

LOVE LETTERS

*"Remember me when I am gone away...
When you can no more hold me by the hand." - Christina Rossetti*

Everyone wants to leave behind love. Yet life is unpredictable, and so too is dying. And each of us can take steps to have our final words be words of love and gratitude.

That is why Hospice Giving Foundation encourages writing love letters. Ideally, we do these while we can; while we are healthy. However, if you learn you have a serious illness, it's time to make final messages to the important people in your life reflect gratitude and values. Your letters can be the time to say **The Four Things That Matter Most**¹ in healing and strengthening relationships: *"Thank you, I love you, I forgive you, please forgive me."*

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED, CONSIDER THESE SUGGESTIONS:

1. You don't have to write down EVERYTHING in your letter.
2. Be patient and kind with yourself. Prepare for your own emotions and sadness.
3. Make kindness the base of your letter.
4. Take your time. You may not be able to write the entire letter from start to finish in one sitting.
5. Each person you write to will be different, so allow yourself the freedom to use unique words or phrases with each person.
6. Test out starting phrases, as that is often the hardest part. Always start with 'Dear _____,' use first names or 'To My Dear Family'... You may want to start with why you are writing the letter, what you believe, what you value "It's hard for me to put this into writing, and I want you to know how much I care about you and what is important to me as I come toward the end of my life _____."
7. Be honest about your feelings. For example, "I'm scared that I might die without you knowing how grateful I am for you in my life. Writing this letter is as much for me as it is for you."
8. Towards the end of your letter encourage moving on. For example, "We made a lot of memories together. I want to leave you with love, and I want you to continue to live a good, full life after I am gone." "I think you know [this]; I didn't want you to guess, I wanted to tell you this from my heart." "Please continue the family tradition of..." "Stay involved with..."

HERE ARE ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER IN YOUR PROCESS, USING THE FOUR THINGS THAT MATTER MOST:

THANK YOU

Start the process by identifying the most important people in your life. Think about who you want to read your letter after you are gone. Acknowledge the role those people have in your life and take the time to express your pride in their achievements. Express your gratitude for all the love and care they have given you; for their concern through the trying times in your life. Maybe mention specific moments you hold close to your heart.

I LOVE YOU

Tell your friends and family how much you love them: Sometimes it is hard to express your love for someone in speech, so use your letter to say express how much you care about them. Remember treasured moments from your life: recall the most special, meaningful times you've shared with your loved ones. Reflect on important life milestones or moments you cherish.

PLEASE FORGIVE ME

Apologize to those you love if you hurt them and ask forgiveness from them. Also, take this time to forgive yourself for any mistakes you feel you have made in the past.

I FORGIVE YOU

Forgive those who have hurt you. This is not a time to be RIGHT. You may acknowledge what they have done, but ultimately you have forgiven them. This will give you, and likely the other person, a sense of release and peace when you successfully let go of old resentments.

Use this letter as a moment to say "goodbye." If you feel comfortable, take this time to ensure that you and your loved ones have a proper parting without any regret or guilt. Encourage them to move forward with their lives.

¹ Ira Byock, MD. The Four Things That Matter Most: A Book About Living - 10th Anniversary Edition. (Atria Books - Simon and Schuster | June 2014)