

Love Letters for Kids
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By Patti Teel

If you've ever attended a child's class Valentine party, you've seen how enthralled children are to open each and every valentine. Starting around age three, children not only enjoy receiving valentines, they take great delight in giving them. Many children also begin to express their affection and love by drawing and presenting their pictures and homemade cards to their parents and teachers. Most parents receive an assortment of pictures and cards containing colorful rainbows, hearts, and words of love--which are all the more precious because they have been written phonetically. These pictures and love notes will fill your heart--as well as boxes, files, and a significant portion of your garage.

For parents and their children, Valentine's Day includes the lovely ritual of expressing their love through the exchange of cards. But if you're only giving your children cards and notes on Valentines Day and on their birthdays, you're missing out on a wonderful opportunity. Through the written word, parents can express love, encouragement, appreciation, concern, and understanding. It's also an effective way to settle a misunderstanding, offer an apology, or express constructive criticism.

During the turbulent teen years, notes and letters can be a wonderful way to keep the lines of communication open and to gain a deeper understanding of your child. And while it's easy to let a thoughtless or angry remark slip out of our mouths, writing notes requires us to be reflective as we carefully choose the words that will communicate a clear and thoughtful message. Sometimes, older children and teens are more comfortable expressing their heartfelt emotions through the written, rather than the spoken word. My teenage daughter writes me notes with a depth of thoughtfulness and understanding that takes my breath away. The colorful cards of her childhood have been replaced by letters that express her growing maturity, love, and the agony and joy of young adulthood. Whether your child is three years old or seventeen--cards, notes, and letters, are a great way to deliver a message of love and understanding.

Here are some ways to use the written word in your relationship with your child:

• **Use notes to express love.**

Children can't be told too often that we love them or that we're thankful to be their parent. In addition to telling your children that you love them, leave little love notes in visible places--taped to the bathroom mirror, by the front door, etc.

• **Use notes to express appreciation and thanks.**

When your child surprises you by straightening a room or helping with the dishes, write a quick thank-you note and tape it where he or she is sure to spot it.

• **Use notes to congratulate and celebrate.**

Young children love to receive mail. Occasionally, surprise your child by sending a congratulatory note in the mail. For example, "Congratulations! You finished your science project! Let's celebrate with a scoop of ice cream!"

- **Use notes to apologize.**

If you lose your temper, or make a mistake that affects your child, write an apology note. You will be teaching your children to accept responsibility for their actions and to make amends to anyone who is harmed by them.

- **Use notes to remind.**

While verbal reminders can feel like nagging, notes can clearly list the chores your child is expected to do.

- **Use notes to encourage.**

When your child will be facing a particular challenge at school, tuck a note in his lunchbox or backpack saying, “You can do it,” or, “I have faith in you!”

For older child or teens:

- **Use notes to gain understanding and to stay close.**

Share a journal with your older child or teen. Pass it back and forth and keep it in a place where each of you can get to it and easily express your feelings.

- **Use notes to show concern and clear up misunderstandings.**

If your child becomes defensive and angry when you try to correct his behavior, notes can be especially effective. A thoughtful note can clear up a misunderstanding and help to ensure that constructive criticism is taken in the spirit that it is intended.

Dubbed “The Dream Maker” by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the author of The Floppy Sleep Game Book, which gives parents techniques to help their children relax or fall asleep. She is holding Dream Academy workshops at schools, hospitals, and libraries across the country where parents and children learn the playful relaxation techniques from her book and widely acclaimed children’s audio series. Children at the Dream Academy workshops practice the three R’s by resting their bodies, relaxing their minds, and refreshing their spirits. www.pattiteel.com

