

Special Needs Planning: Letter of Intent

A letter of intent is a blueprint of your child's situation and your wishes for your child when you are no longer there to carry them out. While not legally binding, the letter provides direction for the person or persons who will be caring for your child. You should start a letter of intent as soon as possible and update it as your child grows, including information such as:

- Medical information about your child, including diagnosis, care and support the child currently receives, medications, emergency instructions, physicians, therapies, etc.
- A "snapshot" of your child's capabilities in regard to daily living skills (bathing, dressing, toileting, money management, cooking, etc.).
- Any special equipment your child needs, such as wheelchairs, shower chairs, modified computers, voice recognition software, utensils or plates, etc. Also who to contact to maintain this equipment or where to go to repair or replace it.
- Education your child has received, as well as future education you'd like your child to receive.
- Living arrangements...where would you (and your child) like for the child to live if something should happen to you? What happens when you just can't physically care for him or her anymore? Indicate whether you feel your child can live independently or would be better in a group environment. Be aware this item may need a long lead time (years) to put into place for independent living, depending upon where you live.
- Employment opportunities that you feel might be open to your child as a disabled adult.
- Social/behavioral information, such as activities and the types of toys your child enjoys, who your child likes to play with, plus any behavior management issues, including how you discipline your child.
- Dietary information, including food likes and dislikes, any special diet restrictions, problems swallowing, etc.
- Religious information as appropriate.

In addition, the letter of intent should include the child's vital information (full name, nick name, place and date of birth, Social Security number), plus the name and contact information of anyone involved in your child's life, such as a caseworker, school or work contact, financial advisor, executor of your will and/or the child's guardian. It's also a good idea to either include a set of the child's medical records or make reference to where those records are located. Finally, provide financial guidance, including information on medical insurance, financial resources available to the child and who to contact for assistance/additional information.