



**Revolutionary Love Letters  
to Parents**

# Wonder

From:

The Revolutionary Love Project

To: You





# Wonder

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## Dear Parent,

Remember being a child and turning over stones and expecting to find treasure? Remember wondering from the car's backseat how the moon followed you home? Remember imagining what lived below the streets under that utility hole? Remember what a vast and beautiful capacity you had to wonder?

You saw different kinds of people and wondered what that meant. Were you safe? Could you be friends? Even if you never asked these questions aloud, you said them by looking at someone a little longer or darting behind your parent's legs. Even if you've forgotten, you wondered because that's what children do best.

One of childhood's gifts is offering examples of how to return wonder. They show us what we overlook. But, in turn, we have not created a world for them that receives, cultivates, and amplifies their innate capacity.

We educate children to sit, listen, and practice skills that ignore their capacity to wonder. We hear what they say as "cute" or strange instead of exciting and profound. We buy into cultures of productivity, which has cost children hours of lost playtime to cultivate wonder. In effect, we send the message that a childhood's superpower is irrelevant when nothing could be further from the truth.

In *See No Stranger*, Valarie writes, "*Wonder is our birthright,*" not a luxury. Forgetting to wonder has consequences. A "*failure to wonder is the beginning of violence.*" When I have lost the capacity to wonder about you, I believe I know everything about you, which makes it easy to make decisions that harm you. To live with the full knowledge that you are a part of me that I do not yet know is a commitment to keep wondering

about you, even when it is hard. If we want peace and justice, we need children to keep wondering.

The good news is that we *“can cultivate an orientation to wonder.”*

Defending our families’ birthrights to wonder is crucial to the movement. Even if we don’t have much time, momentary acts of wonder are powerful—wondering about the person in the other car, answering children’s questions with more questions, and being curious about the new kid at school are all ways of enacting Revolutionary Love. The accumulation of small moments communicates our family’s values and makes up the fabric of our lives.

Making these small choices for your family is also a way of loving all of our families. When your child knows how to wonder, they are more likely to see other children as part of them. Then, our children are more likely to protect one another when we are not there. To teach our kids to wonder is a vow to protect and love one another.

Can we count on you?

—With love, The Revolutionary Love Project Team

## Defining wonder

To wonder is to cultivate a sense of awe and openness to others’ thoughts and experiences, their pain, their wants and needs. It is to look upon the face of anyone or anything and say: You are a part of me I do not yet know. Wonder is an orientation to humility: recognizing that others are as complex and infinite to themselves as we are to ourselves. Wondering about a person gives us information for how to love them. You can practice wonder for all others – animals, trees, living beings, and the earth. Wonder gives you information for how to care for them. Wonder is the well-spring of love.

*“It is easy to wonder about the internal life of the people closest to us. It is harder to wonder about people who seem like strangers or outsiders. But when we choose to wonder about people we don’t know, when we imagine their lives and listen for their stories, we begin to expand the circle of those we see as part of us. We prepare ourselves to love beyond what evolution requires.”* (Kaur, 2020, p. 10-11)

*“Seeing no stranger is an act of will. In brain-imaging studies, when people are shown a picture of a person of a different race long enough for comprehension, it is possible for them to dampen their unconscious fear response. We can change how we see.”* (Kaur, 2020, p. 26-27)

## Practices to foster wonder

### Wonder aloud often

Children emulate adults' dispositions, so if you go through the world wondering out loud, they will also start to do so. This requires adopting a sense of playfulness and comfort with not knowing. For example, I once watched an aunt walk through an art museum with her 4-year-old nephew, authoritatively explaining the historical context for each piece of art. There was no room for wonder or direct experience of the art. Instead, she could share some of her knowledge but lead with questions that invite a deeper relationship. For example, *"Wow, this painting is done with all blue; I wonder why the artist chose all blue?"* Or *"Look, I see a bear hidden in the woods; I wonder what that bear is thinking?"*

Take note of who you think your child has difficulty wondering about and find opportunities to wonder aloud about those people. For example, having absorbed white supremacist beauty standards, it's prevalent for even very young children of all races to consistently pick white dolls or figures for play. If you notice something like this, you can wonder what it might be like to be the baby who never gets chosen.

### Respond with wonder to children's ideas, questions, and play

It can be challenging for adults to respond to children's interests with wonder. They can be interested in things we find boring, they can be quite repetitive in their play, and we've inherited the idea that adults are meant to teach children things instead of the other way around. Finding ways to wonder with your children is excellent practice.

When children ask questions, instead of answering, find ways to ask a question that deepens the inquiry. If children have a theory about how something works, such as "bees live in flowers," instead of correcting them, you can ask, "I wonder how they keep their wings dry in the rain?" If you can practice believing their ideas entirely, you will be able to ask questions that help them wonder more deeply. Some adults find fantasy play exhausting; however, if you can see a way to join the play in a state of wonder, you will increase your and your child's capacities to wonder while deepening your connection.

### Talk about how you or others are connected to all things

Learning to see no stranger is knowing how the other is intimately connected to our lives. Regularly talking about this helps children start to notice connections. For example, you might speak with awe and gratitude about the places and people who grow and transport food and the sanitation workers who take away what you don't use. You can talk about your ancestry and all the places your people come from, em-

phasizing how all the people and places your ancestors lived helped them live, which resulted in your birth. The sun is responsible for all plant growth, which allows all life on this planet to thrive. It should also be more mundane at times. You could point out how a partner or family member did something to make life easier.

## Play the you-are-a-part-of-me-I-do-not-yet-know game

After you've gotten into the practice of speaking about interconnection, start a game where you see someone or something and try to find ways they are a part of you. For example, you might see another parent who looks or behaves differently than you, and you could say, they know what it's like to be a parent, so in that way, they are a part of me, too. You might see a lamp post and say, we both need gravity to help us stand straight. In that way, they are a part of me. This game asks one's imagination to stretch and find new ways to wonder.

If this game takes off, teach it to friends and relatives to spread wonder!

## Create a wonder space

Set aside a little space or altar to place objects that represent things you wonder about. Beauty and wonder often go hand in hand. When we find something deeply beautiful, we can't help but wonder about it. Making a beautiful space devoted to wonder will provide an opportunity to revisit wonder and bring a sense of sacredness to the practice.

## Tell stories about times you forgot to wonder

While young children are often full of wonder, they just as quickly lose it and need help recognizing when they do. They lose their sense of wonder when they are angry, encounter something new that frightens them or act out of stereotypical thinking. An example of this is when they say *boys don't play with dolls*. Telling stories about the times you forgot to wonder, the consequences, and what you did to return to wonder will help them identify these moments independently.

For example: *When I was little, I thought boys weren't allowed to play with dolls. At school, my friend Jose, a boy, always wanted to play with dolls. I would tell him, "No, you're a boy; you can't." Sometimes, it made Jose cry. I was forgetting to wonder about Jose. I was forgetting to wonder about what boys can do. So, one day, I stopped myself from saying no, and I wondered what Jose liked about the babies, so I asked him. He said he had a baby at home and liked playing because it reminded him of his brother. I had a baby at home, too. I asked him to play "big sibling" with me, and we had a great time. I was so glad I remembered to wonder.*

## **Go to diverse neighborhoods and events**

If festivals, neighborhoods, or cultural events are open to all, take your child to where people look, act, eat, play, or create art that will challenge their assumed norms. Go in a state of wonder and delight. Learning how to engage wonder in unfamiliar situations will counter the urge to judge or condemn that which is new.

## **Relate to your child with wonder, especially when you think you know them**

One of the most challenging things about being a parent is how our children become an extension of our identity. We love them. We make them. Even if we didn't birth our children, our care keeps them alive and growing. Understandably, we may consider their actions, beliefs, choices, foibles, and strengths can easily become reflections of ourselves. However, when we wrap up our children too much with who we are, supporting them to grow into the distinct people they are trying to become is tough. We can wonder to achieve a bit of distance. By wondering about the parts that are different or incomprehensible, we can remember that we don't possess our children but steward them towards their life's callings.

## Children's books for wonder

- **Wonder Walkers** by Micha Archer — A beautiful story full of questions about nature that will foster a sense of wonder and delight.
- **Where We Come From** by John Coy — A poetic exploration of what it means to be a human.
- **Come with Me** by Holly M. McGee — A simple story of a girl who, upset by the hatred on the news, is taken out on a walk by her father to wonder about the people around her.
- **Imagine a Wolf** by Lucky Platt — The story of a kind wolf upset because the community around him has stopped wondering about him. It is an excellent book to read to explore what it feels like when we stop wondering about others.
- **Just Ask!** by Sonia Sotomayor — A joyful book that explores disability, making a range of experiences relatable to children.
- **Bodies Are Cool** by Tyler Feder — A body-positive book that reminds us that all kinds of bodies are remarkable.
- **A Lion's Mane** by Navjot Kaur & Jaspreet Sandu — A simple book that introduces children to Sikh turbans by teaching them how to tie one.
- **How We Eat** by Shuli de la Fuente-Lau — A photographic board book for six months and older that introduces all kinds of people by how they eat.
- **My Words Flew Away Like Birds** by Debora Pearson — A story of an immigrant child's experience of being unable to speak as fluently when she moves to a new country.
- **They, She, He Easy as ABC** by Maya Christina Gonzalez — Is an excellent book for building curiosity for non-binary children.