



Revolutionary Love Letters to Parents

Transition

From:

The Revolutionary Love Project

To: You





Transition

Dear Parents,

Transition is the excruciating moment just before birth when a baby's head stretches the birth canal so that it feels like it will break. But it doesn't. Instead, the body stretches, and new life is born. In that moment, it's not just the baby that's delivered. Whether or not you physically gave birth, your parenthood was born when your child arrived.

Birthing doesn't end when the child arrives. Parents and children are continually reborn through the difficulty and humility of growing together. Transitions are the sleepless nights, toileting tantrums, and school-drop-off-screaming that occur before our child grows into new demands. Transitions find us in our fights over how to raise our children. Transitions are there in those incomprehensible times when we can't see eye to eye with our kid, and it's there when our child prefers their friends' company over ours. As Valarie says, transitions may feel like the darkness of the tomb but can be the darkness of the womb. When we let the fire transform us, we learn profound forms of love that allow our children to grow into the people they want to be.

One of the beautiful things about being adults and parents is that we have some perspective on growing up. For children, absolutely everything is new. From learning to walk to their first heartbreak, they don't know what's on the other side of the transition. But we know a little about life and witness our children from the moment they are born. We are capable of nourishing them through transition. We do this by holding the perspective that something new is being born through the pain. We can provide conversations and rituals that mark new phases. As we transition with our

children, our capacity to love them, ourselves, and others grows.

—With love, The Revolutionary Love Project Team

Defining transition

Transition is both a noun and a verb. Transition is the fiery process that is required to move from one reality into another. To transition is to summon the courage to stay in the labors of love and justice, even when we want to give up. It requires us to draw upon collective wisdom to birth something new together. The practices of breathing and pushing help to make transition possible.

“The final stage of birthing labor is the most dangerous stage, and the most painful. . . . The medical term is ‘transition.’ Transition feels like dying but it is the stage that precedes the birth of new life. . . . In all our various creative labors—making a living, raising a family, building a nation—there are moments that are so painful, we want to give up. But inside searing pain and encroaching numbness we might also find the depths of our courage, hear our deepest wisdom, and transition to the other side.”
(Kaur, 2020, p. 278-279)

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

Practices to foster transition

Hold rituals for times of transition

As children undergo a transition, hold a ritual for them. When Valarie’s kids start a new year in school, each adult in the family finds a little object that represents their wish for the child. Before they go to school, each family member gives the children an object with their hopes for the coming year. The children take the objects with them in their backpacks. Not only does ritual help us all mark and move through transition, but it helps children experience and recognize the importance of life transitions.

Learn from your children’s transitions

Childhood is a series of back-to-back transitions. Each season, their minds and bodies transform; each year, they change classrooms. They’ve got very little control over their schedule or food. Children have to learn to navigate constant change, and often, as a result, they have some wisdom. You can learn more about how to weather transition in your own life and family by learning from children. Observe them and ask: How do your children handle transitions? What skills do they use? How do they breathe and push? What do they do to hold intensity?

Talk and share stories about doing the brave thing

In *See No Stranger*, Valarie writes that one way to practice transition is to become aware of the inner critic's opinion and do the "brave thing" despite it. Children can learn to be mindful of the choice to do the brave thing by hearing about the times when we and others chose courage.

When I was a kid, a friend wanted me to say mean things to a classmate. Every day, he told me to do it. I thought he wouldn't be friends with me anymore if I didn't. I didn't have a lot of friends in that class, so I was really worried that I'd be alone. I worried about it all the time. An unkind voice inside me said that no one would be my friend if I didn't do what they said I should. But I asked myself, 'What's the brave thing to do?' I realized it was to tell him I wouldn't do it. I was scared that I would lose my friend. But I told him I didn't want to do it. And he said, okay. We came up with different games to play, and I felt proud of myself for what I did.

Listen to the wise voice inside

In the transition chapter, Valarie learns to cultivate a relationship with the wise woman inside herself. We don't have to wait to grow up to develop a connection to inner wisdom. You can introduce the idea of listening to the wise voice to your family and even offer quiet moments to practice. If your child comes to you about something complex that doesn't need your intervention, you might ask them if they've talked to their wise voice. You might suggest you take a moment to be quiet, dance or draw to listen for an answer together. Learning to listen to wisdom in the face of difficult conversations is a powerful life skill and a way to grow through transitions.

Use the other practices to aid transitions

Challenging transitions can cause rage, grief, and fear. Remember that the other practices on the compass can help you with these moments. With fear, talking about the oscillation between breathing and pushing can help children move forward and care for the natural fears that come from growing up.

Listen and believe children's experiences

To trust one's inner wisdom, make brave choices, and be remade by transitions, one has to learn to listen and trust oneself. These dispositions are hard to cultivate when others around you don't listen to or believe your experience. Children who have a hard time expressing themselves and often speak in creative ways are frequently misunderstood. What they say is often received as cute or baffling instead of thoughtful and creative. If children around you are trying to express something that doesn't make sense initially, think through what they might be saying and ask follow-up questions. This will help you recognize times of transition and build a sense inside them that they are worth listening to.

Children's books for transition

- **What Do You Do With a Problem?** by Kobi Yamada — A story that illustrates the opportunity and beauty of facing one's problems. A perfect story to demonstrate how moving toward what we fear most, moving toward transition, bears beautiful fruit.
- **Red: A Crayon's Story** by Michael Hall — This is the story of a crayon who can't figure out why they're no good at being red. They go through all kinds of struggles until they figure out who they are. This is a good story for looking at the transitions we face when we don't see our gifts and colors.
- **The Last Stop on Market Street** by Micheal Peña — After church, CJ and his grandma ride the bus all the way across town. It's not always easy; CJ wishes he were doing other things. But when he has the joy of serving others at a shelter, he celebrates the work of helping others.
- **Each Kindness** by Jacqueline Woodson — A story of children who don't have the courage to show kindness to another and regret it later. A powerful tale for looking at how we suffer when we avoid transition.
- **I Am Enough** by Grace Byers — A story about loving ourselves for all we are here to be and do. The book embodies the movement of transition through breathing and pushing and bridging the love of oneself to the love of ourselves.
- **A Chair For My Mother** by Vera B. Williams — When Rosa's family's house has a fire, the community and family come together to help put their life back together. A simple tale about saving to buy a new comfortable chair illustrates the practice of transition from the family perspective.
- **Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up** by Sitting Down by Andrea Davis Pinkney — The story of the sit-ins for desegregation at the Greensboro counter. Not only is this a good story demonstrating the power of collective transition, but it's also a simple primer in civil rights non-violence ethics.
- **One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia** by Miranda Paul — A true story about an African Woman and her friends that transform the plastic trash littering their neighborhood into beautiful things. This story traces a community through a transition into a more beautiful world.
- **Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Planted Millions of Trees** by Franck Prévot — When Wangari Mathai returns to Kenya after six years away, she finds the trees around her village gone. This true story tells how Maathai and the women of Kenya planted over 30 million trees.

We hope you've enjoyed these love letters. If you'd like to get in touch with questions or stories from your own family, we'd love to get a letter from you. Contact us at contact@revolutionarylove.org.