

## **Parents as Motivators**

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Following my graduation from the Matsumoto Talent Education Institute and returning to teach in Canada, I knew that my instructional approach would be strongly affected by the experience of studying under Dr. Suzuki's mentorship. So, as I contemplated how I would guide parents in my studio, I turned to Dr. Suzuki's thoughts in *Nurtured by Love, Where Love is Deep, and Ability Development from Age Zero*. What stands out in Dr. Suzuki's writings is his constant reference to the power of parental love, to the unconditional and limitless love parents have for their children. I realized that because love is the universal condition at the core of parents' relationships with their children, parents develop one particularly extraordinary and irreplaceable capacity. They become experts in motivating their children. No matter the child's temperament, age, personality, strengths or weaknesses, parents become the most agile motivators. They take on the imaginative, assertive, gentle, respectful, creative, celebratory, and forgiving dimensions of motivation. So, with parental love at the core of parents' relationships with their children, I decided to capitalize on parents' capacity for motivating their children – to help them understand how the best thing they could possibly do for their children would be to excel as motivators.

From the outset of parenthood, parents are the most adept, intuitive, and skilled motivators any child could ever ask for, not just because parents love their child, but because parents possess unmatched experience, knowledge, and insight into who their child is as a person. By motivating even the most basic of child developmental stages like learning to walk or talk, parents solidify a key relational dynamic – that parents unconditionally support the child's failures and celebrate the child's achievements. Parents are the thankless, underappreciated validators of their child's independence and ownership. No other person knows that child in the fundamental way parents know their child – not grandparents, in-laws, or teachers. And because parents know their child from the fullness of daily life – rather than from a distance, a temporary outing, or an optimal occasion – parents know what it means to be a motivator even when the going gets tough.

Parents make outstanding motivators because of three vital and enduring dynamics. They understand their child. They care about and care for their child. And they accept their child. Understanding refers to parents' capacity for recognizing their child's authentic self, the deep inner spirit that drives the child's temperament, personality,

likes, dislikes, the unique attributes that define the child as a person. Caring about and caring for refer to the parent in action. On the one hand, caring involves practical elements like exercise or nutrition, while on the other, caring has a nurturing and protective dimension that speaks to trust, safety, and dealing with fear and stress. Finally, acceptance is all about parents being unconditionally open to their child's innate complexity. Acceptance isn't about creating a hierarchy of tolerable personal traits; it's about parents nonjudgmentally recognizing the child in totality. Parents make outstanding motivators because they recognize how independence and ownership are embedded in who the child is as a person.

As motivators, parents have amazing expertise in differentiating the intricacies of effective motivation. Motivating teenagers isn't the same as seven-year olds. Firstborns are different from the second child. Effective motivators know what's negotiable and what's nonnegotiable, when to push, when to pull. Hunger and fatigue also have implications for motivation. These are the kinds of things parents know about their child and about motivation.

Why are parents such outstanding motivators? While Dr. Suzuki draws attention to the unconditional love parents have for their child, I believe there's another angle to consider. Parents are outstanding motivators because they know what it's like to experience independence and ownership for themselves. On the one hand, they know the joy, the satisfaction, the inexplicable empowerment, the magical sense of meaning that comes with independence and ownership. On the other hand, parents also know what it's like to have independence and ownership taken away, to be denied independence, to have ownership go unrecognized. So, it's only natural that parents would want their child to experience the emboldening power of independence and ownership. Remarkably, it's the reason why, so many years ago, I decided parents needed to know the best thing they could possibly do for their children would be to excel as motivators.