

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Love Notes: The Magic of Writing

IN THIS AGE OF SUCCINCT E-MAILS and text messages, the value of love notes is not lost—even between parents and children. People often place sweet messages in their children's lunchboxes, providing moments of their presence and loving feelings with the good food. Writing letters can also help us communicate with children when our spoken words fall short.

A funny note about a chore that needs doing, a drawing that conveys an apology, a surprise compliment—the written word often carries more weight than speech, even if you have to read your letter to your preschooler. Instead of buying your child a Valentine, try writing the wonderful things you observe about her.

Notes can also transform situations between children. It's hard to get one's thoughts together during conflict, but one little boy used notes to communicate effectively. If he felt left out, he would draw a big sad face (his) and a big happy face (the other person's) to show the latter his dismay. He always felt better after getting those strong emotions down, and sometimes the note got him back in the game. He preferred initiating his own form of communication rather than having a teacher intervene.

Preschool children dictate strong feelings for us to write down and read to another child. When pressed for an apology, our children often find a note effective—sometimes dictated to a teacher or to a parent at home. For a child who is upset, offering to record his feelings validates his point of view.

You can try note writing at home. If your child has strong feelings toward a sibling or toward someone at school, writing a note offers the space to think things out. It smooths the way where talking during upset often makes it worse. Notes can also communicate love and strengthen that connection between people. When in doubt about a situation, try the writing option; you may be surprised.

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