

Reader Question: Asking (Reluctant) Friends For Letters Of Recommendation

Description



The Letter, Please!

Question: My friend seems reluctant to write us a letter of recommendation for a school that is very hard to get into. Our friend says it is because her family has been resistant to one of the school's most important programs and she doesn't want to hurt our chances of getting in. What should we do?

Answer: This is an interesting question! In my experience and the experience of many of my friends, this happens more often than you might expect. You may be hoping a friend will say "yes" right away and quickly write you a glowing letter of recommendation. Instead, the friend hesitates, seems reluctant, or just says "no."

Now that I'm a mom who gets asked to write letters for families applying to The Willows, I have a better understanding of what's really going on.

- It could be that our reader's friend is being truthful and is not on good terms with the school's administration. It happens! If that's the situation, you probably should not have them write you a letter.
- A family may have been asked to write letters for 3 or 4 families at the same time. They may only want to write 1 or 2 letters to avoid seeming like they are recommending everyone they know without being selective. It may take some convincing to let them know you're serious about the school. *You can also tell them that if accepted, you will enroll your child.* But, only if it's true. Lying to friends isn't cool and could ruin your friendship. Your friend will be putting their reputation at stake if they promise the school you'll enroll. Then, if you change your mind, they will be left embarrassed and furious at you. They will have to apologize to the admissions director.
- This may be the first time your friend has ever been asked to write a letter (especially if they are new to the school). This is where sample letters of recommendation are a huge help. We include several real examples in [Beyond The Brochure](#). Offer to write the letter for your friend and have them edit it. That will help!

- Some schools discourage letters of recommendation—or even prohibit them. If this is the case, abide by the school policy.
- Your friend may not think your child is a good fit for the school. Or, they may wonder if you’ll be happy as a parent there. This probably won’t be discussed with you. They will just make up reasons why they can’t write a letter for you. If you get the feeling they are reluctant, move on to somebody else.
- Who IS a good person to ask for a letter of recommendation? Board members (current or former), current or alumni families, friends who have a connection to the school i.e. they know the admissions director from their professional or volunteer work, etc. Tell everyone you know that you’re applying to specific schools and you may be surprised who knows who! LA is a big city, but a small town.

My lesson learned. I once wrote a letter of recommendation for a mom at one of my kids’ preschools. The family got in and turned out to be a nightmare. Ultimately, they were asked to leave the school. I didn’t know the mom well enough to recommend her for the school and I shouldn’t have lobbied for her child to get in. I’ve also had to walk into Kim Feldman’s office (she’s the Willows School Admissions Director) and tell her that the letter I just wrote for a family isn’t entirely accurate. In this case, my friends changed their mind about their school preferences. Luckily, it was well before admissions decisions were made and Kim appreciated my honesty.

A few other common issues:

- Your friend writes you a letter of recommendation, but you don’t like the letter. You can always ask your friend to make the letter more personal and less like a form letter. Offer some sentences about your family to help improve the letter.
- Your friend writes a letter for you, but doesn’t give you a copy. Ask for a copy for your files. If they don’t want to provide it, don’t worry about it.
- If you love a particular school, but don’t know anyone who can write you a letter, a good place to find families to ask for letters of recommendation is your preschool alumni who have children at the school. They may be willing to help you, especially if the preschool has a strong sense of community.

It’s not easy asking friends or acquaintances to write letters on your behalf. But, letters really can help your application, so don’t hesitate to ask.

Category

1. Beyond The Brochure

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