



## Revolutionary Love Letters to Parents

# Joy

From:

The Revolutionary Love Project

To: You





# Joy

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## Dear Parent,

If I asked you, “How do we solve world hunger?” what does that question feel like in your body?

I don’t know about you, but I feel heavy, overwhelmed, and defeated. I’m immediately in touch with all the desperation of starvation, as well as guilt for the food in my cupboards. When so many bright people have tried to solve this problem, what good can I really do?

What happens when I ask: What is the most *joyful* way to solve world hunger?

I immediately see healthy, well-fed smiles, international and local economies that sustain and empower formerly impoverished communities, children busily learning in school, finally able to focus with full bellies, small businesses and creative chefs offering nourishing food in town centers where communities gather to listen to music, laugh, and eat food. Everyone is being fed by farms that thrive with rich soil, well-treated animals, and practices that benefit wildlife.

I also see that, on the way to making this vision a reality, the needs of communities are tended. We still work hard, and we don’t always feel joyful, but the potential is being tended along the way. Our battles are fought with friends and music. There is time for tears, time for children, and time to properly bury the dead.

Joy is a communal phenomenon. *I* may feel happy, but *we* feel joy. Joy demands we tend to all beings’ physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual well-being. Joy is

deeply ethical.

This is as true for significant social issues as it is for difficulties at home.

We can ask ourselves: What's the most joyful way to get dressed in the morning? What's the most joyful way to talk to our children about race? What's the most joyful way to spend Saturday morning together? What's the most joyful way to apologize for snapping at my child? What's the most joyous way to grieve together? When joy is at the center of solving our family's challenges, it's easier to imagine solutions that nourish everyone.

*"Joy returns us to everything good and beautiful and worth fighting for,"* Valarie writes at the end of *See No Stranger*. Joy also provides maps for how to love, live, and fight well. We've placed this letter in the beginning because we hope that you remember to return to joy as a guide no matter what you are facing. You don't even have to feel it. Simply drop the word into whatever troubles you and let it set fire to your imagination, loosen your heart's tears, deepen your breath, reorient your values, and remind you that you belong.

—With love, The Revolutionary Love Project Team

## Defining joy

Joy is the core practice that sustains all others. To let in joy is to give our senses over to what feels beautiful, delightful, pleasurable, or wondrous in the present moment. Joy is the gift of love. It gives us energy for the long labor.

*"In joy, we see even darkness with new eyes. Joy returns us to everything that is good and beautiful and worth fighting for. I was not alone. I was one in millions. I was part of a movement, one in a constellation. I had to shine my light in my specific slice of sky. I could do that." (Kaur, 2020, p. 284)*

For more exploration of joy, get **the Revolutionary Love Project Compass guide**.

## Practices to foster joy

### Purposefully and mindfully enjoy activities together

For example, Valarie's family does chocolate and cuddle "tastings" (not at the same time). For chocolate tastings, they take small bites of chocolate, perhaps a few flavors, and talk about what it feels like in the body to eat it. Describing the flavors and sensations brings more enjoyment to the process! In a cuddle tasting, they find different ways to cuddle and ask the other person if they feel it. *I put my hand on your shoulder. Do you feel it? I placed my foot on your foot; do you feel it?*

These games are potent reminders that invite us to slow down and gain deep joy from simple pleasures. You can do these practices yourself or adapt them to things your family already loves to do. For example, if you love to dance, talk about what movements or songs bring you joy and what that feels like.

## **Create ways to make challenges more fun**

When you have something hard to do or a daily routine that isn't that fun, brainstorm with your child about how the job or routine could become more joyful. *Do you have any ideas about how we can make cleaning up more joyful? Should we put on music so we can sing while we clean? What do you think?* Realistically, these conversations may or may not improve the routine or job, but discussing teaches your children that joy is essential. It builds the idea that it should be tended. In the best-case scenario, the conversations work and make family life more fun!

## **Reflect on what was joyful in your day or week**

*Do you know what happened to me at work today? It was so joyful... Did anything joyful happen to you?* Children are generally enthusiastic to hear about fun and joy. Telling them stories and inviting them to tell you stories starts to build a vocabulary of joy, which will help them begin to participate in more kinds of joy in their life. They will also teach you about new types of joy. You can also teach your friends and family about the importance of joy by inviting them to share their stories.

## **Laugh at children's jokes, even if you fake it.**

Children's jokes are a bid for a moment of joyful attention. When they are well received, they feel seen, heard, and respected. Well-timed silliness is often young children's favorite kind of joy. Learning to laugh on command is a nourishing life skill.

## **Take time to appreciate getting through difficult times together**

The most profound joy is often paired with grief or struggle. It's the depth of joy and love we feel when we look at our children and know they won't be with us forever. You and your child can tune into this joy by talking about it. *Do you remember how we always used to fight when it was time to go to bed? Now, we never do. We are growing and learning together! I feel so much joy at how much we've grown and how we get through hard things together.* Or perhaps you all feel sad when a beloved friend or relative who is visiting has to go; you might say something like, *"I know I love them so much because I'm so sad when they have to go. It brings me so much joy to love them so deeply."*

## Children's books for joy

- **Hey Baby** by Andrea Pippins — A sweet, simple board book that joyfully expresses all aspects of a baby's day. A joyful read for young children.
- **Saturday** By Oge Mora — When Saturday comes, Ava and her mother have big plans, but none of them go as expected. Despite the disappointment, they find joy in spending time with one another.
- **Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story** by Kevin Noble Maillard — A celebration of culture, family, and community through food; this story demonstrates how we come together in joy through our favorite dishes.
- **Pass It On** by Sophie Henn — This story reminds us that joy is greater when it is shared.
- **They, She, He Easy as ABC** by Maya & Matthew — An alphabetic celebration of pronouns that will make everyone want to dance joyfully.
- **Julian is a Mermaid** by Jessica Love — When Julian sees a group of mermaids, he knows he is one of them. This joyful story shares the power of being supported to join what you think is beautiful.
- **The Joyful Book** by Todd Parr — A book that explores the diversity of celebration and ritual through the lens of joy.
- **The Pout-Pout Fish** by Deborah Diesen — When the Pout-Pout fish is finally loved and appreciated for himself, he discovers his joy.
- **A Sick Day for Amos McGee** by Philip C. Stead — This sweet and gentle book shows how joy can come from caring for others, even when we're not feeling our best.
- **All the World** by Liz Garton Scanlon - This beautifully illustrated book celebrates the interconnectedness of all things in the world and encourages children to find joy in the simple things.
- **Hooray for Hat!** by Brian Won — This playful and fun book shows how joy can be contagious, as the kindness of a friend turns around several grumpy animals' bad moods.
- **The Thank You Book** by Mo Willems — This book celebrates the joy of gratitude and encourages children to find joy in expressing appreciation for the people and things in their lives.
- **The Hello, Goodbye Window** by Norton Juster — This heartwarming book celebrates the joy of spending time with loved ones and creating memories together.