

# Re-Writing to Heal, Not Hurt –

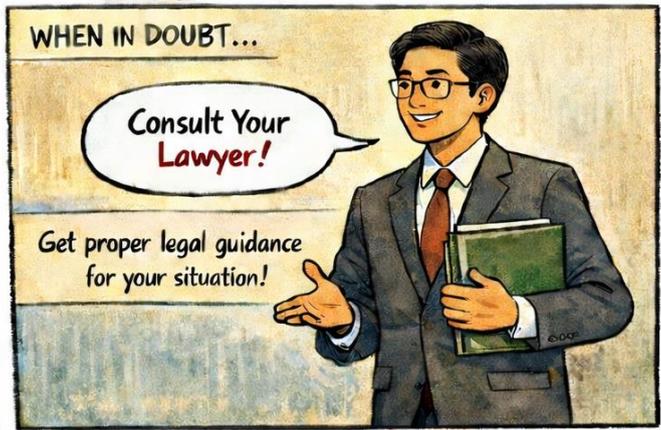
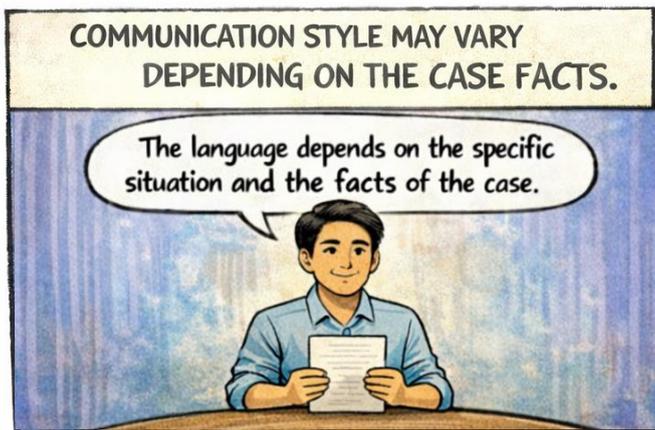
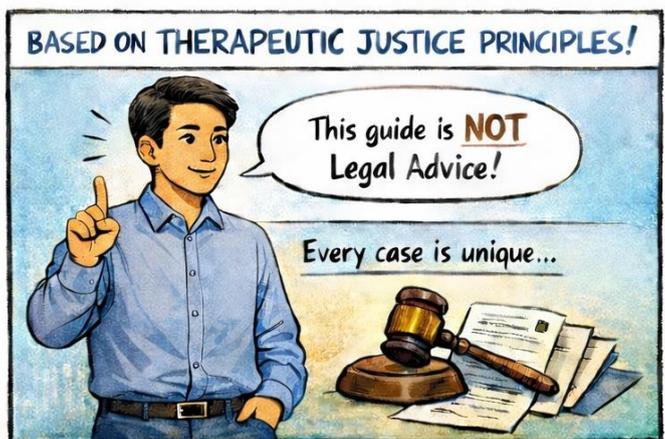
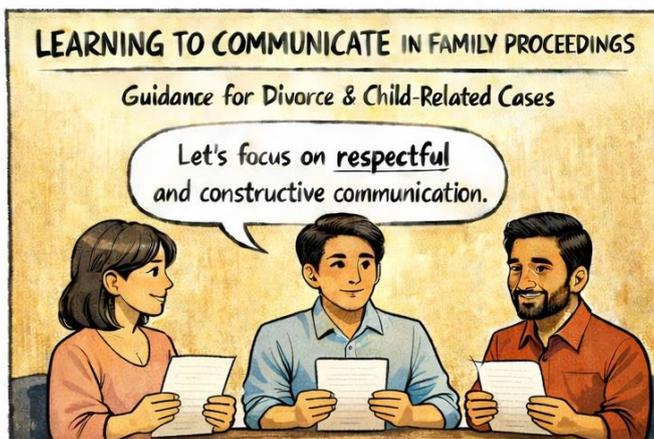
– a Therapeutic Justice Language Guide  
for Family Litigants



# Re-Writing to Heal, Not Hurt – a Therapeutic Justice Language Guide for Family Litigants

This guide is intended for parties involved in family proceedings, in particular, divorce and child-related proceedings, to help them to learn how to communicate in a respectful and constructive manner, in accordance with therapeutic justice principles.

Please note that this guide is not intended to replace legal advice. The appropriate words to be used in written correspondence or any other communications between parties or court documents will differ based on the facts and circumstances of each case. If you are unsure how to apply the language tips in this guide or whether they are applicable for your case, please seek legal advice.



- **What is Therapeutic Justice (TJ)?**



Therapeutic Justice at the Family Justice Courts is about helping families move on from past issues and work towards a better future. Under the guidance of a judge or mediator, the parties and their lawyers will work together with other professionals to find prompt and lasting solutions to their issues.<sup>1</sup>

The key aims of TJ are, amongst other things, for parties to resolve their family disagreements amicably, reduce acrimony and conflict, and treat one another with respect, empathy and support.

## ▪ What is TJ language?

In line with the TJ aims set out above, divorcing parties should use respectful and constructive language in letters with the other party and in court documents (“TJ language”). They should not use inflammatory and provocative language in letters and court documents that heighten tensions and/or insist on having the last word (“anti-TJ language”)<sup>2</sup>.

The use of TJ language should also apply to private communications between parties, whether verbally, or in writing, for example in text messages or emails.

### How will using TJ language help me?

It is hurtful and stressful to receive communications in anti-TJ language.

TJ language is respectful communication that solves problems instead of creating more conflict. Hence, using TJ language can help you to preserve a good relationship with your spouse or ex-spouse – or at least not strain it further.

This is especially important if you need to co-parent after divorce.

TJ language helps to make the other party feel respected, which then makes it more likely that you can have a productive negotiation with them, and an amicable settlement which they are more likely to stick to.

## ▪ How will this guide help me to use TJ language?

This guide will give you tips on how to write in a TJ way.

# TJ Language Checklist

## 1. Think about your goal, write and then pause

### 1. Think about your goal, write and then pause

The first step is to think about what you want your spouse to do after receiving your letter or affidavit or other communication (e.g. *I want him to pay the child maintenance on time without me having to chase him*).

Then, write out what you want to say to achieve this goal (e.g. *"I did not receive the S\$400 child maintenance from you this month. Please transfer it immediately and in future on the 1st of every month, as the court order says, so that I can pay for the child's expenses"*).

You can even propose ideas and solutions to help you achieve your goal (e.g. *"Please put a reminder in your phone to alert you one day before payment is due or set up a monthly giro arrangement."*).

You may feel angry and emotional when writing. It is okay not to feel okay.

**PAUSE**  

Do not send it out yet. Instead, put it aside for a while (at least 15 minutes – or it could even be for an hour, a day, or more). You could consider doing some self-care activity, if possible, like going for a walk, having a cup of tea, or watching a light-hearted video. Wait until you feel calm and at ease before going back to your draft.

going for a walk      having a cup of tea      watching a light-hearted video

## 2. Review before sending out

Review what you wrote, keeping the following principles in mind:

### (a) Talk about what you did right, rather than what the other party did wrong



You could explain, for example, what you did to care for the family.

There is no need to list all the things the other party did or failed to do which in your view were harmful to the family.



### (b) Separate facts from feelings and opinions



Ask yourself what are facts (things which happened), and what are feelings and opinions (your view of the facts).

For example:

'He did not reply to my last three text messages about the children.' is a fact.

'I feel very frustrated.' is a feeling.

'This shows he is an uncaring father.' is an opinion.

Try to put only the facts down, without putting in your feelings and opinions. The judge can draw his or her own conclusions from the facts – and will not need your feelings and opinions to do this.



### (c) Focus on the action, not the person



Avoid shaming, blaming or labelling.

Use statements focusing on the facts of the situation and the practical impact on you, rather than statements blaming the other party.

For example, instead of saying 'You have missed so many maintenance payments, you obviously do not care about the children. They could starve and you still would not care.'

you could say 'Did did not pay maintenance for the past 3 months. This makes it very difficult for me to pay for the children's school fees and food.'





### (d) Focus on solutions for the future and shared goals, and not the wrongs of the past



It would be best to focus on what you and the other party both want (for example, that your children grow up into happy and healthy adults), and what you think you could both do to help achieve this shared goal. Avoid listing grievances from the past which are not relevant or helpful to achieve your shared goals and possible solutions.

For example, instead of saying “*She has never respected my time or the children’s time, and always turned up late for access.*”, you could say “*In order to make sure that everyone can have certainty on the access schedule, I would like to request that we can have an arrangement that if she is more than half an hour late, the access session be cancelled for that day and refixed to another day.*”

Another example is to say “*Our son benefits from a consistent routine. So it would be best for you to fix a regular access schedule with him, which he can look forward to, and which I can also prepare him for.*”, rather than “*It is very disruptive when you just swing by to see our son whenever you want without any warning.*”



### (e) Keep words neutral and respectful



Avoid words that judge the other party’s motives. For example, “*When you do not answer my messages, it is difficult for us to plan the children’s schedule.*”, rather than “*You deliberately ignore my messages about the children – you are obviously not interested in co-operating with me on the children’s matters.*”

Avoid strong language such as “*You failed to comply with the court order to bring the children to my house on Tuesday.*”. Instead, you can say “*I appreciate you bringing the children to my home every Tuesday. Can we discuss why the children did not come this week? We need to work together to follow the court order so that the children’s routine remains stable. Can we talk about how to prevent similar situations in future?*”

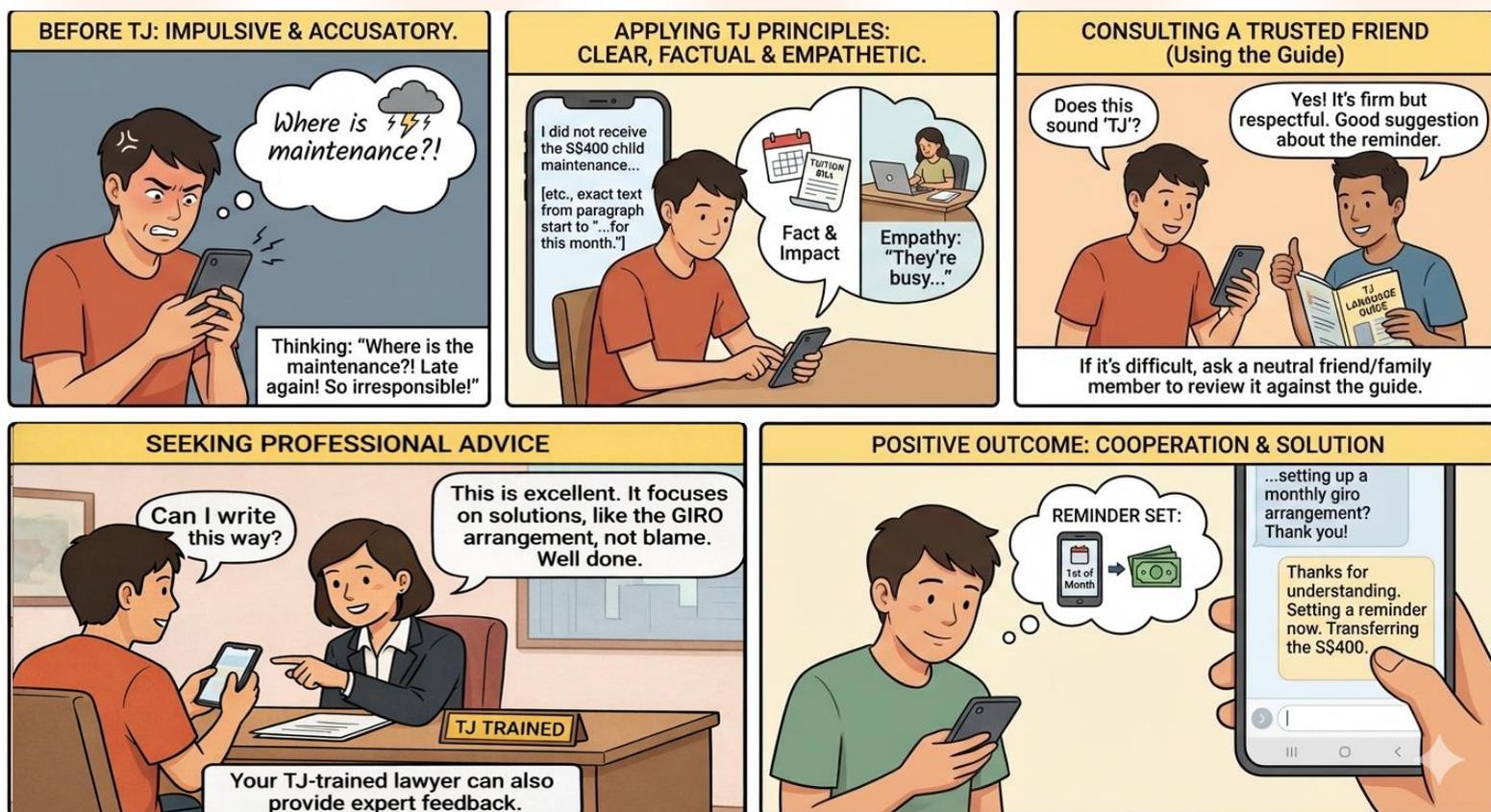
Avoid accusatory or judgmental words that might be perceived as attacking a person’s character as this might trigger a defensive reaction in the other party and close off dialogue. For example, rather than saying “*Your behaviour is unacceptable.*”, it would be better to say: “*When you did [the action, for example uttering vulgarities], that resulted in [impact to me, for example feeling disrespected, and not able to carry on with the conversation]. I would request that you do not repeat [the action], as it would make it difficult to [achieve a shared goal, for example communicate constructively on the children’s access arrangements.]*”

## ▪ What if I find it very difficult to write in TJ language?

Keeping the above principles in mind, a more TJ way to rewrite the example in page 5 above could be:

*"I did not receive the \$400 child maintenance from you this month. This meant that I was [for example, not able to pay our son's maths tuition fees on time]. I would be grateful if you could transfer the money to me by today so I can pay our son's expenses for this month. It is important that you pay the maintenance on the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month, as the court order says, so that I can pay for the child's expenses on time. I understand that you are working hard at your job and are very busy, and it is easy to overlook the maintenance payment date. I wonder if you could consider putting a reminder in your phone to alert you a day before the payment is due or setting up a monthly GIRO arrangement? Thank you!"*

If you feel that it is very difficult to write in TJ language, you could consult a friend or family member whom you trust to be honest and neutral to read over what you wrote and give you feedback on whether it sounds TJ or anti-TJ. You could give the person this guide to read first, so they know what to look out for. Your lawyer, who should be trained in TJ, would also be able to advise you.



## ▪ Could AI help me?

It is also possible to get an AI tool to help you rewrite your statements in a TJ manner<sup>3</sup>.

### However, a note of caution on using AI to help you:

AI can help to rephrase sentences, adjust tone, and organize ideas. However, it cannot tell what is true or false, and it may hallucinate or change the meaning of what you wrote.

Therefore, you must always review the final draft carefully and change it if necessary to make sure that:

- ✓ (a) the facts are correct;
- ✓ (b) the voice sounds like you; and
- ✓ (c) it reflects your position and goals.



**To preserve everyone's privacy, never paste identifying information** (like names, NRIC numbers, addresses, case numbers (e.g. from court, the police or your lawyer) etc, especially information that could identify children or divorcing parties) into AI.

## ▪ Possible TJ Language Prompts

The following are examples of prompts you could use if you wish to assess what you have written for anti-TJ language and make it more TJ. You should paste the prompt and then paste or upload your writing sample into the AI tool.

Please note that these are examples only, and you must decide how to craft your own prompt to best suit your particular circumstances, voice and intentions.

The prompts cover formal, neutral and warm tones, as different tones would be more appropriate for different situations.

### **Formal Tone — for court documents (e.g. affidavits) or lawyer letters**



Read the following text as if you were a legal professional trained in therapeutic justice. Point out the parts that sound accusatory, judgmental, or emotionally charged, and if so, suggest revisions that make them sound calm, objective, and respectful while preserving factual accuracy and firmness of boundaries. The final version should sound professional, measured, and focused on problem-solving rather than blame.

### **Neutral Tone — for letters and emails between parties on important issues**



Read the following text as if you were a family mediator trained in therapeutic justice. Point out parts that could make the reader defensive or escalate conflict, and rewrite them to sound calm, respectful and constructive – as if two people were trying to work through a problem collaboratively. Keep the message authentic, polite, and clear.

### **Warm / Relational Tone — for text messages and other communications between parties on administrative, day-to-day issues**



Read the following text as if you were a coach, trying to help the parties communicate with empathy and insight. Review my text through a therapeutic justice lens and transform it into language that is warm, respectful and empathetic. It should be honest, but not hostile. Preserve my meaning but express it in a way that promotes healing and understanding.

**Example text:**

*"You do not take co-parenting seriously. You said you would come to see the children on Thursday at 7 pm to take them for dinner, and you were one hour late. The children were hungry and anxious, and I was also wondering whether to cook dinner for them or not. They were upset, and I had to comfort them and feed them snacks. This is unacceptable behaviour. I am tired of having to do extra work because of your inconsiderate actions."*

The writer's goal is to tell the children's father to keep to the agreed access timings, as that is in the children's best interests.

Prompt results and further edits by authors<sup>4</sup>:

Prompt	Result	TJ tone features + Edits made
<b>Formal</b>	<i>The respondent [i.e. the children's father] did not arrive at the agreed time of 7:00 p.m. on Thursday to take the children for dinner, arriving approximately one hour late. As a result, the children became hungry and anxious, and I had to prepare snacks for them. I was also uncertain whether to proceed with dinner arrangements. These repeated delays cause unnecessary distress to the children and additional work for me. I respectfully request that the respondent adhere to agreed timing for access to minimise disruption to the children's routine.</i>	Objective, professional, no personal attack, focused on facts and impact on children.  Authors changed "collection times" to "timing for access", so that the text does not make the children sound like parcels to be collected!
<b>Neutral</b>	<i>You were an hour late on Thursday for dinner with the children. They became hungry and anxious while waiting, and I was unsure whether to prepare dinner. I gave them snacks and tried to reassure them, but they were disappointed. I'd appreciate it if you could keep to the agreed access times, so the children's routine isn't disrupted.</i>	Conversational but courteous; addresses behaviour, not character; collaborative framing ("I'd appreciate it if...").  The AI did not ask for the other party to keep to the agreed access timings, only to let the writer know if he was going to be late. Therefore, authors made amendments to put forward the actual meaning intended by the writer.
<b>Warm/Relational</b>	<i>The kids were really looking forward to dinner with you on Thursday at 7 pm. When it got later, they started feeling</i>	Empathetic, emotionally open, assumes goodwill, gentle boundary-setting.

*hungry and anxious, and I wasn't sure if I should cook them dinner. I gave them some snacks and tried to comfort them. It would help a lot if you could keep to the agreed time. It makes things easier for everyone, especially the kids.*

The AI did not ask for the other party to keep to the agreed access timings, only to let the writer know if he was going to be late. Therefore, the authors made amendments to put forward the actual meaning intended by the writer, as well as further amendments for clarity regarding the dinner time, and that the writer was considering whether to cook dinner.

The edits demonstrate that although AI is helpful in assessing, reviewing and making suggestions to your text, you still need to read it carefully and edit it (where necessary) to make sure it is clear and conveys your intended meaning; and also be prepared to make amendments of your own, to convey your intended meaning.

## ▪ What if the other party does not use TJ language?

You may be in a situation where you are using TJ language in your communications, but the other party persists in using anti-TJ language. If there are court proceedings, you or your lawyer can highlight the use of anti-TJ language to the court.

In terms of your own response, you should not mirror what they are doing. Instead, continue to communicate in TJ language and acknowledge the concerns of the other party (for example, *"I can see you're concerned about our child."*). You should focus on solutions (for example, *"I would like to propose the following access timings for your consideration, which takes into account the children's schedules as well as both our schedules."*), but also set boundaries (for example *"I'd like to keep our text messages about the children's matters and not discuss past matters."*)

**What if... THE OTHER PARTY DOES NOT USE TJ LANGUAGE?**

This isn't going well...

**YOU'RE ALWAYS SELFISH!**

**I'M TAKING YOU TO COURT!**

**IN COURT:**

Your Honor, as you can see, the other party is using hostile language in their communications...

**STAY CALM & USE TJ LANGUAGE**

I understand you're upset. I can see you're concerned about our child.

**SET BOUNDARIES**

Let's keep our messages about the children's matters and not discuss past issues.

Fine, whatever...

**STAY ON TRACK**

How about we try these access times?

OK, let's discuss.

**Stay focused on solutions!**

## And last...



Do not speak to attack the other party or to try and make the other party feel bad or look bad. Do not use your communications to express your own frustrations. The goal of your communications should be to solve problems.

Keep in mind that writing in a respectful and balanced way is not being weak. In fact, it creates the opposite impression. It shows that you are calm, mature and in control of the situation and the conversation.

When you reread what you have written, ask yourself *“Does the tone and content of what I have written reflect the courteous, kind and respectful person and the good role model for my children that I want to be?”* Rewrite it until the answer is an unqualified “yes”. The rewriting could, in itself, be a process of emotional regulation and healing. It is you finding your best, most courteous and reasonable self, through the editing and rewriting process.<sup>5</sup>

**Authors:**

Lim Hui Min  
*Director of Legal Aid, Legal Aid Bureau*

Darren Chan  
*Deputy Director, Legal Aid Bureau*

**Graphics and Design:**

Lye Zhi Hui  
*Senior Assistant Director (Legal Technology Unit), Legal Aid Bureau*

## References

1. The Family Justice Courts Therapeutic Justice Model (TJ Model) – Abridged Version states:

*“TJ at the Family Justice Courts (FJC) is about helping families accept the past and move towards their best possible future. It involves a judge-led process where parties and their lawyers, along with other professionals, work together to find timely and enduring solutions to the families’ disagreements within the framework of the law.*

See the Family Justice Courts Therapeutic Justice Model (TJ Model) – Abridged Version (TJ Model (Abridged)) - [https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/docs/default-source/family-docs/fjc\\_tj-abridged2d5f56c9-87ab-49da-8a18-288155fdb4b.pdf?sfvrsn=ba3b1dab\\_1](https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/docs/default-source/family-docs/fjc_tj-abridged2d5f56c9-87ab-49da-8a18-288155fdb4b.pdf?sfvrsn=ba3b1dab_1); and the Family Justice Courts Therapeutic Justice Model dated 21 October 2024 – [https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/docs/default-source/family-docs/fjc\\_tj\\_full.pdf?sfvrsn=6d5426b0\\_2](https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/docs/default-source/family-docs/fjc_tj_full.pdf?sfvrsn=6d5426b0_2) <last accessed on 19 February 2026>

2. See TJ Model (Abridged), referred to in (1) above.

3. There are many AI tools on the market which can generate text, answer questions, summarise contents, and so on – which can be used for re-writing text into TJ language. Commonly used ones include ChatGPT: <https://chatgpt.com/>, Claude: <https://claude.ai/>, Gemini: <https://gemini.google.com/>. We are not endorsing the use of any particular AI tool, however, or the use of AI tools for this purpose, merely stating that it is a possibility.

4. We had used ChatGPT 5. We have quoted in full the resultant text and the AI’s own comments on the TJ tone features – but also included our own edits after reviewing the content.

5. The content and examples of TJ language in this guide were prepared by the authors save for the prompt results obtained from ChatGPT 5 at pages 11-12 of this guide. The authors used PairChat, a government-based AI platform as well as ChatGPT 5 for ideas on how to structure this guide, ensure there is a good flow, and also review it for typographical errors.