

PART 2 • YOUR FILL-IN-THE-BLANK TEMPLATE

The Reconnection Letter

*A fill-in-the-blank framework for the letter
you've written in your head a hundred times*

with Catherine Hickem, LCSW

40+ years guiding parents of adult children

How to use this template

1. Watch the training first (about 20 minutes). Every blank below maps directly onto what Catherine teaches — the template will make far more sense afterward.
2. Type into this PDF or print it and write by hand. Messy is fine. This is a working draft, not the letter itself.
3. Fill in the five parts in order, then copy your sentences onto the final page to assemble the complete letter.
4. Run it through the cut list and the three tests before you send anything. Then let it rest at least 24 hours.

Remember Catherine's promise: we are not trying to fix the whole relationship in one letter. The only job of this message is to make it safer for your child to come closer. That's it. That's the whole job.

Before you write a single word

This letter is not about changing them, convincing them, or getting them to see it your way. It is about you showing up as the person you want to be — regardless of how they respond. The posture is adult to adult, not parent correcting child. You are writing to a grown person whose inner world belongs to them now.

The three anchors — hold on to these as you write

- **Calm over control**

Steady, grounded, and peaceful regardless of the circumstances — instead of taking charge and directing the next steps.

- **Curiosity over judgment**

Asking healthy questions and learning — instead of being critical and assuming.

- **Safety over familiarity**

Creating a safe environment for emotional connection matters more now than holding on to the memories of old.

If a sentence you write breaks one of these three things, cut it out.

You have to have healed first

Writing can only come after you have done the work to heal your wounded places. If you haven't, your pain will leak out — and they will feel it. They know you really well; you can't fake it with them. The good news: if you write it to make it safe for them, they'll feel that too. That difference is everything.

What actually lands — every time

Before they even open a message from you, your child's body braces — for a lecture, a guilt trip, a list of everything you've done for them, or a request they're not ready to give. What they need is not perfect words. They need evidence: that you've been listening, that you can hold your own emotions without handing them over, and that there is no hook hiding in the message.

“Your child doesn't need you to be perfect. They need to feel that you finally get it — and that reaching back toward you won't cost them their peace.”

The five parts of the letter

Work through these in order. Sample lines are Catherine's — use them as guide rails, then make the words your own. Your child will recognize your real voice; that's the whole point.

PART 1 • OPEN WITH LOW PRESSURE

Take the demand out of the room — immediately. Before anything else, let them know you're not expecting anything back. That one sentence tells them: this isn't a trap, this is a letter.

■ *"You don't need to respond to this. I just needed you to have it."*

■ *"No reply is needed — I just needed to say this."*

Write your low-pressure opening (1–2 sentences):

PART 2 · ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR EXPERIENCE

You do not have to understand everything they feel — or agree with everything they believe — to acknowledge that their hurt is real. Name their experience. Do not defend your intent. Those are two different sentences, and only one of them belongs in this letter.

“I’ve been thinking about how some of the things I did landed on you — even the ones I never meant the way they came out.”

Name their experience, without defending yourself (2–3 sentences):

PART 3 · TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY — WITHOUT COLLAPSING INTO SHAME

Own your part. Be specific, but be brief. Don’t turn this into self-punishment — that just hands your child the burden of comforting you. A few clean sentences of ownership are stronger than three paragraphs of guilt. Say it once, mean it, and move on.

“I realize there have been times I have not honored your autonomy and commented on things that are none of my business. I apologize for overstepping. How you live your life is your business, not mine.”

Own your part — specific, brief, clean (2–4 sentences):

PART 4 · EXPRESS WHAT YOU WANT — WITH NO CONDITIONS ATTACHED

Now you get to say the hope out loud: connection, without attaching a demand or a timeline to it.

"I'd love to know you as the adult you are now — whenever and however you're comfortable."

Say the hope out loud, with no demand and no timeline (1–2 sentences):

PART 5 · CLOSE WITH AN OPEN DOOR AND ZERO PRESSURE

Hand them control of the pace — all of it. There's no clock on this. The door is open, on their terms.

"There's no clock on this. The door is open — on your terms."

"Whenever you're ready — if you're ever ready — I'm here."

Write your open-door close (1–2 sentences):

The secret ingredient: one real memory

One specific, real memory will do more than a page full of feelings. A real memory proves you see them — not a version of them you've built in your head. Weave one in, in one or two sentences. Keep it warm and small; no editorializing.

A specific moment with them I genuinely treasure:

The cut list: what to leave out

This is where well-meaning letters do damage. Go back through your draft and check each box only when you're sure the letter is clean of it.

No defending yourself. The moment you explain why you were right, the door you just opened closes again.

No "but." "I'm sorry, but you also..." — that "but" erases everything that came before it. Cut every single one.

No guilt-tripping. No "after everything I've done." No "you have no idea how much this hurts me." It may be true for you — it still doesn't belong in this letter.

No blaming a third party. Not the ex, not a spouse, not a friend, not their partner. It reads as dodging, even when it isn't.

No pressure lines. No "please just call me." No "I'm not getting any younger."

No rehashing history blow by blow. You're not litigating the case here.

No lectures, no scripture, no advice — unless that is genuinely shared ground between you already.

Write this on a sticky note:

*"If a sentence is there to make you feel better or to prove a point — take it out.
Everything that stays should make it safer for them to come closer."*

The three tests before you call it done

Read it out loud.

Ask yourself honestly: would I want to receive this?

If you have one safe person in your life, let them read it — and tell you if it still has a hook in it somewhere.

Timing, pacing, and format

- **Format matters more than people think.**

A letter or a card can feel safer to receive than a text, because it doesn't demand an instant reply. A long email can start to feel like homework. Match the format to whatever feels lowest-pressure for them specifically.

- **Be careful with gifts alongside the letter.**

A gift can feel like an obligation — or even a bribe. A simple, honest message is almost always safer to receive than a package.

- **Don't send it reactively.**

Not at 2 a.m., not right after a hard conversation or a hard interaction. Send it from a settled place — and let the finished draft rest at least 24 hours first.

- **Silence is not rejection.**

Very often, silence is your child needing time to trust that this is real — that it isn't a setup for the same old pattern.

- **No follow-up barrage.**

The kindest, strongest thing you can do after you hit send is give them room. Real room. Keep living a full life while you wait — don't write the end of your story yet.

My sending plan

Format I'll use (letter, card, email, text) — and why it's lowest-pressure for them:

When I'll send it (a settled, ordinary moment — not a reaction, not a loaded date):

“This was never only about getting a reply. It's about you becoming the parent you want to be — and that part is yours to keep, no matter what they decide to do.”

Copy your sentences from the five parts — opening, acknowledgment, accountability, your hope, the open door — and weave in your one real memory where it fits naturally. Then read it out loud.

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