

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

The Letter of Intent: A Successor Caregiver's Field Manual

The single document that lets someone who has never lived with your adult know exactly how to support him next Tuesday. Routines, communication, medical history, triggers, calming tools, staffing, community.

BY JIM PALASTY · OASIS FOR AUTISM · 9 MIN READ

7

CHAPTERS

Routines. Communication. Medical. Triggers. Calming tools. Staffing. Community. Roughly twenty pages. Updated annually. Lifesaving.

How it works

THREE STEPS

Cover the seven sections

Pull from memory, calendars, IEPs, clinical notes. Write the way you would tell a friend, not a court. Specificity beats polish.



Walk it to the successors

Named guardians, rep payee, trustee, sibling, two trusted friends. Read it together. Mark what is unclear.



Annual review

Tie the update to a birthday or anniversary. One hour, once a year. The successor needs current information, not a museum piece.

Sections of the letter of intent

Identity	Name, age, photo, preferred name, legal status, legal documents in force
Routines	Morning, school/work, evening, weekend, sleep, hour by hour
Communication	Verbal, AAC, gestures, scripts that work, scripts that do not
Medical	Diagnoses, meds, allergies, providers, hospitalizations, dentist
Triggers & calming	What flips the switch, what calms it, exact tools and sequence
Staffing	Day program, DSPs, respite, sibling rotation, who does what
Community	Friends, neighbors, faith group, clubs, employers, library, store

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE



After my husband died, my sister-in-law moved in for six weeks to give me a break. I handed her a fifteen-page letter of intent. She read it that night. She knew exactly what to do at four-thirty in the morning when my son started pacing the kitchen because the milk had run out. She knew which song to put on, which mug to use, and where the spare gallon was hidden in the garage. The letter did all of that.

PATRICIA, KALAMAZOO

What matters, at a glance

The bus accident question

If a bus hits you tomorrow, who knows that your adult cannot eat eggs and panics around fluorescent lights? The letter is the answer. The lack of a letter is the catastrophe.

Routines section

Morning, school or work, evening, weekend, sleep. Hour by hour. The successor needs a script, not a philosophy. Generic does not survive Wednesday.

Triggers and calming tools

Lights, sounds, smells, foods, environments. The tools that help: the favorite blanket, the YouTube channel, the drive around the block, the song.

Annual review trigger

Tie the update to a birthday or anniversary. Set a calendar reminder now. The 25th of June. Or whatever day works. Annual is the rule.

Medical history

Diagnoses, current meds, allergies, last hospitalization, primary doctor, key specialists, the dentist who knows. One page if the doctors cooperate.

Community connections

Who already knows your adult and who can be called when the manual runs thin. Names, phone numbers, the church or club or library or neighbor.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Identity & legal status section drafted | ☐ Routines section drafted |
| ☐ Communication section drafted | ☐ Medical section drafted |
| ☐ Triggers & calming section drafted | ☐ Staffing section drafted |
| ☐ Community section drafted | ☐ Reviewed by two named successors |
| ☐ Annual review on calendar | |

YOUR MOVE

When you sit down to write

- 1 Open a blank document. Title it Letter of Intent for [Adult's name].
- 2 Write the morning routine first. One section. Forty-five minutes.
- 3 Save. Walk away. Come back in two days for the next section.
- 4 After all seven sections are drafted, share with two trusted reviewers.
- 5 Print. One copy in the safe. One in the binder. One with the named successor.

The letter is not legal. The letter is everything that the legal documents cannot hold.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

oasisforautism.com · <https://oasisforautism.com>

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Jim Palasty is the founder of OASIS for Autism and a single father of an adult autistic daughter in Michigan.