
Inclusive and Gentle Language—A Letter to Families

~ Jessica Oswald

Editor's Note: *Communicating our work to the loving families of the children in our classes is an art. Family members want to know what is going on with activities, and we want them to know that we are bringing DEI issues to their children in age-appropriate and artistic ways. We also want to share suggestions with families that will allow their children's lives to be childlike without adult worries and concerns. And we don't want these caring adults to feel scolded or rebuked.*

At the suggestion of Andrea Gambardella, who is constantly looking out for helpful material to share in Gateways, this parent letter from Green Meadow early childhood teacher, Jessica Oswald, is shared with you. It is a gem of a letter that communicates so much, with warmth and respect for the caregivers, all wrapped in protective love for the children.

Dear Families,

We had a most enjoyable week of school despite our rhythm being turned all around. We are working on making bird seed cookies and creating window hearts. We enjoyed warm bowls of oatmeal, freshly made bread, and the most delicious vegetable soup. The children are playful and industrious in all that they do. Our classroom community is filled with love and care—the children work hard together each day to listen to each other and help when needed.

Our dear Paprika came out to visit us for story time and we reminded each other of how Paprika does not feel like a girl or a boy, but rather they feel just like themselves. We talked about how Paprika likes to be called they/them...the children love Paprika!

We had a fun adventure walk all over the school campus. The imagination was going to the zoo and we had to roll down the hill in front of the kindergarten building to get onto the “zoo train.” There, Mother turtle met us and played a body geography game with us (touch your nose, toes, shoulders, elbows). Then we joined the bunnies and hopped around, crawled like polar bears, and balanced across a long fallen tree. We were ponies galloping across the big green field. I always say, there is so much joy found in being comfortable in one's body.

I am immensely grateful I get to spend my days with your beautiful children.

We know the world is not an easy place to be a child right now. At our lunch table the other day, there was talk about war in Russia and the recent news of a “spy” balloon and countries wanting to take over. There is a lot of discussion about climate change and how we are “killing the planet.”

I can guide the conversation, always, to be kind and appropriate, but I can't stop it because the children need a place to digest their sense impressions. What goes in needs to come back out.

Many years ago, I had a father who brought his children to school on his way to work. When the child arrived in the classroom, he needed to report everything he heard on NPR on his morning ride to school. When I brought this to his father's attention, his reaction was, “Oh, I did not know they were listening.” Children hear, see, and feel everything.

I am very well aware that we are all trying to do our best; and, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to filter out the adult world. This means we need to work harder to do so. How? It is a question we all have... including myself as the mother of a 14-year-old. How do we create/believe in a world that is good? This is our work with young children. The curriculum for Waldorf early childhood education is, *The world is good.*

Do you want to bring a child into a world such as this? Which is a fundamental question of whether or not it's good. It is an act of faith to declare that it is good. Am I going to act as if it is good? And, what would happen if I did? The answer is, the more you act out the proposition that it is good the better it gets.

I came across the above quote recently...I have not been able to locate the source. It is powerful and could be the answer we are looking for. Our children learn strictly through imitation. So, where do we (adults) find and create joy? What do we nurture in ourselves and pay attention to? How do we live in wonder and awe of the world? How do we love and care for each other? Cultivating all the goodness in us is a daily practice and can balance out the heartbreak and allow our children to truly live in a world that is beautiful.

We teach our children to have a heart for the world by having one ourselves.

For the young child, it is simple. They do not need to know about climate change and all the facts at this time of their life...that will come later. Right now, the young child needs to feel the joy of riding a bike, learning to jump rope, the thrill of jumping in a puddle, the peace of looking up at the clouds. Feed the birds, make cookies and a card for a neighbor who could use some good cheer, speak kindly to each other and about others. Learning how to pour a glass of water and offering a hug to someone in need does wonders for the giver and receiver—they need to know who the helpers are in the world and how they can be one too. *Lecturing and facts do not warm the heart—it is in the doing.*

Here is an article I found quite helpful to read. It is about helping our children regulate their emotions.

When reading it, pay close attention to the importance of the adult being able to find beauty and awe in the world. It's through our own inner work that we can help our children.

Parents League of New York, "How to Teach Children to Regulate Their Emotions"

<https://www.parentsleague.org/blog/how-teach-children-regulate-their-emotions> ♦

Jessica Oswald *founded and teaches in the Forest Preschool at Green Meadow Waldorf School, a place where children find joy in the simple outdoor rhythms of the day. Jessica has two children in the school; her eldest daughter graduated with the Class of 2017. She grew up in Brooklyn, NY and has somehow found herself spending her days with a wonderful group of children in the forest.*