

Letters to Parents, from Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

Learning Together, As We Go

Dear parents,

How ARE you?

We've been thinking of you—and talking to some of you—over these six dizzying weeks that seem like six months or more. Among the many changes this pandemic has delivered, time seems to have warped. And suddenly we find ourselves spending most or all of our days at home—together.

If we are among the fortunate families in this world who have a roof over our heads, food in our bellies, and no virus in the house, we have much to be grateful for. May we remember this and give thanks. Often. (Gratitude is a super immune booster and an easy practice to strengthen now.)

And even so, we find ourselves stretched and stressed with the sudden changes and challenges—No school, no daycare. No work, or radically reduced or changed work. And more people in the house more of the time, all with needs flowing through them every minute of every day.

Central to it all is a mix of feelings, including confusion, fear, and uncertainty. We are all on new ground, improvising ways to stay healthy, stay safe, pay the bills, shop for food and other necessities, stay in touch with friends (at a distance), **keep in touch with loved ones far away**, and find ways to fill hours of time that just a few weeks ago were filled by work, school, community, physical activity, going out for meals **or movies, and enjoying the freedom of being out and about.**

Effectively, every day now, parents and kids wake up to their usual needs as well as a new world with new rules and requirements. **Time-tested strategies for carrying on no longer apply, and overwhelmed parents are asking:** Where can I find the clarity, structure, and support I need, not only to survive this physically but to stay sane and functioning as well?

With this new parent column, we aim to share with you practical, doable suggestions, **not only to survive and do what's necessary, but also to thrive.**

We're seeing opportunity here—opportunity to touch each other, energize each other, and sustain each other through these uncertain times. While we're at home together, this is the time to do what we hear parents say they've always wanted to do—"spend more time with our kids" and "get to know them better." Here's your chance to learn and practice how to foster warmth, closeness, mutual understanding, and respect among your family members. Skills and practices that will serve all of us far beyond the circumstances we are facing today.

Letters for parents will draw upon suggestions from our book *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids*; from our own parenting and grandparenting experiences; our homeschooling and classroom teaching experiences; and the thousands of conversations we've had with parents over the years and today.

In each letter, we will focus on specific life-sustaining, life-enriching needs and how parents and families can meet and greet them with open arms, open hearts, and open minds. With curiosity and willingness to *learn together, as we go*.

So in each letter, look for two things:

(1) Our *Note to Parents*, where we will identify a family need relevant to these times and explore the importance of facing it and embracing it.

(2) Our *Family Activity* section, where we offer suggestions for things you can do with your kids to share and connect with needs (yours as well as theirs) and find ways to fulfill them together. You are not in this alone. You'll find your kids are a well-spring of creative ideas, once you let go of the myth that parents have to know all the answers.

Note to Parents

Dear parents, we hope you will find more ways now than ever before to TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF. Time to discover what grounds and connects you with the precious life flowing through you.

Maybe you already do this; maybe you can seek and find even more time now. Maybe, like so many parents, you've been waiting for "enough time" to simply slow down and check in with yourself. Well, now's *your* time—please take it: Take a walk ... Notice your breath ... Meditate ... Exercise ... Sit with your feelings and needs lists or card decks.* Take time to recognize the life that's stirring in you.

You can also reach out to friends (on Zoom, phone, or Facetime) for connection and support. Schedule regular empathy calls like this to give and get a regular dose of empathy. As Marshall used to say: *Take your time—it's yours, you know*.

Family Activity

TAKE TIME TO CHECK IN

Choose a regular time each day or each week to show that you care by connecting with members of your family. Ask, *How are you today?* Then have each person take a few minutes to respond. This can be quick—no feedback; just listening. In fact, ask everyone to agree to no "unasked-for" comments or advice.

Here are some additional prompts for starting a check-in:

- *What do you like about being home together?*

- *What's difficult about being home together?*
- *What requests do you have for making life more wonderful?*

We hope you will practice this listening activity and see for yourself what happens.

In our next letter, we'll discuss a **foundational** strategy for meeting needs together: Family Meetings.

Wishing you and your family well,
Sura and Victoria

** You can download (for free!) illustrated Feelings & Needs cards, in 20 languages, from our website: <http://thenofaultzone.com/global-network.html>*

Resources

- *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids, and other Hart-Hodson books, are published by PuddleDancer Press (www.nonviolentcommunication.com)*
- *Authors' website: www.thenofaultzone.com*
- *Parent coaching sessions and workshops with Sura and Victoria:*
 - Sura – 805.698.3332*
 - Parent Coaching, Parent & Family Workshops (Zoom), Teacher Workshops (Zoom)*
 - Victoria – 805.701.0789*
 - Support for Homeschooling, Parenting, Couples, Teachers, English as a Foreign Language*