



Revolutionary Love Letters to Parents

Rage

From:

The Revolutionary Love Project

To: You





Rage

Dear Parents,

I invite you to read this quote from *See No Stranger* out loud:

“The opposite of love is not rage. The opposite of love is indifference. Love engages all our emotions: Joy is the gift of love. Grief is the price of love. Anger is the force that protects that which is loved. We cannot access the depth of loving ourselves or others without rage.”

That last line bears repeating, doesn't it?

“We cannot access the depth of loving ourselves or others without rage.”

Without anger, ours or our children's, we cannot fully love our families. Anger protects what we deeply love about each other. Families share a lot of love and life: routines, food, caregiving, and bathrooms—a powder keg of anger. This means your children are bound at times to be your opponents.

But you know this already, don't you?

On top of that, we don't live in ways that particularly suit children or parents. Our world requires children to negotiate tricky situations constantly. Ill-equipped to navigate time, risk, and intense emotion, their schedules are tight. Their world is full of physical danger, think cars and busy roads, and they are bombarded by tantrum-inducing advertisements. Adults have to help children manage all this, which is exhausting. On top of that, parents of young children in the U.S. aren't guaranteed family leave, childcare, or health care. Family life can be nearly impossible, which

gives American families a lot to be angry about. This rage has essential information about worlds we could create for families.

Small instances of rage in our families also contain wisdom. The frustration at putting your child to bed is information about your desire for time to breathe in the evening. Your child's rage that their unicorn shirt is dirty is information about the importance of their imagination and identity. So, we build safe containers for rage, not only to avoid hurting one another, but because we vitally need the information we find there.

The good news is that all this creates ideal circumstances to generate more Revolutionary Love! Making safe containers for your rage and helping your children learn to do the same is one of the most essential tasks in children's early years. (This is why there are hundreds of parenting books about it). It is also a powerful way to contribute to creating a culture of Revolutionary Love. You are already a front-line love rebel.

So, let's ditch the shame about our family's anger. Let's see it as an opportunity to love each other better. Let's find creative ways to contain the mad that we feel: throw pillows, dance furiously, scream in the car, pull weeds, or whatever helps it move. Let's help each other channel the wisdom in that rage. Let's raise children who know the value of their divine rage. We need rage; it's a renewable resource, which at its center contains what matters most.

— With love, The Revolutionary Love Project Team

Defining rage

To rage is to express our body's most fiery energy; it is to tap into our body's power to protect ourselves and others. To rage is to honor and tend to our own pain so that trauma does not hijack our ability to see another's humanity. When we listen deeply to our rage against injustice, we gain the information and energy we need to transform the world.

"The solution is not to suppress our rage or let it explode, but to process our rage in safe containers— emotional spaces safe enough to express our body's impulses without shame and without harming ourselves or others...Safe containers take many forms: shaking, weeping, venting, writing, art, music, dance, drama, meditations, trauma therapies, rituals, and ceremonies of all kinds. Only when we give rage an external expression outside of our bodies can we be in relationship with it. We can then ask: What information does my rage carry? What is it telling me? How do I want to harness this energy?" (Kaur, 2022, p.131)

"Divine rage is fierce, disciplined, and visionary. . . . The aim of divine rage is not vengeance but to reorder the world. It is precise and purposeful. . . It points us to the hu-

manity of even those who we were fighting.” (Kaur, 2020, p.130)

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

Practices to foster safe containers for rage

Normalize anger for children and each other

Because young children often struggle to contain rage, they quickly feel bad for feeling anger. It can be helpful outside of heated moments to tell children that anger isn't wrong; it's what happens when we want to protect something we love.

You might say, *“Anger helps us know what’s important to us, but it’s tricky because, when it’s big, it can make us want to hurt things. We’ve got to create safe containers for what we feel to figure out what’s important to us!”*

Sharing an example of getting mad, containing it somehow, and then discovering the vital information in the anger can help children understand the process more concretely.

In addition, other parents often feel ashamed of their children's angry outbursts. Letting other parents know you experience it too, and it's normal, can be part of helping one another learn to create safe containers.

Use boundaries to teach safe containers.

Children, especially younger ones, can have difficulty containing rage. Setting and maintaining clear boundaries is crucial to helping children learn how to create effective containers for anger. Clearly and powerfully setting expectations for how to behave during rage can make space for children's feelings. *I see you are mad, which is fine. You cannot hit your sister or throw things in the house. You can hit a pillow or throw balls outside. If you need me to help you stop throwing things, I can, or you can stop on your own.*

Create home spaces for rage

Make a place in your house where your child can go when they need a safe container for rage. For example, you might tell your family that you plan to go into your closet to scream a little when needed. You might put an oversized pillow meant for hitting in your child's room or save scrap paper for tearing into pieces. During a calm time, introduce the idea of a safe container for rage and what you've set up.

You know how sometimes we get furious at each other? I've made a place where we can go and feel angry. I put these two giant pillows in your room. You can hit them,

stomp on them, wrestle with them, or do whatever you need to do while you feel angry. I might borrow them if I need them.

Your child may or may not take you up on this invitation. If they don't, it's okay; the very gesture and conversation tell them that you acknowledge the presence of anger and value it enough to have a place for it. If they don't use what you set up, you might ask them later if there is another place or way they want to express rage. This will start a dialogue about different ways to contain rage.

Talk about anger in the body

In a calm moment, you can talk with your child about what anger feels like in the body. *Sometimes, I feel so mad that my cheeks burn and my stomach hurts. There is so much energy in my chest I want to throw something. Do you remember what it feels like inside you?*

If your child likes to draw, paint, dance, or play instruments, this kind of conversation can be good to have while you are doing one of these things. You might draw and say something like: *My anger is like fast and crazy lines going all over the page. Or it's a loud drum beat; it's so loud.* This may prompt them to share their feelings or at least encourage them to think about it.

Hearing about a parent's anger might be too intense for a child, so you can have the same conversation in telling a story about a time you were angry as a kid. (Children love to hear about your life as a child). Tell the story, but focus on what it felt like in the body. *When my mom said no, my hands wanted to push something!* You can sneak in a question about what they feel when they are angry.

If you don't feel comfortable telling a story, read **Ahn's Anger** by Gail Silver or **When Sophie Gets Angry— Really, Really Angry** by Molly Bang. Both discuss how anger feels in the body and can be great conversation starters.

Remember, children might not have anything to say the first time you try to talk about something. They often need time to think and gather information. Bring up the conversation three or four times, preferably in a similar context, before you decide it won't work.

Reflect on rage and gender

Our ideas of gender influence how adults react to children's rage. Rage is expected and tolerated in boys, even in harmful ways. It's highly discouraged and controlled in girls. Be mindful of this tendency.

Research has shown that young boys receive three times less language about emotion than girls, so you may need to talk more often with boys about their feel-

ings to help them create safe containers and discover what their rage is protecting. Girls may need more permission to express and let their rage flow.

These are, of course, generalizations that don't account for individual temperament or the complex spectrum that children express gender. Still, adults often unconsciously enact these stereotypes, so it's crucial to be mindful.

Offer ways to settle

After rage has peaked, children (and adults) need time to settle. Water play can often be soothing. Taking a bath, playing with toys in the sink, or even just sipping water. If this doesn't work for your child, you might read a book, draw, or build with blocks. Offer them something that naturally focuses their attention before you talk about what happened.

Children's books for rage

- **Mad Isn't Bad: A Child's Book About Anger** by Emily Menedez-Aponte — This book starts with a message of radical acceptance of anger, then walks children through ways they might contain their rage. It is a good read for introducing safe containers for rage.
- **The Rabbit Listened** by Cory Doerrfeld— The story of a child whose blocks have been knocked down, and it isn't until a compassionate rabbit listens well that he feels better.
- **Ahn's Anger** by Gail Silver —When Ahn gets angry because his grandfather asks him to stop playing, he has a profound encounter with his rage. Ahn's encounter is a great way to introduce children to the different stages of anger.
- **Why?: A Conversation About Race** by Taye Diggs — A book that links racial pain with rage and action. This would be an excellent book introducing how anger can be channeled into reimagining.
- **When Sophie Gets Angry— Really, Really Angry** by Molly Bang — Sophie gets angry when things don't go her way. The story tracks Sophie as she grapples with her rage. It's a great way to start a conversation with children about what they do when angry.
- **Ravi's Roar** by Tom Percival – Being young and small in a world that isn't built for it can cause a lot of rage. In this book, little Ravi gets so fed up that he turns into a tiger. A great book for mirroring the anger young children often face.