person is someone you love and care about.

Often I wanted to blame you and others for things that didn't go the way I wanted them to go. It was scary to think that I was not totally in control of what happened around me. I have been very afraid, sad, hurt, and disappointed but I didn't know how to express my feelings in an appropriate way. I didn't want to face my feelings and fears but instead hid behind a mask of anger.

When I felt I couldn't control my life and you, I got angry and tried to control things even more, which only made me angrier in the end. Eventually, I stored up enough anger so that the burden became too great and then I would try to dump it off on you and blame you for things that were really my fault or my issue. When you did not take on my responsibilities, I would explode in an angry and violent way toward you.

I have carried a lot of angry and negative feelings in my life. It's not your responsibility to relieve me of those feelings and make me happy. It's my job to take care of myself. I know now that I made a choice to become abusive and violent with you. I chose not to confront my fears directly but to try to avoid them. I chose not to talk about my feelings but to suppress them. I chose not to share my hurt and disappointment but to shift the responsibility for living my life to you and then I blamed you when things didn't go as I wanted or expected.

My violent behavior was not provoked or deserved by you but rather a clear and conscious effort to control you. I made the choice to act violently the night I slapped you in the face. That was wrong. When I pinned you to the bed, I wasn't "out of control;" I made a conscious decision to "get the upper hand" and to attempt to control you in that situation. That was wrong.

I know now that the only person I can and should control is me. I am completely responsible for my feelings, insecurities, and actions.

Through my anger and violence group, I have learned:

- ...appropriate, respectful, and healthy ways to express myself;
- ...to understand that I make mistakes and to realize that I must accept responsibility for them;
- ...that being a man does not entitle me to explode or threaten in order to get my way;
- ...that exercise and moderation in alcohol and caffeine use are an important part of taking care of myself; and
- ...that I've made the choice to be violent in the past and I can actively choose not to be violent in the future.

I know I've hurt you not only physically but, more importantly, emotionally with my actions of "storming around," yelling at you, and putting you down. I've made you feel crazy with passive-aggressive behaviors and cutting remarks. You did not cause or deserve the wrath of my angry and abusive behavior. Whatever choices we make about our relationship in the future, I'm making an ongoing commitment to myself, to you, and to our sons to continue to look inwardly at who I am, what I've done in the past, and what I must continue to do to stop my abusive and controlling behaviors in the future. I will continue to seek support and counseling and practice the tools and techniques I've learned in order to act responsibly and in a healthy and respectful way with you and our boys.

Tom

Joanne:

I've made many mistakes in the past that I'm not proud of. During our break-up, I made choices that I will regret for the rest of my life. Instead of bringing us closer together, I pushed you farther away. I'm really sorry for this. I am sorry for the arguments I started with you at 3 or 4 in the morning. I should have left those issues and concerns until a better time. Instead, I argued with you and woke the boys up on a number of occasions. I am sorry for the time I stood in your way and wouldn't let you leave the room. I am sorry for the times I threw you onto the bed and held your arms down and screamed in your face. I am sorry for the time I held you down by your shoulders, making you feel like you were choking. I am sorry for the time I grabbed you by the sides of your head and forced you to look into my eyes. I am sorry for scaring you by punching the walls and the doors and for hitting myself in the head with the telephone. I am sorry for doing the things I did to intimidate you into doing what I wanted you to do. I was wrong and I had no right to do those things to you.

I am sorry for all that I did to you on the morning of September 25. I am sorry for twice pulling you off the couch, I am sorry for pushing you up the stairs, and I am sorry for shoving you into the closet wall and hitting your chin with my shoulder. I am sorry for punching you in the arm. I am especially sorry for doing these things to you in front of Sean. I am sorry for trying to keep Michael and Adam with me when you wanted to take them with you. I am sorry for not being who I wish I had been during the time when I was "stressed out" with work and put

more and more pressure on you to do more of my share of what needed to be done in our family and in our relationship. I am sorry for putting off things which were important to you, especially getting my wedding ring “sized.” I am sorry for discounting and downplaying our wedding plans. I am sorry for the many names I called you. I am sorry for continually questioning who you were and what you were doing.

I am sorry for terrifying you by saying that ex-marines can “snap” just like postal workers. I am sorry for jabbing you in the chest with my finger and telling you that you would regret all of this and that you were ruining my life. Joanne, you didn’t ruin our relationship and our family and my life. I did. And I’m the one who is now regretting it. I made so many mistakes. If I could go back in time to correct my “wrongs,” I certainly would. But I can’t do that, so correcting my “wrongs” starts now. I know I can’t correct the abusive and controlling things I did to you, but I’m going to do my best to make sure that you never see that side of me again. I know that, even though we are apart, we will still have disagreements from time to time about the boys and I commit to take time-outs and use all the skills that I have learned to control my anger and abuse so that I will be able to communicate respectfully with you. I am now seeing Sean, Michael, and Adam expressing their anger in the same way that I did and I will do my very best to teach them a better way to handle their anger from this point on. I am going to be a better and more caring father for them and for me.

I can only wonder where we would be today if I had made better choices. I’m thankful for the five and one-half years we had together, the births of Michael and Adam, and all that we shared. I am truly sorry for all the things I have done to drive you away. You did not deserve any of them. They were my choices and they were my responsibility. I wish you happiness and all you desire.

Ray

Dear Danielle:

I know that I’m not an elegant writer so I will just start sharing with you what is in my heart. I’m sorry for all of my controlling and abusive behavior with you and for my strong sense of entitlement that I have assumed in our marriage. In the past, when I worked hard, I believed that the fruits of my labor were mine and mine alone. I pursued my goals and ambitions and you were willing to come alongside me to give me that support that I needed to achieve these goals. But, when it came time for me to support you in your dreams, I was self-centered and selfish and concerned only with myself. I’m sorry Danielle. I was a taker and a user, never reciprocating the support and encouragement you had given me. And when you had no more to give, I unleashed my rage, demanding more and more from you and Andrew. That was not right. I’m sorry. I should have come alongside you to nurture your dreams and aspirations and attend to your needs. I’m sorry that I thought so much of myself and so little of you and Andrew.

I look back and see the potential our relationship had and I wish I would have given it the attention and time it deserved. It could have flourished. I’m sorry for not truly investing in our marriage. Since you left, it has become very apparent to me how controlling and abusive I was. In the past, when you challenged my authority, I struck out at you verbally and I hit you. I am really sorry for doing this to you. You did not deserve this kind of treatment from me or anyone else.

I feel like such a hypocrite because, on our wedding day, I made a promise to love, honor, and cherish you in front of God and all our closest friends. I didn't do what I promised I would do. Instead, I physically abused you by hitting you in the mouth. I embarrassed you in front of our friends and your co-workers when you had to lie about the bruise on your face. I controlled you. I emotionally put you down. I belittled your ideas, your opinions, and your feelings. I am truly sorry for my behavior. You did not deserve this kind of treatment and this is no way to cherish, honor, or love someone. I realize now the mistakes I've made by choosing to be abusive and controlling with you.

I'm now learning what it really means to be a strong man. It's not hiding behind the facade of the male ego and role. Because a facade doesn't give a structure any real strength. It's the beams and supports that make a structure strong. Those beams and supports, for me, are self-control, sensitivity, tenderness, sharing, patience, transparency, honesty, and a lack of rigid expectations about the way a partner and other things are supposed to be. My goal, through continuing counseling and other men's support groups, is to explore each of these areas and realize the potential I have to be the man I want to be. It has taken a lot of effort to change 29 years of patterned behavior and this work has just begun. By doing what I need to do from this point on, I commit to never being violent with you again. I will also continue learning about myself so that I can provide our son with a loving and non-abusive role model. I'm learning tools to handle my anger and stop my violence and abuse. I know that, by using my tools, I can provide the kind of healthy environment our son and the others around me deserve.

Danielle, I am truly sorry for the way I looked at and treated you.

Sincerely,

David

**THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXAMPLE OF AN AMENDS LETTER
THAT A FATHER WROTE TO HIS SON**

Dear Sam,

I would like to share an important part of my recovery process with you by taking full and complete responsibility for my controlling and abusive behavior with you.

I was so happy when you were born and, unfortunately, I had my own plans and unrealistic expectations for who you were supposed to be. I always believed you should be perfect in every way --- how you acted and how you did in school and in sports. This was all about making me feel and look good and not about who you were as a young boy or who you really wanted to be. I was always in a hurry to have all those plans and expectations of mine for you to come true, such as being perfect, not ever getting mad or yelling like I did when I was angry, and acting like a little adult when you were only a child. I wanted you to learn the way I learned how to be a man, how to work hard and develop a proper work ethic that would get you ahead in life. I believed that would make you happy in the same way that I defined happiness and success just like what I learned from my dad.

Sam, when you were very young, you started to witness years of verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse to you, your mom, and your brothers. You were also the target of my physical abuse toward you. I did not want you to cry, whine, or ever complain. It angered me when you did because I was fearful that someone would notice that I did not have a perfect child; then I would make the choice to escalate to be point of verbally abusing you by yelling and screaming at you to shut up and, if that did not work, I threatened to spank or slap you if you did not listen to me and obey me immediately. I also followed up on my threats and actually did physically abuse you by spanking and slapping you and also pulling your hair and squeezing your neck.

I never, ever, ever should have hit, slapped or spanked you, pulled your hair, or squeezed your neck like I did to you when you were a young boy. I never should have sworn, yelled, or screamed at you like I did either. Calling you a dumb ass, a dumb shit, an asshole, or a jerk, was hurtful, uncalled for, and completely inappropriate.

Sam, I also know that I damaged you by blaming and shaming you as I used guilt, threatening and intimidating language, and telling you how disappointed I was in you because you did not perform to my unrealistic expectations of who I wanted you to be.

I also blamed you for the anger I felt---saying that you made me mad by not meeting my expectations of you; in fact, that was really caused by my own fears and insecurities outside our home. I am also aware of how I humiliated you at times---saying that you were not worth a shit, that you would never amount to anything, and that you would be nothing but a God damn bum--- as a way to try to control you and the situation.

Sam, I hope you know that I have been very serious about learning about my anger and how I am learning to control my behavior and actions when I feel sad, hurt, and insecure and turn these feelings into anger (toward you, your mom, and your brothers). My anger will never go away completely, but I can handle it more effectively when it does come up so I do not hurt you and the other people I love. I promise you that I will continue my journey to apply the lessons I have learned to stop being emotionally, verbally, and psychologically abusive to you. You did not ever deserve this abusive behavior I have done to you. I am now realizing at this stage in my life that all I ever really wanted for you was to create your own expectations on your own terms, to have your dreams and follow them, and to be happy.

Sam, I am very sorry for how I have treated you in the past and I make a commitment to you that I will work hard, using what I have learned in my anger class, to make sure this kind of behavior does not happen with you in the future.

Love, Dad