

# Letter to My Past Self

## reflection exercise

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The emotional impact of past regrets, losses, and traumas can linger on for years.

In this exercise, you will describe a past experience that feels unresolved, write a letter to yourself at that time, and reflect on the resulting insights and emotions.

### Prepare

Recall a past experience that feels unresolved and continues to impact your life. Write the *facts* of the event, including your age at the time, what happened, and who was involved:

Describe how this experience continues to impact your life:

### Write

Write a letter to your past self about this unresolved experience. Address your past self with “you,” be as honest as possible, and don’t worry about spelling or grammar.

- Tell your past self any relevant insights you now have about the struggle.
- Offer forgiveness and compassion to your younger self.
- Mention anything else you feel is important to promote healing and closure.

Examples are provided on the last page if you would like further direction.

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## Letter

*Dear Past Self,*

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## Process

Describe any insights you had while completing this activity:

Describe ways you can grow from your experience:

Additional comments (optional):

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### Examples

The following examples show how two people approached this exercise. Use these to reflect on ways to write your letter while staying true to your own situation and personality.

### Example 1

*Dear Past Self,*

*You were just 13 when you got caught up with the wrong group at school and started bullying others. Even after 20 years, I can still remember how scared and helpless the kids you bullied looked! Man, the guilt and shame I have over that still hurts so much!! I know you felt this at the time, but you ignored it because you were so desperate to fit in.*

*I've learned the hard way that it takes mad courage to hold true to your values, especially when others are putting pressure on you. I've also learned that popularity is meaningless! It took a lot of time before I finally accepted myself enough to stop trying to make everyone like me. I wish you could have had that courage at 13, but I feel proud of the person I have become.*

*Past self, I forgive you for what you did to those other kids. It was wrong then, and it still feels wrong now. But I know how lonely you felt at that time and how you were willing to do almost anything not to feel that way. I want to let go of the guilt I've been carrying over this. I wish peace to you, to my present self, and to those who were harmed by what I did.*

### Example 2

*Dear Past Self,*

*Decades later, I still remember the brutal grief you felt after mom died when you were just 20. You hadn't spoken to her for months because of an argument that now seems pointless. You thought you had all the time in the world to patch things up. You had only just left home and had no clue about how uncertain life can be. I cringe when I think of the intense grief and guilt you felt at that time.*

*Never again have I taken the presence of my friends and loved ones for granted!! Every day, I remind myself how fragile life is, how things can be taken away without warning. Mom's death motivates me to be more present to my loved ones – to cherish every conversation, every moment spent together.*

*Past self, I send you all my love and compassion for what you went through. Stop blaming yourself for your argument with mom – you were doing the best you could! You know deep down that both of you never stopped loving one another. Mom wants you to be happy and free. You owe it to her to stop beating yourself up! We can honor her memory by sharing love with others and living a full life.*