

## August 2020 — Co-creating Our World

Dear Parents,

From the time our first child is born, many of us assume the burden of thinking *It's all up to us*. We think that parents should know what to do in every situation. We think it's up to us to decide what we all *must* do and tell kids what they *have to* do. These common assumptions get handed down generation after generation. They are felt in our bodies and psyches as weighty responsibilities and obligations. They are the assumptions of *power-over parenting*.

Power-over parenting turns parents into dictators, judges, and enforcers. We dictate what's good, bad, right, and wrong. We make sure our children know what to do and how and when to do it. In other words, when our parenting is built on a power-over foundation, we become parenting police.

This parenting approach is not only no fun—for *us*, let alone for the kids—it's unrealistic. The truth is, we mostly don't know what will unfold in life, for our children or ourselves. And now more than ever, we have even more questions than answers about what will come next:

- What can be done about the coronavirus? How long will it last?
- Will schools open in the fall? If so, what does "open" mean? Or will I homeschool, and what does that mean?
- Will my job change, or even continue? Will I want to return to work? How will we adjust to less income?
- How do I connect with social uprising? What does it mean to be an antiracist parent? How can I contribute to a world where everyone matters?
- And how do I accompany my children as they also confront our uncertain future?

Fortunately, *power-with parenting* supports us with this understanding: Children are smart. Children are aware. Children often have the most creative ideas about how to look at a situation and tackle problems.

Power-with parenting frees us to be real with our kids, to admit that we don't have all the answers, and to assure them we value their perspectives. Perspectives we need to

understand in order to co-operate with them and co-create a mutually supportive, interactive world.

Power-with parenting allows us to move into an uncertain future together, with mutual respect, understanding, and contribution.

## **Personal Practice**

We practice power-with parenting by being honest with ourselves and honest with our kids. By noticing our assumptions and how we talk. Are we telling our children what to do, or are we engaging them in co-creating our world?

Below are three examples of power-with parenting. Notice how the parent ends their sentence with a question that engages the child in the conversation.

*This past week, it seems I've been doing all the meal planning, cooking, and clean-up. It would be much more fun for me if we all worked together. I'd like to try something different, where we all participate in preparing meals. Would you be willing to make a plan to try out this week?*

*I'm receiving conflicting information about whether there will be school in the fall. We may have to wait until August to know. I feel curious and also impatient to know what fall will look like. What comes up for you about this situation?*

*I'm concerned I will be late for work unless you get dressed right now. Would you be willing to hustle and be in the car in 5 minutes?*

This week, practice using power-with connecting requests like the ones below. Notice what responses you get.

*What are you hearing?*

*How do you feel hearing that?*

*What is coming up for you?*

*How does this sit with you?*

*Can you flow with this?*

*What do you notice?*

*Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_?*

## Family Activity

Regularly scheduled family meetings meet needs for sharing power, maintaining the intention to connect and learn together, and staying current with each other and with changing conditions week to week. Here are some ideas of what they might look like:

- In Sura's multi-generational family, the weekly family meeting starts with each person checking in on the following topics: How am I right now? What went well this week? What didn't go so well and how could we have done it differently? What's coming up this next week? (Any schedule changes?) And what do we want to pay attention to, or do differently, to meet everyone's needs?
- In our book *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids*, you'll find several activities to try out in family meetings. They may also inspire you to create your own activities.
- Many families use Feeling and Need cards to enrich check-ins. Family members come up with different ways to use them, for fun and for connection. You can find templates for Feeling and Need cards, with pictures, in *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids*. You can also download free Feeling and Need cards (in 20 languages) from our website: <http://thenofaultzone.com/global-network.html>.

## Our Request

We write these letters hoping to support parents during this time of pause and transformation. We want to know what resonates with you. What parts of these letters provide accompaniment, inspiration, encouragement, and/or practical help? What topics would be most interesting to you in future letters? Please email us at [contact@thenofaultzone.com](mailto:contact@thenofaultzone.com).

In addition, if you'd like us to address a specific issue you're wrestling with at home right now, *we will reply*. Send us a paragraph that shares some specifics about the ages of your kids and the challenges you face moving from power-over to power-with parenting, along with your questions. If we address your situation in one of our Letters to Parents, we will request permission first, and change names and other identifying information for privacy.

To consult with one of us privately, find us by email: [Victoria@thenofaultzone.com](mailto:Victoria@thenofaultzone.com) or [Sura@thenofaultzone.com](mailto:Sura@thenofaultzone.com).

We look forward to hearing from you!

— Victoria and Sura