



## Revolutionary Love Letters to Parents

# Reimagine

From:

The Revolutionary Love Project

To: You





# Reimagine

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## Dear Parent,

During the conflicts in Northern Ireland, powerful women, primarily mothers, held secret and unofficial peace-keeping meetings around their kitchen tables. These were family meetings, convening enemies to break bread and reimagine Irish life without violence. When the peace treaties were signed, politicians and diplomats initially got all the credit, but it's now recognized that peace was first laid in homes with the dishes.

Activist adrienne maree brown writes that national democracy fails when people don't practice on a small scale— in families, workplaces, neighborhoods, circles of friends, and children's schools. This is partly because we need personal practice with democracy to enact it at scale. But it's also because our relationships influence our beliefs and behaviors more than institutions do. It's easy to forget and overlook that the most influential power is wielded at home and with friends.

This means that our families are fertile sites for reimaging our world.

You might think: *I'm just trying to achieve a modicum of peace at bedtime; I can't take on the world too.* But what if getting children to bed and enacting peace and democracy aren't mutually exclusive? What if the families listening and reimaging together is a crucial aspect of small-scale democracy that maree brown is advocating?

You already reimagine the world with your child every day. When they want to go to the park, but it's a school day, you offer to take them on Saturday; you've reimaged the schedule together. You want your child to eat more greens; they only eat

them if they've helped to cook, so you make dinner together; you've reimagined the meal. These little moments can be extended and discussed so that your reimagining capacity becomes more robust.

You never know; you might start by reimagining with your child and find yourself with the opportunity and capacity to be the one weaving peace around your table. Whatever you have the capacity for, do not underestimate the contributions your family can make. Not just because you are raising the next generation but because we make this world moment by moment. As Valarie quoted Howard Zinn in *See No Stranger*:

*"The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."*

—With love, The Revolutionary Love Project Team.

## Defining reimagine

To reimagine is to explore a vision of a relationship, community, and world where we all flourish. Reimagining means that we're doing more than resisting our opponents. We are looking at the cultures that radicalize them and institutions that authorize them. This is the moment to declare what is obsolete, what can be reformed, and what must be reimagined. Reimagining focuses us not just on what we are fighting against, but the future that we are fighting for.

*"But the longer I spent listening to the stories of marginalized people, tending to their wounds, the more I heard a deeper longing—for a future where we were all safe and secure in our bodies, free to pursue our dreams, where our social, political, and economic institutions supported not just our survival but our flourishing. We could resist with all our might and never deliver such a future. We needed to do more than resist. We needed to reimagine the world." (Kaur, 2020, p. 171)*

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

## Practices to foster reimagine

### Model problems as opportunities to reimagine together

Model curiosity, excitement, and care for disagreements or when something fails. This could be in conflict, but it could also be when something breaks or goes awry. *"Oh, we have different ideas. We get to figure out a new plan together. I wonder what it will be!"* Or, *"Oops, the blocks fell over. It's our chance to build something new!"* This

won't work when emotions are intense (then it's time to create safe containers for rage). However, modeling enthusiasm for challenges will, over time, change how children approach them. They will develop a more positive disposition to situations that require reimagining, which can also help grow their capacity for the practice of push.

## Reimagine family structures to tend to your child's wounds

When children act in difficult ways, they're often communicating what's not working for them; they are reacting from a wound. You can practice tending your opponent's wounds, your children's, by reimagining the family structures. For example, perhaps your child keeps running away from family dinners. Consider what might be going on for them. Is dinner too long? Do they need a different kind of engagement? How can you reimagine dinner to meet their needs? Reimagining wouldn't mean getting rid of family dinners; instead, it's about making small experimental shifts to try to meet everyone's needs. When you do this, you might even tell them. *I noticed that it was tricky to sit through dinner, so I reimagined how it would go if we played a little game. Let's see if that works for all of us.* Talking with them about the different ways you are trying to reimagine an issue will help draw them into the conversation.

## Ask, "What's your plan?"

When your child seems to be doing something incomprehensible, ask about their plan. This can diffuse the anger and help you listen and reimagine what could happen together.

For example, you see your very young child taking a knife to their room, and instead of making assumptions, you say, *I'm worried you might get hurt with that knife; I'm wondering what's your plan with it?* When they say they are going to cut a hole in a cardboard box to make a castle, you can quickly reimagine a plan that works for both of you. *"How about I get a utility knife and help you cut the castle hole? Knives can be dangerous, so come and ask for my help next time."*

This also works for conflicts between children. *You're both grabbing that doll; it looks like you each have a different plan for it. I'll hold the doll so we hear each other's plans... Oh, you want to put it to bed and you want to dress it for going to school. I wonder if there is a way both of those can happen?* If emotions aren't too fraught, solving situations this way teaches them to listen and reimagine with each other. If this happens consistently enough, they will start doing it independently without adults' help.

If you and your child are on opposing sides and aren't in a moment of rage, you can lay out the situation: *"Hm, I need X to happen, and you really want Y. Is there a way or plan that will make us both happy?"*

These situations are simple, but when they compound, they are powerful ways to know what it means to live, listen, and reimagine. Too often, when children have con-

flicts, overwhelmed adults swoop in with demands or answers that may temporarily stop the conflict, but it doesn't engage children so that they learn to work through issues with opponents. For example, when children fight over a toy, hearing "Please, share" doesn't tell them anything about how to do it. If they know how to share, they would. Instead, talking with each child about their plans, demonstrates how they get to a satisfying way to share. It helps them practice considering different perspectives so that they can think and feel more creatively and peacefully.

## **Have family listen and reimagine meetings**

Having an official time for family to discuss issues is a way children can participate and witness listening and reimagining. Even if children are very young and aren't ready for dialogue, experiencing adults listening to each other and coming up with solutions will make a lasting impression. But if you'd like to engage your children and it feels overwhelming to tackle significant issues, start with minor ones. For example, the kids want to build with Legos in the living room, but the adults hate stepping on loose blocks. Can the family decide on a solution so the kids can build but adults won't hurt their feet? You might even write down agreements and revisit them to see if they are working in the future.

## **Talk about problems in terms of what different communities need**

When children learn about issues in your local community or on the news, explain these in terms of what opposing groups need. If there is a local teacher strike, you might talk about how teachers want better salaries or updated classrooms, but it's tricky because taxes pay for those things, and people don't want to give more money. Feel free to share with your child which side of an issue you tend to agree with, but do so while explaining the other side's problem. You can consider presenting it in terms of how you understand your opponent's wounds. To encourage your child to reimagine, ask them what they think the wounds are and what solutions they might come up with.

## **Prepare and practice listening and reimagining at extended family gatherings**

Children pay attention at family gatherings, especially when adults start to disagree. Knowing this, you might strategize beforehand about listening and responding to relatives with different, even harmful, views. Talk with your children, before or after, about how you are trying to negotiate the tension, even if you aren't sure what to do. If you are looking for resources for conversations across political lines with family, read Monica Guzman's book **I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times**. Also, **Braver Angels**, a national group dedicated to providing space for polarized conversations, offers regular workshops on having conversations with family members across divides.

## Children's books for reimagine

- **The Year We Learned to Fly** by Jacqueline Woodson and Rafael López — A book about two siblings' power of imagination to overcome everything from a dreary day to the pain of exclusion. A great book about the power of reimagining the world.
- **The Fort** by Laura Perdew — A book about what happens when imaginary worlds collide and the power of reimagining play together. This book offers a very concrete and relatable way to introduce the concept of reimagine.
- **Duck! Rabbit!** by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld — Is it a rabbit or a duck? This book's clever illustrations highlight the tragic comedy of refusing to see another's perspective.
- **They All Saw A Cat** by Brendan Wenzel — Using beautiful and creative illustrations, this book shows us that others see things quite differently by following the same cat who is seen by different animals on each page.
- **The Butter Battle Book** by Dr. Seuss — The Butter Battle book is a cautionary tale about what can happen when we don't create safe containers for rage so that we can wonder, listen, and reimagine the world with our opponents. Set in an imaginary world where two communities embroiled in a debate about the proper way to butter toast create an arms race that threatens to destroy both communities.
- **The Star Bellied Sneeches** by Dr. Seuss — Another classic Seuss book, this world is filled with two different kinds of sneeches, those with stars and those without. This book tracks the sad consequences, which could be used to start a conversation about what might've happened if they listened and reimagined their world together (which they do by the end).
- **Enemy Pie** by Derek Munson — When this young boy tells his dad that he's got an enemy, a boy in the neighborhood he doesn't like, his dad whips up an enemy pie. This endearing story is about the way relationship can transform enemies into people you have over for pie.
- **Aaron Slater Illustrator** by Andrea Beaty — The tale of a boy who loves to illustrate stories but struggles to read and write. When assigned homework to write a story on the first day of class, he reimagines the task and comes up with a new way to do it.
- **She Persisted** by Chelsea Clinton — Each page features a woman in history who, in the face of injustice, reimagined and created new opportunities for themselves and others. This book could be used as an example of the power of reimagining. (It could also be a book that you connect to fight).
- **Steamboat School** by Deborah Hopkinson — This early elementary-aged book tells a true story about black children who were denied the right to school in their state. Their teacher reimagines the scenario and builds a school on a boat in the river where the laws don't apply.