



Revolutionary Love Letters to Parents

Push

From:

The Revolutionary Love Project

To: You





Push

Dear Parent,

Imagine a tiny hard seed buried deep underground. Water comes like breath and softens it so that it starts to germinate. Pushing against its protective shell, the root and sprout rupture its boundaries, and despite the dark soil bearing down, it musters its tiny weight and searches for light above and more water below. Once its stem breaches the soil, it pushes against the bud to unfurl a leaf. As it grows, it discovers it's next to a large rock that blocks the sun and keeps the roots growing in all directions. As it rises, the plant forms away from the rock in search of the sun, and its roots plunge deep below it. It is starting to discover its unique shape. At every stage, it must push to realize its particular plant destiny.

Our children are no different. They are delivered with massive push, and once they learn to breathe, they continue to create their lives by breathing and pushing. To be born, grow up, live, and die requires immense courage to push. In between, the forces our children push against are the things that form their lives.

The tricky thing about being a human parent is that our babies enter life needing an immense amount of care, requiring us to push for them so that they can live. Sleepless and desperately in love, we begin this journey with the most significant push of our lives.

But as time passes, children need to grow and learn by pushing on their own, and sometimes, we become the very force they push against.

It can be tangled and confusing to figure out what to do as a parent. At any given moment, am I to push with, for, or against my child? Do I let them push on their own

even if they fail? Do I encourage or demand they push? Do I become the rock they have to push against? What will benefit them? What will help them grow into a shape that suits them?

I don't think there are easy or final answers to those questions. The lives and loves between parents and children are too feral and beautiful to be reduced to simple answers. However, the good news is that our lives never stop being shaped by how we push. We were born by our mother's push, and we will die pushing the last breath of air out of our lungs. Our branches, roots, stems, and leaves will flourish where we push to reach the light. We can be on the journey to learn the best ways to push with our children. They can teach us while we teach them. Together, we weave our brief and beautiful lives.

—With love, The Revolutionary Love Project Team

Defining push

To push is to choose to enter grief, rage, or trauma as part of a healing process. Pushing requires us to discern the right times to breathe and rest, and the right time to push through painful sensations, emotions, and thoughts to birth new possibilities in ourselves and others.

“Healing is the long journey of returning to our bodies. It’s a kind of labor that requires breathing and pushing— resting and then going deeper. We must be willing to notice and befriend sensations including pain and discomfort.” (Kaur 259)

“When I was finally ready to love myself, I had to learn how to breathe and push through my grief, rage, and trauma. On the other side, I found what seemed utterly impossible before: healing, forgiveness, and even reconciliation.” (Kaur, 2020, p 253)

“Pushing together through healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation was the labor of Revolutionary Love.” (Kaur, 2020, p 270)

For more exploration of push, get [the Revolutionary Love Project Compass guide](#).

Practices to foster push

Talk about what you are “working on”

Talk with your child about the things you struggle to change that require you to push. Children are often keenly aware of what's hard for them but don't notice that it's the same for adults. This can result in feeling shame about what is hard. This shame can make conversations about where a child might need to push difficult. The truth is everyone in a family is working on something. When made explicitly transparent for

children, it reduces children's shame and creates an environment of mutual support. You might say everyone has hard things that need practice. *For me, I'm working on keeping track of my stuff. I'm constantly losing my hat, keys, and wallet. I forget where I put them. Or I'm working on remembering to eat so I don't get grumpy with people.* Whatever you choose, make it genuine and something your children will understand.

See children as competent and believe they can push

As parents, it's our job to support children in what they can't do for themselves, so it can be hard to see what children do well. Children, even very young ones, author their lives, create meaningful relationships, engage in crucial intellectual work, and contribute meaningfully to the community. Even unskillful actions are children's efforts to make a meaningful life. When we practice seeing how children author their lives and contribute to their world, it's easier to believe that they can marshal support to work with difficulty powerfully.

Spend time watching your child play alone with others. Observe everything they do that works well for them. Watch what they do to make play go well. See the little things they do to entice or follow others in play. What strategies do they use when things are hard? Use this time to learn from them what strategies they use to push. No method is too small or insignificant. We've been trained to see children's behavior as trivial; fight against that, see it as brilliant. You might even try some of their strategies in your life.

Use family chores or jobs to reflect on the practice of push

Chores, jobs, and responsibilities are all fantastic ways to learn the value of push. It isn't easy to regularly be responsible for part of family life, but doing so requires effort that results in care for the whole family. Consider talking about chores as a way to push to take care of the family. *It isn't easy to remember to feed the dog every day; sometimes, we don't want to do it, but pushing a little to make sure our pet is cared for makes her happy, and it means we get all the joy of having a dog. This kind of push is a way of loving our family.*

If your child is too young to have chores, you can do chores with them. You might instigate family "push times" when everyone joins together to get something done. *It won't be easy to clean up all these toys. We will work together, stop to breathe, and sing some songs to make it more fun. With a little push, we will have a very clean room, which means we will have space to play new games. It will be hard for a minute, but it will make our home much better, which will feel great!*

Reflect on the resources that help you push

When playing the roses, thorns, buds, and stems game (see Revolutionary Love Letter), focus on how push was part of challenging experiences. You can add how a

stem supported the push within the thorn. This will help children start to think about the resources they have to be resilient. For example, *I could not figure out how to solve this tricky problem when I was at work. Everyone was counting on me to do it, but I couldn't think of anything that would help everyone do their job—having to push to think that hard was a thorn. But a stem helped me. I talked to different people to hear what they felt about the problem. Once I spoke to others, it gave me new ideas, and I came up with an idea. So, a stem helped me push, which made my thorn not so bad.*

For challenging tasks, teach one step at a time

Adults often forget how complex “simple” tasks can be. Where we see one or two steps, there’s usually double that for children. If you want to help a child “push” into a difficult task, figure out just how many steps something takes before you help break it down. For example, writing one’s name has a whole series of lines, which require hand motions and visual orientation. Looking for the easiest first step can help a child gain the confidence to take on a more challenging one. *There’s a lot of letters in your name, but you know which letter is really easy? The “i.” It’s only a line down and a dot above. I bet you could try that.*

If you do get through a task by taking one step at a time, telling children that what they did will help them remember to look for small steps in the future. *That seemed like it was going to be so hard, but you pushed on by doing the small parts until you’d done it all!*

Allow children to make mistakes

It’s tempting to rescue children from easy mistakes. However, to develop the capacity to push, one has to practice agency and resilience when things don’t work out. When the stakes are appropriate, refrain from saving them from their mistakes. Provide empathy if the failure hurts, and even praise for taking a risk and failing.

Praise children for accomplishing difficult tasks

Stop praising children for things they accomplish easily or quickly. Instead, offer detailed praise about challenging and effortful endeavors. *You’ve been working for weeks to climb to the top of the slide! You pushed and pushed for so many days!* This can make a huge difference in your child’s ability to push. They will shy away from difficult situations if they expect you to praise them for getting things done easily and quickly. But if you recognize and value situations in which they had to push even if they fail, they will be more likely to attempt difficult things.

Help them navigate, breathe and push

Ultimately, children will have difficulty deciding whether to push or breathe (don't we all). They don't always know when they are hungry and need a break. Nor do they have the perspective to try something that might be less scary than they think. You might, at times, hold them to finishing something so they learn what it feels like to push. And you might sometimes ask them to stop and breathe because you can see that the push won't work. Narrate what you are doing and why. *Every time you start to practice writing your name, I notice that you get frustrated and stop. That's understandable; there are a lot of letters in your name. But let's just try writing three of them. The only way to get better is to push and practice. Why don't you pick three? Look here, the "i" is so easy; it's only a line and a dot. Or You've been working so hard on this puzzle, and I notice you are getting frustrated. I think it's time to stop and take a breath; let's go have a snack.*

Connect push to loving ourselves

Striving to do something uncomfortable, whether forgiving another, confronting a hard feeling, or doing something we aren't good at, doesn't usually feel like love. It can be helpful to talk with children about how this is an aspect of loving ourselves. This can add a new frame and sense of motivation to lean into the practice of push.

Children's books for push

- **I Can Do Hard Things: Mindful Affirmations for Kids** by Gabi Garcia — This book of affirmations touches on all of the aspects of push in this section and in See No Stranger. From feeling difficult feelings to apologies to accomplishing challenging tasks, it encourages children to push and empathize with others' struggles.
- **The Day You Begin** by Raphael López — A story that features times when children might not feel like they belong because of race, language, or class. It speaks about that pain and offers encouragement and hope. It's an excellent book about how to push by befriending complicated feelings.

Mistakes Are How I Learn by Kiara Wilson — A story for those children who are afraid to push because they are scared to fail. This book contextualized failure as part of the push experience.

- **Change Sings** by Amanda Gorman — This book shows what push is like in a collective justice-focused context. Push is something we do together.
- **Sam and Eva** by Debbie Ridpath Ohi — Two children explore the joys and challenges of collaborative drawing and play. An experience that children will be familiar with, it's a powerful way to look at pushing through the challenges and flow of play.
- **The First Strawberries** by Joseph Bruhac — A traditional Cherokee story about a husband and wife who get so angry the sun has to interfere to help them. Incorporating breathing and pushing (perhaps a bit about rage), this story viscerally and beautifully shares the power of forgiveness.
- **Draw the Line** by Kathryn Otoshi — A wordless picture book that traces a dispute between two children about their imaginary use of a single line. Ultimately, it is a book about the power of conflict and forgiveness; this is a way to walk children through the power of loving ourselves with the practice of push.
- **Under the Lemon Moon** by Edith Hope Fine — When Rosalinda sees a man stealing the lemons from her tree, she discovers that he has harmed her precious tree. She undertakes a beautiful quest full of push that connects her to her community and ultimately ends in the act of forgiveness and mercy.
- **The Little Engine That Could** by Watty Piper — This classic quite literally demonstrates the power of push.