

Highlights complies fully with the requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). When we receive letters via email, we do not save any personally identifiable information. In this book, all the names of children whose letters were not originally published in the magazines have been changed to protect their identity. Any identifying information that appeared in handwritten letters has been erased.

The letters, emails, and poems published in this book that are written by children have not been edited or changed. In rare cases, it was necessary to shorten the letters. All text appears as it was presented in the original correspondence, including any typos, spelling, and punctuation errors. The replies written by Highlights for Children that are published in this book were edited only to avoid repetition and correct typos or punctuation errors.

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CONTENTS

- 8 Foreword
- 12 Where the Conversation Began
- 20 Letters About Family
- 52 Letters About School
- 78 Letters About Friendship
- 106 Letters About Feelings & Confidence
- 136 Letters About Self-Improvement
- 162 Letters About Hopes & Dreams
- 188 Letters About Societal Concerns & Events
- 222 Letters About Biases & Exclusion
- 252 Letters About COVID-19
- 278 Letters About Really Hard Things
- 316 What We've Learned
- 323 Acknowledgments

Foreword

ADVICE COLUMNISTS OCCUPY A STRANGE AND RARIFIED space in the world of words; unlike therapists or physicians, we operate more or less as trusted best friends or honorary aunts and uncles to the people who write to us for advice. Our most important gift is to gain, and retain, insight—and to pass it along. We are amateurs, armed mainly with a way with words, a knack for paying close attention, and the ability to disseminate wisdom, along with our capacity to care about people we don't know personally—and will never meet. In fact, the only thing we really know about the people who write to us is that they have the courage to ask, along with a desire to be heard and understood.

Once upon a time, we were all children. Understanding, compassion, and respect are paramount—especially when responding to questions from children. No column has ever done this better than “Dear Highlights,” the long-running column in beloved *Highlights* magazine.

The spectrum of questions tackled by the magazine since its founding in 1946 spans what I see as the North and South Poles of human experience: Love and Loss. And because these questions are being asked by brave and curious children, the questions themselves are simple, beautiful, honest, and without the artifice, manipulative sheen, or flat-out ego that I so often see

in queries sent to my own “Ask Amy” advice column, which is geared toward adults. (The gift of authenticity that comes along with childhood is too often lost with the passage of time.)

To read questions sent by children over the decades expressing concern over so many terrifying events—from assassinations of national leaders, to terrorist bombings, natural disasters, police brutality, and to the coronavirus pandemic—is a reminder of how traumatic and overwhelming these events can be for children, and how important it is that adults respond honestly and with great care.

To read questions about the quotidian concerns of childhood—how to manage siblings, schoolyard bullies, parents, friendships, or how to convince their folks to get them a pet—is to absorb the beautiful universality of our more common experiences.

We have so much to learn from these kids. The thoughtful editors of “Dear Highlights” know this, because the answers to these thousands of queries always illuminate the legitimacy of the question, as well as provide such supportive, compassionate, and timeless advice!

What I didn’t know before reading this book was that the editors of *Highlights* magazine respond to every single query sent to them—not just those that are published. I can guarantee that the tens of thousands of children who have received a personal reply over the decades have treasured

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this very special correspondence. This legacy of caring cannot be measured; it can only be felt.

As the mother and stepmother to five daughters, every single page of this treasured collection moves me profoundly. But what brings me to tears, again and again, are the facsimiles of the letters themselves, the handwritten poems on notebook paper, and the lovely illustrations sent in by children—who painstakingly express their hopes, dreams, fears, stresses, and triumphs to the wise and wonderful team behind “Dear Highlights.” What a joy to see this authentic and creative work shared on the page!

To read these questions and answers—some from many years ago—makes one yearn to know how things turned out for the children who so bravely told their stories and asked their questions to the magazine. Read this opening sentence from the year 2000, written by a twelve-year-old girl named Lara, whose relationship with her mother was brutal: “I am writing on behalf of my feelings, which are buried so deep inside of me . . .” Did the compassionate response to Lara’s plea make her feel heard and realize that she is

What we do know for sure is that the wisdom embedded in these thousands of “Dear Highlights” Qs & As has radiated outward and helped unknown scores of children and caregivers who have had the good fortune to read *Highlights*.

deserving of love? (And—I can't help wondering: Did Jake—age 9—ever stop cussing?)

What we do know for sure is that the wisdom embedded in these thousands of “Dear Highlights” Qs & As has radiated outward and helped unknown scores of children and caregivers who have had the good fortune to read *Highlights*. For every person who asks a question, there are all those who have the same question or concern but don't share it.

In times of great stress or trouble, Mr. Rogers advised children: “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” That's exactly what children writing to “Dear Highlights” find when they put pen to paper: Helpers whose open-minded trust and kindness surely has made our world a better place.

February 2021
Amy Dickinson
Freeville, NY

Where the Conversation Began



WHEN A CHILD SHARES THEIR INNER THOUGHTS, we are given a gift. It's an honor and a responsibility—even a sacred trust. Through letters, emails, poems, and drawings, hundreds of thousands of kids have engaged with *Highlights* magazine since its inception. They have shared their thoughts and feelings with us as if we were close friends. They write about the various challenges of growing up—difficulties at school, at home, and with peers. They write about their hopes and dreams. They write about their worries and fears—for themselves, for the people they love, and for the larger world. They ask, “What should I do?” “Can you help?” “What do you think?”

Since our beginning, it has been a Highlights tradition to read every letter and respond to every child. This practice has created for us an ongoing, authentic dialogue with children. It became a way to keep our finger on the pulse of kids—to stay attuned to their thoughts and feelings. It has led to our becoming a touchstone for generations of children navigating the ups and downs of childhood.

Our dedication to answering every child's letter is rooted in the views of the first editor and cofounder of *Highlights* magazine, Dr. Garry Cleveland Myers. A child psychologist, lifelong educator, and particularly astute observer of children, Dr. Myers believed that positive human relationships were a powerful motivator for children. He and Caroline Clark Myers, his educator wife and cofounder, were advocates for conversations with children that allowed adults to hear and understand kids' perspectives. In his many writings for adults, Dr. Myers urged parents to take pleasure in their children by being "appreciative listeners" and encouraging their kids to share their thoughts more often.

This philosophy of child-rearing was foundational to the magazine. It was apparent in the very first issue in 1946. By writing (for 25 years!) a monthly editor's message that welcomed kids to each new issue, Dr. Myers set the long Highlights tradition of speaking directly and conversationally with children. In his "Talks with the Editor" feature, which was later renamed "Let's Talk Things Over," he laid a foundation of trust and encouraged kids to self-reflect. This space in the magazine reinforced the idea that talking and communicating with people you trust are good ways to handle problems.

In those early years, our mailbag mostly held fan mail from kids, their queries about *Highlights*, and letters to Sammy Spivens—a puppet character in a long-running feature who encouraged kids to reflect on their bad habits.

But over time, we began to receive more and more letters from kids that revealed their thoughts and feelings. They wrote about difficulties in getting along with their friends and siblings, their career aspirations, being teased, caring for pets, societal concerns, and other topics that had a direct effect on them. From time to time, a page of their letters made it into an issue, and we

It has led to our becoming a touchstone for generations of children navigating the ups and downs of childhood.



began to see that kids were very interested in reading letters from other children. In 1979, we began publishing them in a regular advice column that continues today as “Dear Highlights.”

Throughout the evolution of the magazine over the years, as mail flowed in from kids—thousands of letters, drawings, and poems monthly—members of the editorial staff were specially trained in how to respond to them. No one took lightly the task of answering a child’s letter. Rather, it was considered an honor and a basic tenet of the company’s core beliefs: When a child writes to you, you write back with care and respect.

Eventually, we realized that we possessed a treasure trove of

information about childhood derived from a primary source—kids themselves. We saw research value in our reader mail, and we began to save it all. When the attic of our editorial offices, where the letters were stored, began to overflow, we contacted The Ohio State University (OSU). The staff in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library saw the value in our collection of correspondence from children, which included letters, poems, drawings, stories, and science questions. OSU also recognized its historical significance, so they agreed to retain the letters in a special collection. Because they were unable to accept the total amount of mail we had amassed, we sent all the letters and emails we received from children, and one drawing and poem for every ten received—mostly from 1981 to the present. This archive was the main source for most of the kids' correspondence reproduced or excerpted here.

As we pored over the letters in the making of this book, we began to see a pattern that wasn't surprising: Kids' concerns have changed very little. Certainly, the world has changed dramatically since we received those first letters from kids, but how children grow has not. For 75 years, kids across generations have written to us about the same fundamental issues, still hoping for adult guidance and encouragement.

Given the consistency we saw in kids' letters over time, we were surprised to see more change in how we responded. We uncovered some replies that probably were too reflective of the different personalities of the editors who wrote them. Some letters may have called for more empathy than we offered in our briefer replies. We took too long to rephrase our suggestion to "talk this over with your parents" to "talk this over with a parent," to be sensitive to the growing number of readers living in single-parent households. We struggled—and still do—about our tendency to assume that the child who writes to us

has at least one loving, caring parent or guardian. But we know that's not true for every child. Looking through a present-day lens, we sometimes wished we had answered a particular letter from another era a little differently. Yet, our belief that kids matter and what they think matters is at the very heart of every response. Sifting through the store of replies felt like looking at a

For some children, an in-person conversation with a trusted adult isn't possible, hasn't proved helpful, or seems too daunting to initiate.

series of snapshots taken over the decades, revealing both who *Highlights* was and is.

What also remained consistent over time is the authenticity of a child's letter. They have come to us in childish scrawls, with misspellings and grammatical errors—or, more commonly in earlier years, in careful cursive. But, in 2006, for the first

time, the number of emails eclipsed the number of postal letters we received—a trend that continued for about ten years.

Although many kids seem to find emails easier to write and send, we find that postal letters are easier to answer. When a child writes to us with paper and pencil, they sometimes give us additional contextual clues. We might be able to roughly guess the letter writers' age by looking at the handwriting, for example, which greatly helps us formulate a response. Often a child illustrates their letter, and the details in the drawing can offer hints about the problem not expressed in words. Some children forego a written message entirely and just send drawings about an upsetting event or situation. This was especially common after 9/11, when we received numerous drawings of airplanes hitting

the Twin Towers. We responded to these drawings as if they were letters expressing worry or sadness.

Emails offer no such clues. Sometimes they don't even include the child's real name. The brevity and more anonymous feel to these notes make composing a meaningful response even more challenging.

Certainly, the ideal way to connect with kids is through face-to-face communication, which allows us to look them in the eyes and punctuate our response with supportive body language and warm hugs. But for some children, an in-person conversation with a trusted adult isn't possible, hasn't proved helpful, or seems too daunting to initiate. For them, writing a message to us serves.

Most children write to us only once, but some write to us several times. One reader, who found it particularly hard to navigate relationships with family and peers, wrote to us regularly over the course of ten years, beginning from age 7. In 2004, he sent us 33 postal letters—and, later, for a period, a daily email. All told, we sent him more than 200 replies. After a while, he



started to feel a little like family, and today the staff often wonders aloud how he is doing.

While the majority of our conversations with kids cover the common, daily challenges of childhood, some of the letters and emails are about serious or especially sensitive issues. In these cases, we seek the help of experienced, credentialed professionals, who are more than willing to review our replies. They help ensure that we're sending the best possible advice based on the information we have. As required by law, when kids tell us about abuse or neglect, we report it to the proper authorities. We handle emails in strict compliance with the Children's Online Privacy and

Protection Act (COPPA). The names of the children whose letters are published in this book have been changed to protect their privacy. We've also preserved the integrity of each letter and reply we selected, leaving the original wording and spelling. We've cut text only to shorten when necessary.

In my long tenure at *Highlights*, I personally have read and responded to thousands of letters and emails from children. This remains a favorite part of my work as editor in chief. I am rarely surprised by any letter, but I am still frequently touched. Nevertheless, seeing so many messages from generations of kids bound together in a single volume moves me deeply. This book is a powerful reminder that childhood is a period of heavy lifting for kids. In their

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often brief but always intimate letters, we see how hard they work to develop their character, find belonging, discover their strengths, and build self-esteem.

If the archive at OSU is a time capsule, then this book is a tapestry. Pulling from some of the most beautiful threads of our correspondence over the decades, we have tried to weave together the letters, poems, and drawings shared with us into a depiction of childhood that's honest and rich in color and texture. Like the best art, it should stir you. Cause you to reflect. Make you feel the world of childhood.

I also hope this book spurs you to action—to commit to leaning in and listening to kids on their way to growing up. When we *hear* them, we learn how to better serve them. When we respond with thought and care, we model the way we hope they'll show up for others. By doing so, we ensure that childhood is the nurturing, positive experience kids need and deserve. This is how we put children on the path to becoming people who will help create a better world for all. We implore you to listen.

Letters About

Family



FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND FRIENDS ARE THE MAIN INFLUENCES on a child's life. Of these three, family is the single most important one. Children depend on family for all the necessities of life—food, shelter, love, trust, and security—beginning even before their first breath and continuing for at least a couple of decades. Kids' understanding of the most important qualities in relationships takes root at home with the family. Their early experiences at home, learning that they are safe and cared for and feeling like they belong, have an enduring effect on their well-being.

Family can be defined in several ways. Some define it simply as a group of people who share legal or genetic bonds, but at Highlights we define family as a group of people connected by the bonds of deep caring and commitment. It's the group of people with whom we share, usually, the same daily routines, rituals, and significant events. But at its center, family is the collection of people who nurture us and offer us love and support. It's the people who help us figure out who we are and where we fit in the world. This more inclusive definition encompasses the many different configurations of people whom our readers today call family.

In the early years of *Highlights*, the simple definition may have described most of our readers, who were part of nuclear families consisting of two opposite-gender parents still in their first marriage. In the 1960s, the apex of the post-World War II baby boom, this setting described 73 percent of all children in the U.S. But today, only 46 percent of kids live in this family structure.

These days, one in four mothers are raising kids on their own, and common family makeups include stepparent, grandparent, multiracial, LGBTQ parent, co-parent, and single-parent households. Divorce, which hit an all-time high in the 1970s and early 1980s (as did our reader mail about divorce), is still a factor, but the recent trend of fewer millennials choosing to marry is also an influence. In almost half of households headed by a married couple, both parents are working full-time. Often, the mother is the primary breadwinner. Family size is shrinking. In fact, the fastest growing American family structure is only-child families.

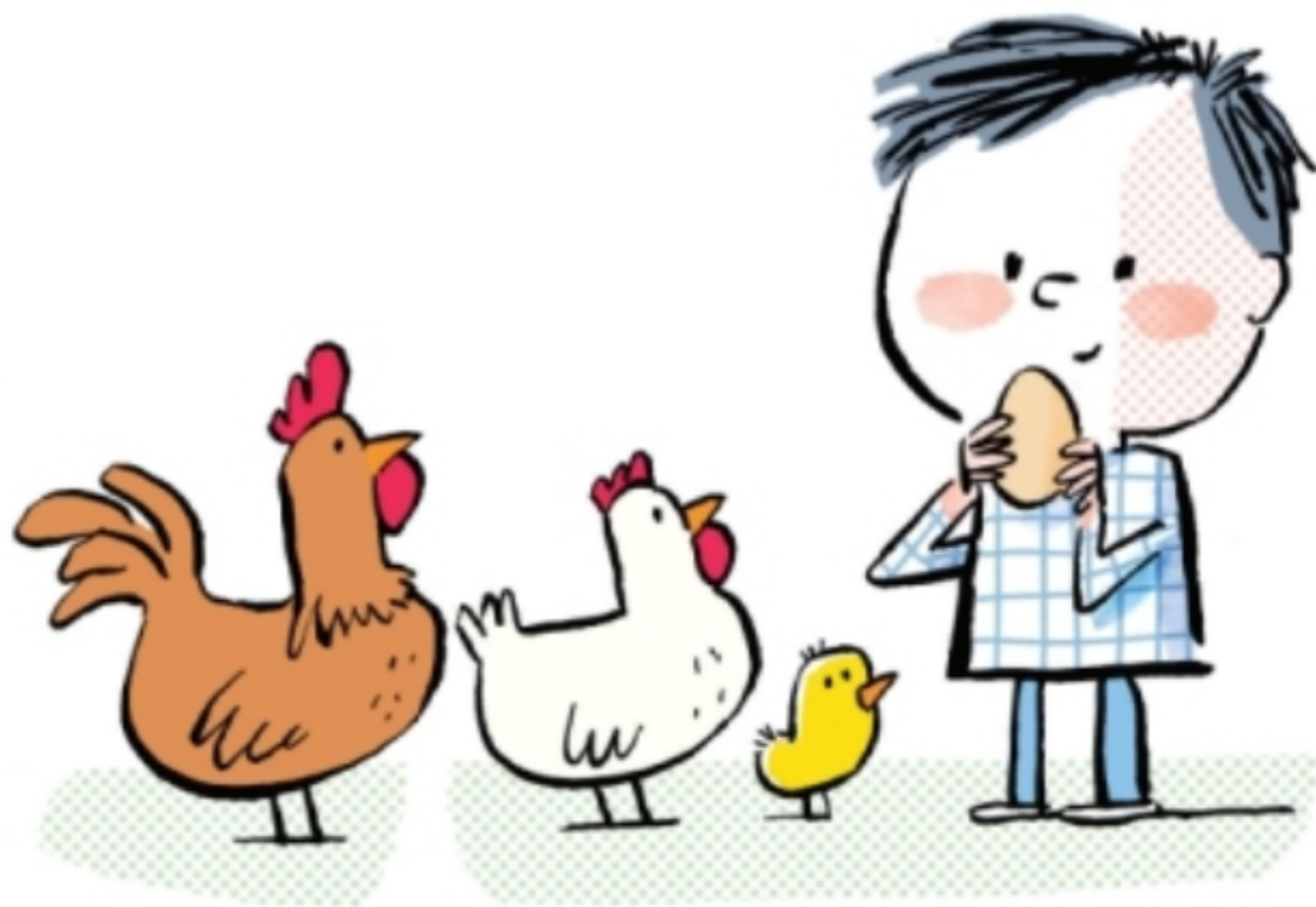
But despite all the change in how families are built, families continue to mean everything to kids. We're reminded of this when we ask young kids whom they most admire and they respond, typically, by naming a close family member. We also see their devotion in the drawings, poems, and letters about family life, which we've been receiving for years.

Kids' love for family, especially their parents, can be fierce, and their fear of losing a parent can be intense. Cheng, age 9 in 2014, wrote about his concern for his father's health. "My dad keeps smoking, and I want him to stop. It could easily kill him, and I want him to stop this bad habit." Perhaps even more common is the fear of losing a parent through divorce. One anonymous reader sent an email in 2008 to say that her parents were always fighting. "Do they still love me?" she wondered, "Because I have to pick one parent."

Many of the letters that kids write today about family life cover the same ground as previous generations of children wrote about. Kids still write to share some of the joys of family living, such as making room for a new baby or creating a fun vacation memory. They still write with objections to their bedtime, chores, allowance, and other family rules, although today they may expect to have more to say about how these decisions are made. And although much was made about the trend of helicopter parenting in the early 2000s and, a few decades later, about drone parenting, we still receive letters from kids who crave more understanding and attention from their parents. In recent years, a primary parental distraction often seems to be an electronic device. In 2012, a reader named Joshua wrote, "My dad never wants to do anything fun with me anymore. After dinner, he just sits at his computer and reads the news."

Few children get through childhood without fighting with parents. The kids who write to us sometimes say that the arguments make them feel stressed or anxious, but usually they are writing for help in

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thinking about the conflict and seeking resolution. Some letters illustrate the tension between kids who want more freedom and parents who wish to keep them closely tethered to home.

Kids with siblings have, for decades, written to ask for help in coping with the unwanted attention of younger brothers and sisters. Living with siblings gives kids meaningful experience in developing patience and in accepting and tolerating differences in the habits and interests of others. But kids, of course, don't always see this as an upside to having bothersome siblings. Even if they do, it doesn't necessarily make getting along any easier. Kids who feel jealous of siblings whom they perceive to be getting more love and attention often write to have their feelings heard and acknowledged. Children who write about older brothers or sisters sometimes write to express worry about



their siblings' risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or cutting. As in prior years, many only children say that they are envious of friends with siblings.

Another common topic in our conversations with kids is stepfamilies. Kids frequently write to us about the adjustments required to make room for stepparents, stepsiblings, and half-siblings, but blended families are so common that they no longer come with a stigma. Sadly, kids with LGBTQ parents often need help facing criticism, ridicule, or even contempt, as do kids with parents of different races.

Grandparents continue to be enormous influences in the lives of children and are more likely today to head households with kids. But even when they are not the guardians, they are frequently the go-to relative when a child needs unhurried time and attention or needs to feel a little unconditional love.

Family leaves an indelible impression on a child. Kids are always watching the adults around them and learning, even when we wish they were not. Occasionally, readers write to us about some deeply distressing experience. Almost always, these childhood traumas are a by-product of adult problems, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, parental fighting, and acrimonious divorce. Some of the traumas are a result of circumstances beyond control, such as a serious illness or the death of a parent. Children, of course, navigate difficult circumstances differently. Many children are resilient, while for

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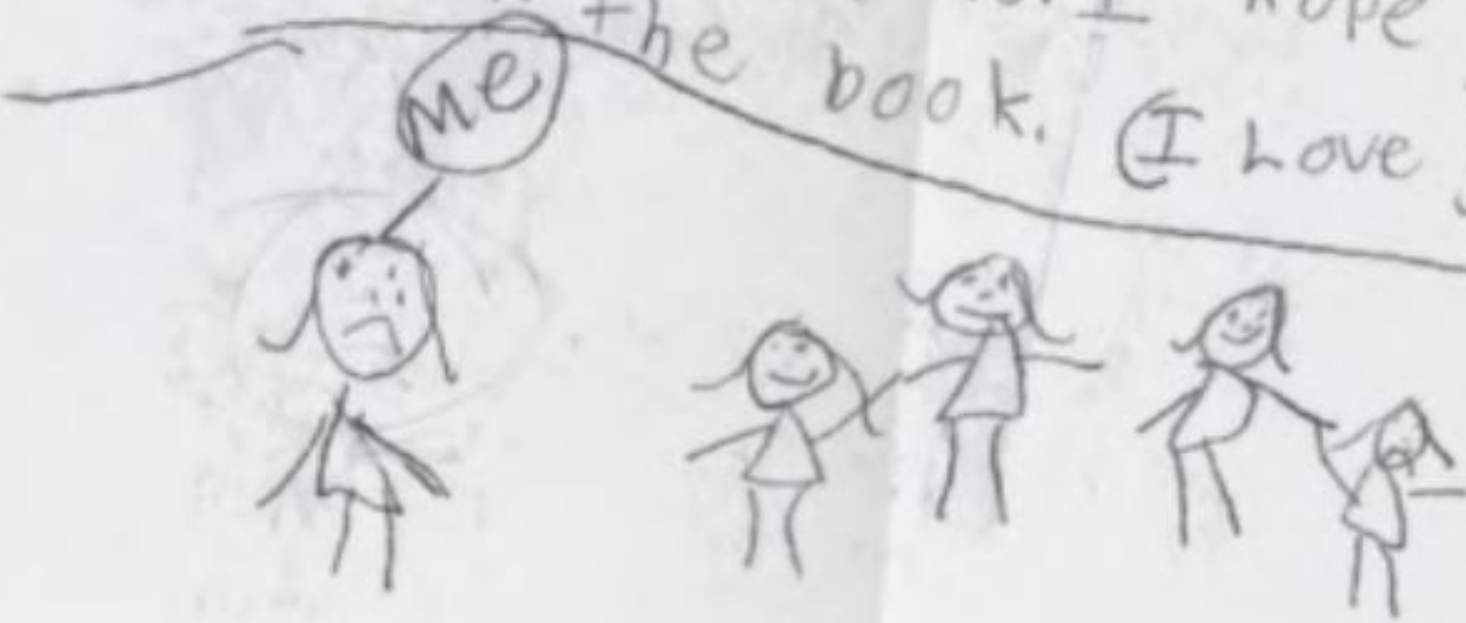
others the effects of these difficulties are rarely completely overcome. When we reply to letters from these kids, we work hard to make sure they feel heard and supported. We reassure them that they are not responsible for what has happened and urge them not to take on blame. Often, our message is that they are not alone. We strongly encourage them to share their feelings with trusted adults in their circle who, we hope, can better gauge the need for professional mental-health treatment.

Family dynamics and structure change throughout life, as do roles. Ideas about what constitutes a good family situation and a happy childhood have changed over the years and are still debated today. But what cannot be debated are the stabilizing, basic building blocks of family—love and trust. Arguably, one of the best ways we help most of our readers is by reminding them that family life is often imperfect and that the ways family members express interest and concern are sometimes flawed—but the love is there, and it endures.

Our hope for children everywhere is that childhood—a short, critically important season of life—will be nurturing, distinguished by family relationships that are warm, responsive, and predictably stable. This is the kind of support all children need to thrive, feel safe to explore the world, and engage positively with others. An attentive, caring family, however it is configured, puts kids solidly on the path to becoming their best selves.

THE LETTERS

It is me again,
I have another
friends have a problem, all of my
one but I never get to see her.
I have no siblings at all. And my
Best friend ever has a
baby sister and it is all about
he baby sister. ps. I hope you can
put this in the book. (I love your highlight)



—Savannah, 2014

Dear Highlights,
I don't have any bothers or
sisters and I get bored and
lonesome and I get tired of
doing the same old thing.
Please help!

—Chrissy, age 10, 1985

Dear Savannah,

Your drawing lets us know how sad this
situation makes you feel. It might help
you to know that other kids have
written to us about feeling sad because
they don't have any brothers and sisters.

We suggest that you find other
ways to satisfy your desire to be with
younger children. Maybe you could ask
your best friend if you could sometimes
play with and help take care of her baby
sister, as long as it's OK with her parents.
Do you have some relatives who have a
baby in the family whom you could play
with and help to take care of? We're
sure the parents would appreciate your
help.

A big part of growing up is learning
to accept a situation the way it is and
choosing to make the best of it. We
can't always have what we want, but
we can still choose to be happy!

We hope this helps.

Dear Highlights,

I like biking, but I have a big family that consists of 2 parents, me-9, my brothers-6, 5 & 3. We're almost always busy, and we just almost never have time.

—Anonymous, age 9, 2013

Dear Friend,

You are very fortunate to have such a big family, but we can understand how this would make it hard to find biking time. We encourage you to sit down with your parents and talk about this question. Explain in a calm, clear way that you really enjoy bike riding and you're looking for more times when you can pursue this interest. Make sure they know that you understand how busy your family is and that you are willing to work around the family's schedule. Then, listen well to what they have to say. We believe they will have some good suggestions for you.

Here are a few ideas that may help. Perhaps you and your family can make a schedule, writing in the many commitments and activities going on for everyone and then finding free times that could be used for biking. Setting specific time aside will make it easier

to plan for it. If it's too difficult to find a time when everyone is free to bike, you could ask your parents about biking with friends or relatives. Depending on the layout and safety of your neighborhood, you might even talk to your parents about places you can bike without an adult riding with you, such as your driveway or up and down your street. Of course, it is your parents' decision, and it is their job to keep you safe. Respect their wishes regarding safety—especially about the times and places you can ride.

Remember, even if you aren't able to bike as much as you want to, think of other activities—running, climbing, jumping rope, etc. They are great muscle-strengthening exercises that will come in handy next time you're on a bike.

Dear Highlights,

My Mom and my Grandma said "Don't cross the street and go to where is my friends are." But I always get so angry from them, I'm 9 years old and I know how to cross the street. Can you help please?

—Brianna, age 9, 2013

Dear Brianna,

We hope you will realize that your mom and your grandma have said this because they are concerned for your safety. Although you know how to cross the street, accidents do happen, and they can happen even when people are being careful. They don't want you to be hurt by a car or some other vehicle.

Try to explain to your mom and grandma how you are feeling—but don't get angry. Anger rarely solves anything, and it can make it harder to find solutions. If you can show them that you are mature and able to take care of yourself, perhaps they will be willing to let you cross the street on your own. If not, we hope you will be able to accept their decision. Be patient—we're sure the day will come when you will be able to cross the street on your own!



Dear Highlights,

My mom is always on her phone. I always ask her to get off, but she doesn't. She's on it half the day, and the other half she's working. All I want to do is spend time with her more. What should I do?

—Anonymous, 2020

Dear Friend,

We encourage you to talk with your mom about this. You could ask her to set aside specific time to talk so that she knows you'd like a serious conversation without distractions. You might start with something such as, "I love you, Mom, but I feel bad when we don't spend much time together. I know you work a lot and I appreciate that, but I would like to spend more time with you. Could we talk about it?" You might suggest simply spending some time together talking about what each of you did during the day. You could try making it a daily routine that the two of you talk for five or ten minutes after dinner or before bedtime.

Whether or not your mom agrees to make any changes, you can still

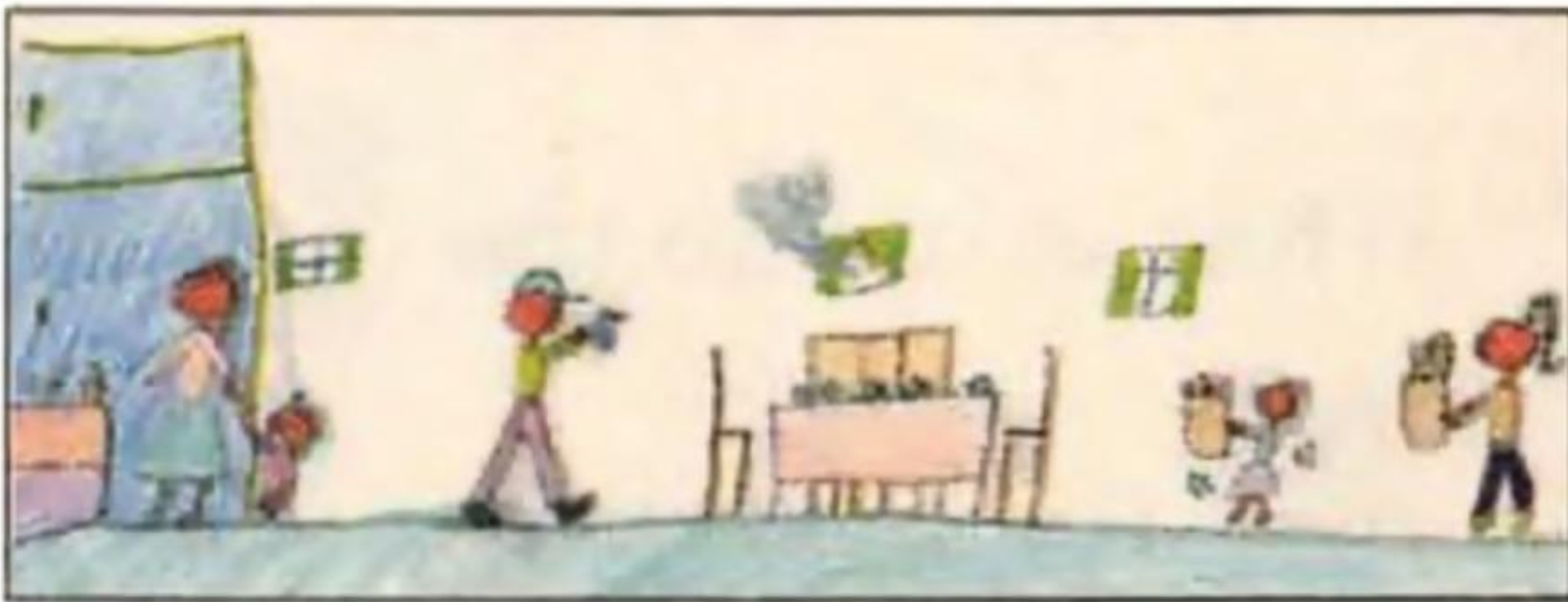
make some changes on your own. You might try purposefully being near your mom and participating in what she's doing. For instance, have you considered sharing more household chores with her? Folding laundry, washing dishes, or preparing meals can be a good time to talk, sing, or tell jokes. Another thing to try is to schedule time to do things together. For example, you could both decide that at 7:00 on Friday nights you'll play games together for an hour. We're sure that you and your mom can come up with other good ideas.

Smiles, a good attitude, and a real desire to let your mom know she is important to you can make a huge difference. If one idea doesn't work, don't let yourself become discouraged or give up. Just try another approach!

My Family

My mama taught me to tie my shoes.
My daddy rides bikes with me some afternoons.
My sister sleeps with me at night.
My cat plays with me and won't put up a fight.
My family helps me when I am feeling blue.
I love my family, and they love me, too.

—Olivia, age 8, 2010



—Erinne, age 6, 1993

Dear Highlights,

I really want a dog, but my mom is allergic to all mammals. (Except humans) and I don't want a fish. What should I do?

—Amber, age 10, 2017

Dear Amber,

We're glad you wrote to us. Having an allergy like that must be difficult for your mom.

Many people enjoy different kinds of reptiles. We don't know how you and other family members feel about this, but it's something to consider. If you have a chance to visit a pet store, you might get some other ideas for a pet besides fish. Fish are graceful and fascinating, but we understand that you can't cuddle and get close to them as you would a dog!

It may seem that you will have to wait until you are out on your own to have a pet. That may seem too long of a wait, but there are times when we all have to accept a situation for what it is. We encourage you to focus your thoughts and energy on the many things in your life that make you happy rather than on what you can't have. Don't let your happiness depend upon having a dog. You can make the most of every day with or without a pet.

Dear Highlights,

I need some advice. Star Wars has taken over my kid sister's mind. How can I convince her that sometimes I have other things on my mind?

—Katie, 1979

Dear Katie,

We think we know what you mean. Your sister thinks about *Star Wars* and talks about it all the time.

Don't worry. Just be patient and wait for your sister to lose her interest in *Star Wars*. Believe it or not, this will happen. In the meantime, you will just have to live with it.

Dear Highlights,

My mother and father divorced when I was a baby. Four months ago my father had a baby with his wife. Now my mother is pregnant. I feel like nobodys gonna care about me anymore. P.S. What can I do?

—Sierra, 2015

Dear Sierra,

It may help to know that many older siblings feel this way when a baby is born in their family. Suddenly, the attention shifts from being just on you to being on you and your new sibling. This isn't a bad thing; it's just an adjustment. We promise you that your parents have not forgotten about you or stopped loving you. Their love has just expanded to make room for you and your new siblings.

It may help to let your parents know how you are feeling. It's important for them to know that you worry about feeling neglected. This way, they will know how to help you feel included and loved.

A baby is an exciting addition to a family, but it's also one that requires a

lot of work. Your parents may seem more tired now than they were before, and they may ask you to help out with the babies. We hope you will have an open mind and be willing to help when needed (or volunteer even if no one asks you directly for help). Your parents will appreciate your willingness to lend a hand.

Congratulations on being an older sister! We know you will be a great example for your siblings.



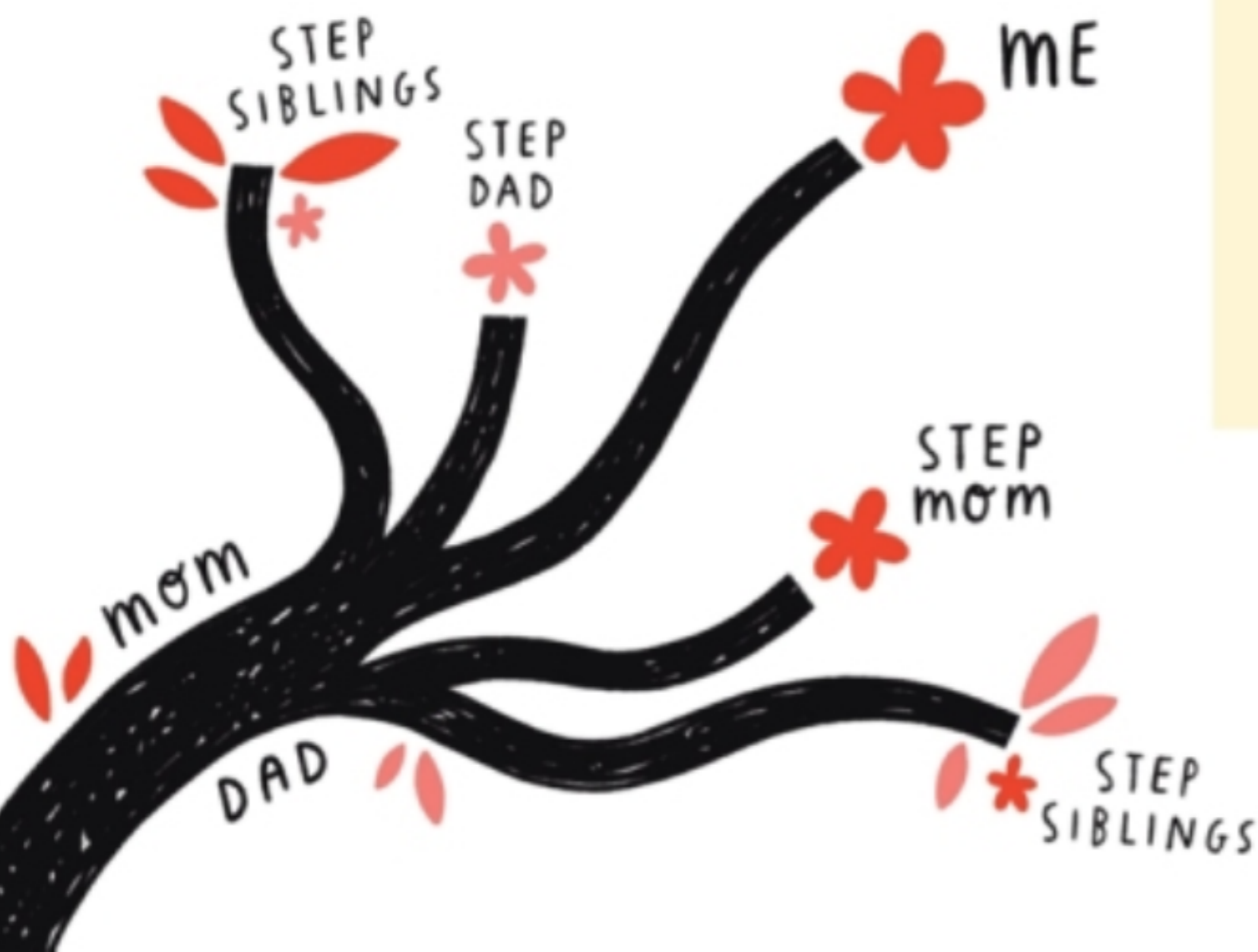
Dear Highlights,
I have a stepdad. Whenever I ask him a question, he asks a question back. I don't like it. And my stepmom is always reading, and she doesn't seem to like me.

—Kathy, 1987

Dear Kathy,

Whenever stepfamilies are formed, it takes a while for everyone to get used to each other's different personalities and ways of doing things. We are sure that both your stepmom and your stepdad do like you and want to get along well with you. Do your best to accept them as they are, and we expect that they will do the same. As you come to know each other better, you will discover that the things which used to bother you are small in comparison to the whole person.

Learning to live in a stepfamily takes time, Kathy. If you give it your best effort, we think things will work out just fine.



Dear Highlights,
My mom and dad have been separated for about a month. Now my dad wants to come back. I'm not sure I want him back.

—K. D., 1991

Dear K. D.,

Your feelings are normal. You have been on a kind of emotional roller coaster, feeling lots of ups and downs. Things probably settled down after your dad had been gone awhile, and now you're afraid of what might happen when he returns. But try to accept your dad again as part of your family. It's up to your mom and dad to work things out, but your attitude is important, too. Concentrate on your dad's good qualities and give him credit for wanting to come back. No matter what happens between your mom and your dad, remember that each of them loves you.

Dear Highlights,

I live with my grandma, 2 uncles, my cousin, and my dog. My grandma has custody of me. I told my grandma that I want to live with my mom, but she told me no and I'll never live with her. My mom visits me every day and buys me my clothing, she buys me food, and everything I need while my grandma doesn't buy me those things. My grandma said I'm never living with my mom. I want to live with my mom but my grandma won't let me. What should I do?

—Anonymous, 2016

Dear Friend,

You might try discussing your concern with your grandma when both of you are in a good mood. You could start by telling her how much you love and appreciate her. Then you can explain how you feel. In the conversation, it may help to use “I” sentences rather than “you” sentences. For example, instead of saying, “You don’t let me live with Mom, and that’s not fair,” you could say, “I would like to understand better why I can’t live with my mom. Can we talk about it?” Starting with “I” rather than “you” can set a gentler, less blaming tone. After you’ve spoken, you can give your grandma time to talk, without interrupting.

Your grandma may have reasons for her decision that she doesn’t feel comfortable sharing with you. Try to respect this. For now, you may have to accept that you can see your mom, but not live with her. Perhaps you can be thankful that you get to see her regularly.

Make the most of your time with her. We know the situation is not exactly the way you want it to be, but life can certainly be good even if it’s not perfect.

When you find yourself getting upset, it could help to take a few slow, deep breaths and slowly count to ten in your head. As you count, think of a peaceful image, such as your favorite place. It can also help to express your feelings with writing, drawing, or other creative activities. Listening to music, taking your dog for a walk, reading, or playing with friends can help make you feel better.

You might also share your feelings with another trusted adult. Many kids find it helpful to confide in a school counselor. Part of his or her job is to listen to kids’ concerns and to offer guidance about things going on at school or at home. Other people you may feel comfortable talking to might include a teacher or the parent of a close friend.

I'll Be Mad

If my brother knocks over my tower of blocks
I'll be madder than Mommy when he breaks something
I'll be madder than the sky in a thunderstorm
I'll be madder than a tree when it falls down
I'll be madder than flowers in a rainstorm
I'll be madder than the ocean when the waves get high
I'll be madder than a ship when it sinks
I'll be mad as mad can be
But I'll forgive him.

—Katie, age 6, 2000



—Gabrielle, age 4, 2002

Dear Highlights,
My mom and grandmother don't like me to read science fiction books, such as *Animorphs*. I try to collect them, but they won't let me buy any more. They said I won't learn anything from them. Should I quit reading *Animorphs*?

—Scott, 2000

Dear Scott,

You might try to explain to your mom what you think you gain by reading these books. For example, since a lot of kids read and collect such books, many of them make new friends by talking about the books with their classmates. Perhaps you could reach a compromise in which you agree to read one or two books that are not science fiction for each *Animorphs* book you read. Regardless of what you and your mom decide what is best for you, you must respect her decision. Keep in mind that there are many excellent books, full of adventure, that are not science fiction. Your librarian can help you find some.

Dear Highlights,
my brother used his wits to construct a toy lightsaber that he is best at dueling with, one that he can even finally beat me from time to time. Instead of being angry or enraged, i feel... happy... proud. I don't know how to interpret this. can you help me out, here, Highlights?

—Anonymous, 2020

Dear Friend,

We're so glad to hear that you're proud of your brother for constructing his toy lightsaber. We understand why your feelings could be confusing—but they are good feelings! The pride and happiness that you feel is probably a result of watching him improve. Have you been teaching him or giving him tips? Have the two of you spent a lot of time practicing together? No doubt your brother is proud of himself, too. Younger siblings often look up to older siblings, and being able to defeat you in play fighting is a big milestone for him. You are watching him grow up, little by little, and because you have been a key player in this part of his childhood, you can share in his happiness. We hope you and your brother continue to bond—over lightsabers or anything else—for a long time.

Dear Highlights,
I have two older sisters.
Sometimes they play
games and don't ask me
to play. One of them has
a car. When I ask if I can
go to the store with her,
she says no. What can
I do?

—Stephanie, 1982

Dear Stephanie,

Your problem is not unusual. Each person in a family needs some time to herself. Your sisters do not always want to take you along with them. That does not mean that they do not love you very much. We think, as you all get older, you will understand that. Try to talk to your sisters and tell them how much you enjoy being with them. But try also to understand that sometimes they like to do things alone.

Dear Highlights,
I am going to have a baby brother or sister, and everyone tells me that it will be annoying. What should I do?

—Daneasha, 2005

Dear Daneasha,

Try talking to your parents about this. They will be able to give you an idea of what to expect when the baby is born. There may be things you can do to help welcome the new baby, such as sorting baby clothes or helping fix up the baby's room. Being involved in the preparations may help you feel less worried about what it will be like when he or she arrives. Being a big sister can be a wonderful experience. Just because others tell you that the baby will be annoying doesn't mean they are right. If you have a positive attitude, you may find you enjoy having a new baby in the house.

Sisterhood

Having a sister is a real treat,
especially when you tickle her feet.

You watch her laugh and watch her cry,
you even watch her childhood go by.

You play together, even fight,
but still you love her with all your might.

She may be mean sometimes, it's true,
but deep inside, she looks up to you.

She makes you happy, she makes you glad
to say "You're the best I've ever had!"

—Allie, age 11, 2017



—Mary Ann, age 4, 1960

Dear Highlights,
I am the eldest in a family of five children, and in the 9th grade. I try to help my siblings as their big sister, but now have a dilemma. We will be adopting a little child soon, and the child shall be homeschooled with us. We have to go to classes and our homeschooling Group all week, and we all have had some problems with a few kids. They have been known to taunt these brothers and have directed racial slurs to my siblings. We are a biracial family and will become even more so after the adoption. Although some teasers have been rebuked, we can't completely control it. My question is, how can I be a supportive big sister and help my new sibling in a multiracial family? I am researching all I can but am having a hard time finding information on being supportive siblings.

-Ashley, 2011

Dear Ashley,

When readers write to us about teasing and bullying, we usually suggest that the best response is to completely ignore the people who are doing it. It is sad that these people don't know how to treat others with respect and kindness, but that behavior reflects on them, not on you or your siblings.

Usually, such people are trying to get a reaction. The more you react, the more satisfying it is to them. However, if there is ever any danger that you or your siblings will be hurt physically, an adult needs to know about that right away.

We encourage you and your siblings to stick together, and stick up for one another, so that none of you ever feels alone. If one of your siblings is being teased, another could put his or her arm around their shoulders. Then, they could simply walk away together without saying anything. Kids are less likely to tease people who stick together.

You mentioned that the teasers have been rebuked, so it seems that adults at the homeschool group know what's going on. Be sure to keep them posted. It's their job to keep the school safe and comfortable for all students. Perhaps your parents would agree to go with you to talk to them. Instead of focusing on punishing the teasers, which might not bring positive results, you might discuss the need to create a climate of friendship and tolerance in your homeschool group. Here's a website that may give you and your teachers ideas on positive things that can be done to oppose racism in schools and communities: tolerance.org. Always ask your parents for permission before going to a website you don't know.

Your siblings are fortunate to have someone like you to look out for them.



Dear Highlights,
My Mom and Dad always put up pictures of my brother and sister but barely any of mine. I am the middle child is it true that the middle child is overlooked? What do I do?

—Jada, 2014

Dear Jada,

We don't believe that middle children are overlooked by their parents on purpose, but we do believe that sometimes it may feel that way. We're certain, however, that your parents don't mean to have you feel left out.

We encourage you to talk to them about this. Try explaining how you feel sad and left out when you see the pictures of your siblings up but not many pictures of you. They love you very much and want you to be happy. We believe that they will be glad you confided in them.

Dear Highlights,
I have a twin sister, and everyone always compares us. How can I be seen for who I am without being compared to my sister?

—Melody, 1996

Dear Melody,

Twins can have remarkable similarities. These people may be trying to learn more about twins or simply making conversation.

When people compare the two of you, politely point out that you each have your own personalities and gifts. If they note similarities between you, take that opportunity to point out differences as well. And if someone compliments your sister, you can smile and say, "Yes, she's good at that." Be happy for her accomplishments, but realize that your abilities and purpose in life are just as important.



Two Homes

I have two homes.
Most people have one home,
but I have two.
My dad's house is scented with
the wonderful smells from
the food that he cooks.
My mom's house is small,
warm, and cozy.
When I think of home, I think
of two places.
I love both homes.
When I think of home, I think
of two faces.

—Isabella, age 9, 2002

—Emily, age 10, 2019

Dear ^{Highlights} ~~Highlights~~, My
parents are lesbiah
I know it's okay to be
difrent but I still feel
a bit weird about it
What do I do?!?!
...!

—Thea, age 8, 2011

Dear Thea,

We hear from many kids who worry that their families are different in one way or another. Try to remember that every family is unique in its own way. These different family experiences are part of what makes the world interesting and beautiful.

What's important is that your parents love you and provide you with a safe home.

We're sure your parents would like to know what's on your mind. When they're not too busy or tired to talk, let them know about your concerns. Remember to be respectful and kind and to listen carefully to what they have to say.

We're glad you wrote to us. Writing in a journal and doing artwork are other good ways to express some of the feelings you have.

Dear Highlights,

I beg my grandma to let me have the latest phone because they say the monthly bill will be high. How can I get an Android?

—Haley, 2013

Dear Haley,

We know that it's becoming more and more common for young people to have their own cell phones. However, at this time, it is more of a status symbol than an actual need for them to have one. There are certain situations in which it may be necessary for someone your age to have a cell phone. But for the most part, kids simply want one because others have them and can talk to or text their friends and play games at any time.

As you mentioned, the monthly bills can be high. In addition, phones

are often stolen, lost, or misused.

Unfortunately, not all the people who have them are using them wisely or responsibly.

We encourage you to respect your parents' and grandparents' wishes. If they feel it's not necessary for you to have a cell phone at this time, then we encourage you to accept their decision. They know what is best for you as well as what is possible for them. Begging your grandma for a phone may make her feel uncomfortable, so we suggest that you not put her in that position.

We hope this helps.

Dear Highlights,

Sometimes I feel that my parents care more about my brother than about me. My brother has a learning disability. So my parents say he needs special care, but how can I get them to understand that I need more love?

—Amanda, 1986

Dear Amanda,

We know that it can be difficult when a sister or brother has a disability. It does seem sometimes as though that youngster gets more than a fair share of attention. Because your brother has a learning disability rather than a more obvious handicap, it is even harder to understand sometimes why he deserves all this special treatment.

Because learning comes more easily to you, your parents don't need to give you so much extra help. That doesn't mean that they love you any less than they love your brother, though. The next time you talk to your parents, try not to make comparisons between you and your brother. Just tell your parents something like, "I wish we had more time to do things together." If you try to work with your parents instead of competing against your brother for their time, things will probably work out better for everyone.



My Father in Africa

My father is in Africa, far, far away.
I don't get to see him
As you see your father every day.
I love him, I miss him,
Even though he might be well or ill,
I'll never know.

My father is in Africa, so very far away.
I wish I could be with him
Each minute of the day.

—Mona, age 9, 1964



—Eve, age 10

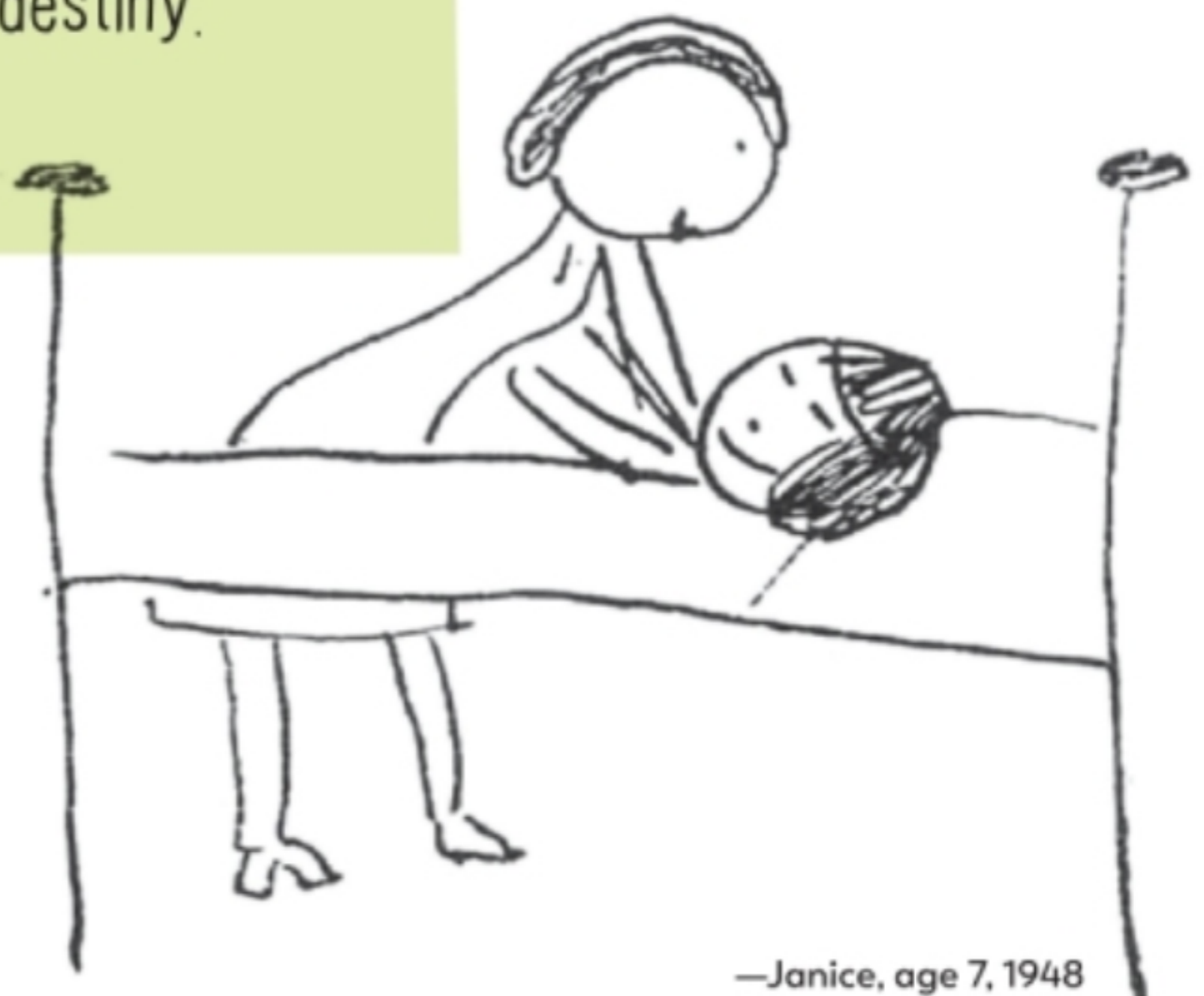
My Mother

My mother says she doesn't care
About the color of my hair,
Or if my eyes are blue or brown
Or if my nose turns up or down.
It really doesn't matter.

But if I cheat or tell a lie,
And do mean things to make folks cry,
And do not try to do what's right;
Then that does really matter.

It's not one's looks that make one great;
It's character that seals your fate.
It's what's within your heart, you see,
That makes or mars your destiny.

—Teresa, age 12, 1970



—Janice, age 7, 1948

Dear Highlights,
I'm going vegetarian, have been for almost a month, and my parents don't approve. They're almost trying to force me to eat meat. What do I do?

—Anonymous, 2014

Dear Friend,

Maybe it would help to have a calm conversation with your parents about your choice. Rather than trying to change their minds, you could ask them for the reasons why they disapprove of your vegetarianism. Perhaps they're worried that you won't get enough iron and protein in your diet. If this is the case, you could make a plan to research non-meat sources of these nutrients. If they are worried about planning special, vegetarian meals for you, you might offer to pitch in with cooking. By politely addressing your parents' concerns, you may be able to reach an understanding.

It may take time to see eye-to-eye with your parents, but we hope you'll remain patient. You may also want to let them know that you respect their decision to eat meat, even though you're taking a different path.

Dear Highlights,
Sometimes my mom and I disagree on things, then when I try to ask her a question she won't let me say what I want to say. She's the only one who gets to talk.

—Z. J., 1996

Dear Z. J.,

Perhaps sometime when the two of you are getting along and you both have time, you can talk about this. (If this doesn't work, try writing how you feel in a letter.) Calmly say how you feel and ask if you both might agree to some rules for future discussions. For example, you could agree that when one person is speaking, the other won't interrupt. Each person could hold up their hand when they "have the floor." When they put down their hand, the other person says in their own words what the first just said. Then the second person has their own turn to talk. This makes sure that you're each listening carefully and trying to understand. Not losing your temper can take practice, so stick with it.

Dear Highlights,

My little brother is always bugging me. Sometimes I can't even take it. Every time I start to play with something, he takes it away. My mom yells at me instead of him. Now I don't know what to do. Can you help me?

—Daniel, 1984

Dear Daniel,

Probably your mother yells at you because she knows you are more grown-up than your brother and ought to be able to figure out a way not to fight. First, think about why your little brother always wants to do whatever you are doing. It is because he looks up to you. He thinks you're pretty grown-up, too, and he wants to be just like you.

Try to find some time each day to spend just with him. If he knows that he can count on some special time of his own with you, he may be more willing to leave you alone when you want to play by yourself or with your friends. Also, if he thinks of you as his special friend, he won't want to make you mad by bugging you. We doubt that you will be



able to stop fighting with your brother completely. Most brothers fight some. You can start to be friends with him now, and as you both get older, you may realize that you hardly fight at all anymore.

Dear Highlights,
My dad works during the night
and I miss him all the time.

—P. J., 1998

Dear P. J.,

Parents have to do what they can to take care of their families. In your family, right now it means having your dad work at night. Parents don't always get to choose which hours they work—usually the company they work for assigns the schedule. It may be hard for your dad to work nights, but he wants to take good care of his family.

You might write notes to your dad. You could stick one in his jacket or pants

pocket and tell him to read it at work. Ask him to write some notes to you and leave them at home for you to read while he's at work. He might even hide them around the house for you to find. If you and your dad set a certain time to read the other's note, you'll know that you'll both be reading about each other at the same time.

When your dad is home, you might offer to help him with chores. That way, you'll be spending time together. You can feel good about being his helper. Then he might have more free time to spend with you. You can also help your dad by being quiet during those times when he's sleeping. That can show him that you love and care about him.

*Dear Highlights,
My mom goes to Washington DC sometimes for 5 days, and I
really miss her.*

—Melody, age 7, 2020

Letters About

School



SCHOOL IS SO EMBEDDED IN A CHILD'S LIFE THAT it is almost synonymous with childhood. Of course, learning happens at every turn and in all kinds of "classrooms"—home, camps, museums, virtual classrooms, the soccer field and dance studio, and even the backyard or playground. But most U.S. children will spend about a third of their days until age 18 in a classroom at a public or private school.

Many parents give school high priority, understanding that children's academic success matters and doing all they can to ensure positive outcomes. But the letters and emails Highlights receives from children remind us that kids are doing more in school than acquiring basic skills and knowledge. Not only are they learning about the world, but they are also learning about themselves and their place in the world.

Today, school gets serious fast beginning in kindergarten. For many children, it's a big leap to leave the familiarity and comfort of home, daycare, or preschool to begin formal schooling. Their new experience in a larger,

highly structured environment outside the family can be unsettling. They are transitioning from the security and privilege of home, where they were made to feel uniquely special, to a classroom full of peers. In 1986, six-year-old Genevieve laid out some of the many challenges in her letter to us. "I have a new school and I'm not used to it," she wrote. "I'm afraid my first-grade class won't have enough for me to do. And I'm afraid the kids in the lunch room

For kids, finding their place and feeling a sense of belonging in school can be one of the biggest adjustments in childhood.

are mean . . . and I only know one kid and I don't know what to do."

For kids, finding their place and feeling a sense of belonging in school can be one of the biggest adjustments in childhood. School is where first friendships are forged, where



they learn self-control, develop empathy, and learn to “play well with others.” It’s where, sometimes for the first time, kids must create a trusting relationship with a new kind of non-family authority figure—their teacher. It is where their worldview is expanded, and they begin to discover their own interests, capabilities, and personal challenges.

School plays such an important influence and places so many demands on children that it is little wonder kids need all the nurturing support we adults can give them. Over the decades, many children have looked to Highlights for that kind of support. In fact, school has consistently ranked among the top three topics kids write to us about (along with friendship and siblings).

The school environment has changed significantly from the days when kids walked to neighborhood schools, stood before classroom blackboards, and vied for the “fun” chore of clapping dusty erasers outdoors. Yet the letters from kids about school have changed remarkably little. Kids still write to us about study habits, fear of speaking in front of the class, and test anxiety. They still request advice about getting along with classmates and dealing with pressure from parents to excel in school and extracurricular activities.

Sometimes, kids share drawings that reflect school pride or admiration

The school environment has changed significantly from the days when kids walked to neighborhood schools, stood before classroom blackboards, and vied for the “fun” chore of clapping dusty erasers outdoors.

for their teachers. They send letters expressing ongoing curiosity about the subjects they are studying. Often, the thoughts they share mirror the concerns of their parents—and this is where we most see modern times reflected. When standardized testing became high stakes, for example, we saw an increase in letters and emails about school stress. After the Sandy Hook Elementary

When we write kids back, we do more than address their immediate concerns. We take the opportunity to share bigger ideas that we hope will help kids value education.

School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, we heard from children worried about their own safety in the classroom. In the spring of 2020, when COVID-19 forced the early closing of most U.S. schools and left kids wondering what the new school year in the fall would look like, many kids wrote to say how much they missed the social interactions school provided. Not only did they miss their friends, but they also seemed to miss the routine and intellectual stimulation of school. In their letters

to us about being quarantined, kids were more likely to describe themselves as bored rather than worried or scared.

When we write kids back, we do more than address their immediate concerns. We take the opportunity to share bigger ideas that we hope will help kids value education. We want them to know that, yes, learning can be hard—but the hard things are often the things most worth doing. We try to help them see that the obstacles they face in the moment, such as struggling

with math concepts, rarely translate into lifelong deficits if they continue to work hard to learn. Sometimes, the real obstacle is fear of failure and humiliation. That was certainly the case for George, who wrote in 1991, “Kids think I’m stupid. The more they say that, the more I believe them.” We want kids to know that making mistakes is a core part of learning for all of us, that asking questions in school is not only a good idea but it’s also encouraged, and that it’s OK to look for help when you need it.

Whether kids write to us about their failure to live up to their parents’ or teachers’ expectations (or their own), pressure from peers, or their feelings of being a school outsider, we try to praise effort, offer plenty of reassurance, and express optimism that it will all get better. We want kids to shed any feelings of shame, fear, or humiliation, as these emotions only fuel school apathy.

Although the kids who write to us may be too young to take the long view, we hope to help kids (and their parents) see that doing well in school is about more than earning good grades. We hope that, over time and as kids grow, they’ll see that knowledge is empowering, and that school done well helps them grow into people who understand their own strengths, work well with others, cope with real problems, and grow up confident. So, in our conversations with readers about school, we say in various ways, “Kid, you’ve got this.”

THE LETTERS

Dear Highlights

I am Scared to enter Middle School because I won't know any one. All the other kids have been together since Kindergarten. How can I not be as scared as I am now?

—Mason, age 10, 2015

Dear Highlights,

I am 12 and going to a Middle School. I am excited to go because there would be more kids like me, but there are other things I'm afraid of. Like kids will make fun of my name, I'm proud of it, but there are alot of kids who care alot about the races. Also, I'm a good student an A, I'm afraid kids will make fun of me. Call me goody 2 shoes. Also, I had trouble with friends at the Elementary school and afraid I won't have any friends to hang out with there. I really want a best friend. I am really nervous. What if I can't get the work done. Please help me!

—Jin-ho, age 12, 1999



Dear Jin-ho,

We're glad to hear that you're proud of your name, Jin-ho. Although it's true that some kids may tease you, try to remember that others won't. Try to set an example of how people should treat others. Treat everyone as you would have them treat you. A person will often tease if they know it will make someone upset. If a student picks on you, ignore their comments. Walk away or concentrate on your work. Once they realize that you won't react to teasing, they may stop bothering you. If it continues, then you might want to talk with an adult you trust, perhaps a parent or a teacher.

It's true that you may have more homework in middle school, and you might have to study harder. One key to doing well in school is organization. Maybe you can use a calendar to keep track of your assignments and activities. You could set up a time after school when you will always do your homework. Try establishing good study habits at the beginning of the school year.

You mentioned that you are worried about having friends during middle school. Give yourself a chance to meet new people. Friendships take time to develop. Try talking to one new person every day, whether it's in class or during lunch. Try joining clubs, sports teams, or other groups that interest you. Then you'll have many opportunities to meet lots of new people and find new friends.

Try not to worry about things that might not happen. Many of your fellow students are probably having the same questions and concerns. Middle school is a change from elementary school, and you're right to be excited. We're glad that you want middle school to be a good experience.

Dear Highlights,
I have a problem. How am I going to get to play outside? I have so many things to do when I come home from school. I get out at 3:00 and sometimes after school the girls play basketball in our gym. One night a week I go to band and don't get home until 4:30. Two nights a week I have sports. I also have a lot of homework and I have to practice my instrument.

—Jane, 1968

Dear Highlights,
I've been getting so much homework that I barely have time to play. What should I do?

—Destiny, 2016



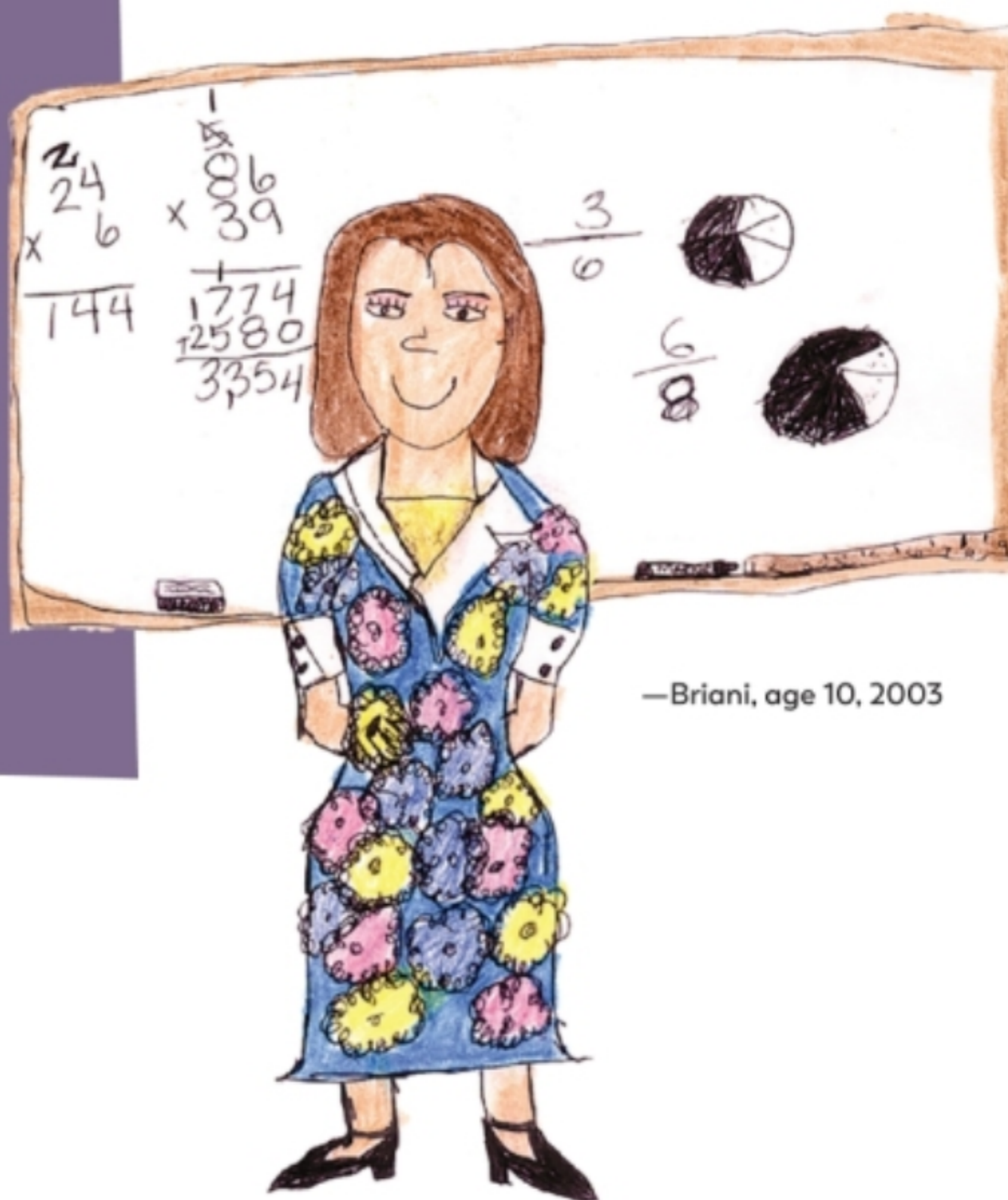
Dear Destiny,

To give yourself the most time to play, it's important to use your time wisely. If you're given time to do your homework during school hours, try your best to finish as much as you can. Then, as soon as you get home from school, start the rest of your homework. Perhaps you can break it up into two parts. In between, give yourself a 30-minute break to play. If you concentrate hard, you might be surprised at how quickly you can finish your work. Once you're done, you'll be able to enjoy a feeling of freedom for the rest of the evening. If you're still feeling overwhelmed, talk to your parents and teachers for their suggestions.

My Third-Grade Teacher, Mrs. Williams

My favorite teacher is
Mrs. Williams.
She taught me to reach for
the stars.
And now I think someday
I might like to visit Mars.
So thank you,
Mrs. Williams,
for all you have done.
You make learning
so much fun.

—Elijah, age 8, 2010



—Briani, age 10, 2003

almost every day before school when
I get up, I say, "I'm going
to be good and work quietly."
but when I sit down to work
at school, a classmate
finds me and starts chatting
with me. and then the teacher
comes over and tells me
to sit alone at a
desk, and I don't like it.
can you help?

—Yan, age 8, 2007

Dear Yan,

Have you tried talking to your parents about this? If you explain to them how hard you are trying, they might be able to offer you some great suggestions. It might also be a good idea to talk to your teacher. They would probably be happy to know how you feel. We bet your teacher has encountered students with similar difficulties in the past and would be able to offer some good advice.

If you find that the same two or three classmates keep interrupting your

work, you may want to explain to them what is happening. Tell them you don't like having to sit alone at your desk, and you would appreciate it if they wouldn't talk to you while you are working quietly. Then, if someone begins to interrupt you during class time, they will know what's going on if you simply point to your work or whisper, "I can't talk."

Good luck. If you stay determined to focus on your schoolwork, you will be able to do it.

Dear Highlights,
I want to be in the CHESS CLUB at my school, but lots of people think that CHESS is for dorks and I don't want my friends to think I'm a dork. Can you help me?

—Ivy, 1998

Dear Ivy,

We all have different likes and dislikes. That's what makes each of us unique. Chess is a strategic game and takes patience and thinking skills. Sometimes people make fun of the interests of others because they don't understand these interests. They might think it covers up their ignorance by teasing others.

It takes courage to step out and do something different from your friends. Part of growing up is choosing to do things that best suit your interests, whether or not other people approve of them. Each of us has special talents to cultivate. To waste them because of other people's thoughts would be a shame.

Stepping out and fulfilling your heart's desire could encourage your friends to look for their own unique talents. It takes confidence to pursue a special interest. Be proud of who you are.

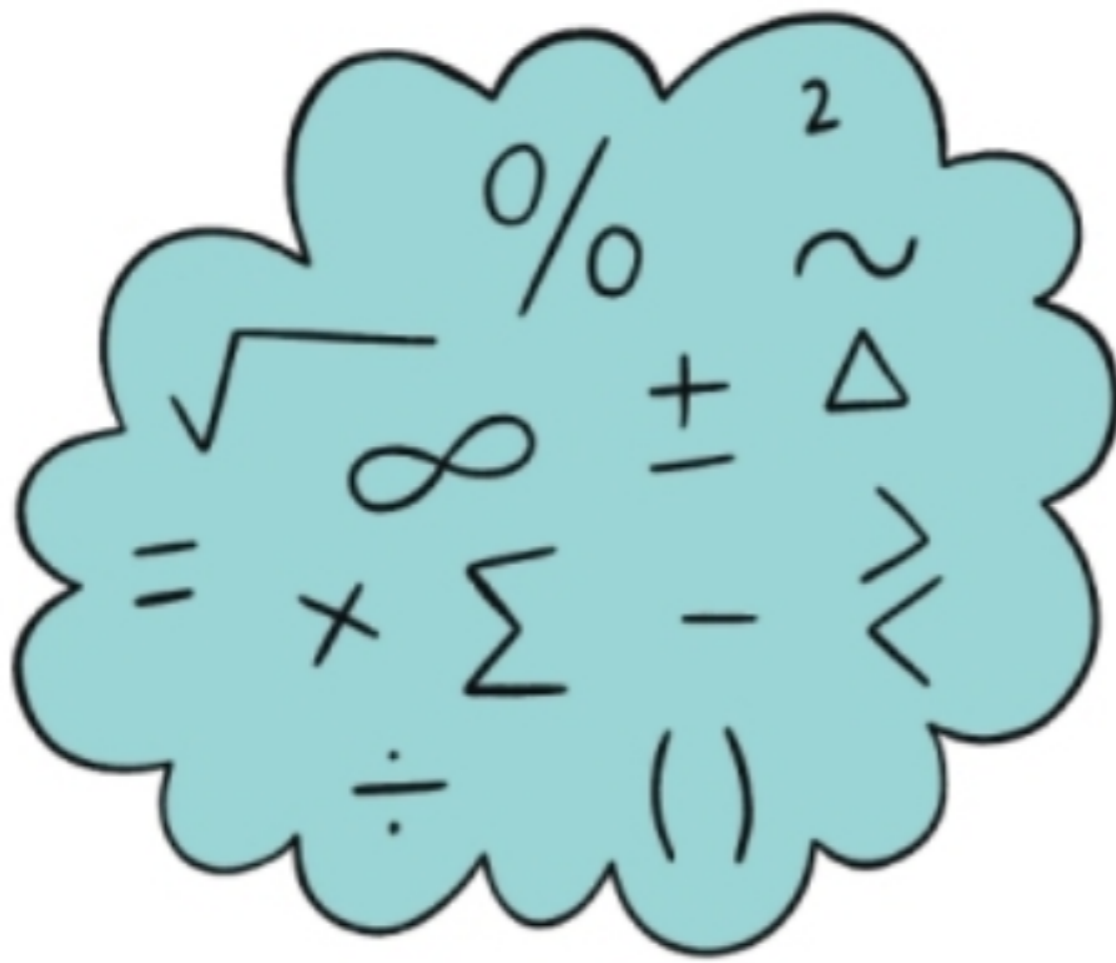
Dear Highlights,
Everybody says my fifth-grade teacher is going to be strict. What should I do?

—Clint, 1996

Dear Clint,

Wait until you have this teacher, then judge for yourself. Your opinion may be different from your friends'. Teachers, like parents and friends, have different styles and personalities. Try to remember that learning to get along with all kinds of people is a valuable skill. And you may find that a strict teacher runs an orderly and fair class in which you can learn a lot. Most teachers just want you to listen, do your best, follow rules, and be respectful of others.





Dear Highlights,
I don't like math but my parents tell me to do it almost every day! Can you help me understand why it's important?

—Isabelle, 2012

Dear Isabelle,

Some subjects will be helpful to a person's career someday, but all subjects can make everyday life better.

Can you see how you'd use math in these everyday situations? Ordering pizzas for a group; making time to play and do homework; figuring out sports statistics; deciding how much money to take on a field trip; making half a recipe; and doing woodwork or crafts. Try to find math throughout your day. You'll see it everywhere. You may not enjoy practicing it, but you'll be glad you did when you need to use it.

Dear Highlights,
I have a problem getting along with teachers. They keep on telling me too many things to do. What should I do to get along with them?

—Joshua, 1988

Dear Joshua,

A good talk with one of your teachers is the most direct way to tackle the problem. It might also help to have a talk with your mom, your dad, or some other adult. They may have some good advice about how to get along better with your teachers.

Your teachers are probably doing what they feel is best for you. If they give you many things to do, it is most likely because they want you to learn many things and do your best. Try to write down your assignments and do them as well as you can.

Once your teachers see that you are working hard to try to get along better, things will probably change.

Forgot My Homework

Oh, I forgot my homework,
Oh, what a drag,
Oh, I forgot my homework,
I forgot to put it in my bookbag.

Oh, what should I do?
Oh, what should I say?
Should I tell my teacher
My little brother threw it away?

Although I should tell the truth,
I know I shouldn't lie,
I won't be able to talk very well,
For I'm getting ready to cry!

—Breanne, age 8, 2003



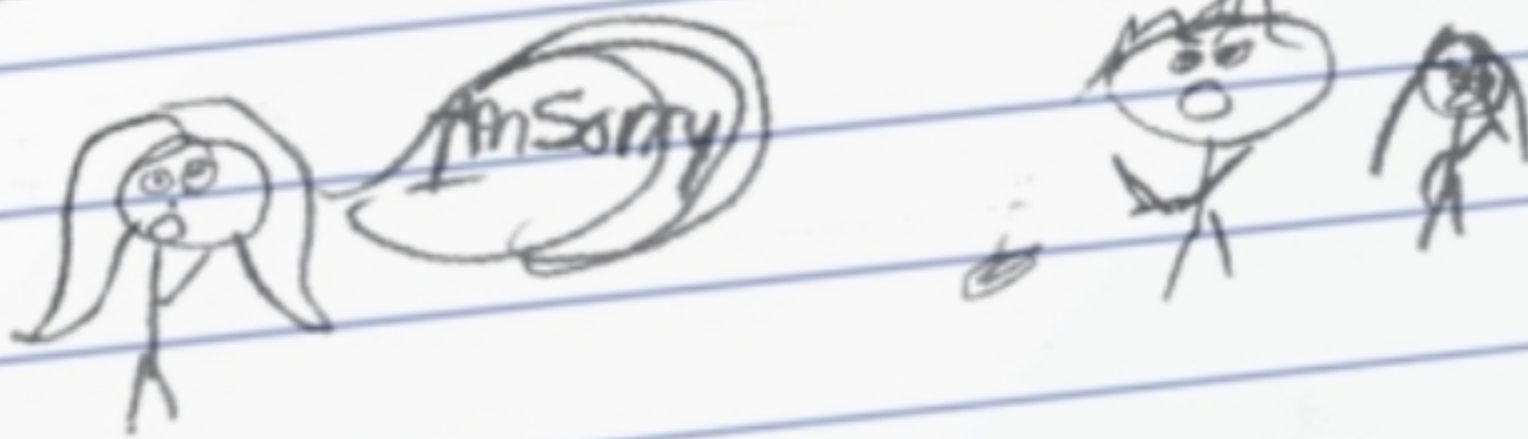
The Homework Machine

—Melissa, age 9, 1989

Age: 9

At School I had to do a lap around the grass. I seen a pine cone and I picked it up and threw it. Then, it bounces off the ground and hits this guy in the back and I said I'm sorry I did not mean it to hit you. And he said ya, right and told the teach and principal and the teacher told my grandma because I live with her and I told her what happen and no one believes me. What do I do?

I really need your help on this one! :)) P.S. I love your books they are awesome and in the december book in the Coffs can you teach us how to make a snowflake? :))



-Brittany, age 9, 2013

Dear Brittany,

We're sorry that no one believes you when you say you didn't throw the pine cone at a boy on purpose. Sometimes we're just in the wrong place at the wrong time. We're proud of you for doing the right thing and apologizing to the boy, even though you didn't mean for the pine cone to hit him.

Instead of focusing on the negative outcome of this incident, try to put it

behind you and save your energy for more important things. Sometimes no matter how hard we try, we just can't convince people of something. If you know you didn't hit the boy with a pine cone on purpose, then you should be able to reassure yourself that you know the truth and that's the most important thing.

Dear Highlights,

My sisters, brothers and I are home-schooled. A lot of people don't have a very high opinion of us. They think we can do whatever we want, but that's not true. We have a time to start school and a time to be done. I just want to inform your readers that home-schoolers aren't at home for their parents to baby them.

—Katie, 1995

Dear Katie,

It's easy to misjudge things we don't know about. And, just as classes are different in difficulty and in teaching style, homeschooling is, too. People who think it's easy may know someone who homeschools and doesn't have the rules you do. Try to be understanding when someone is uninformed. If you give information patiently and calmly, you'll have a better chance of your message getting through.



Recess

Recess is a ray of golden, gleaming sunshine
on a dark and gloomy day,
snatching victory from the hands of defeat,
the end of the everlasting battle,
running, shouting, climbing out of the valley
and over the cliff.

The sun blazes

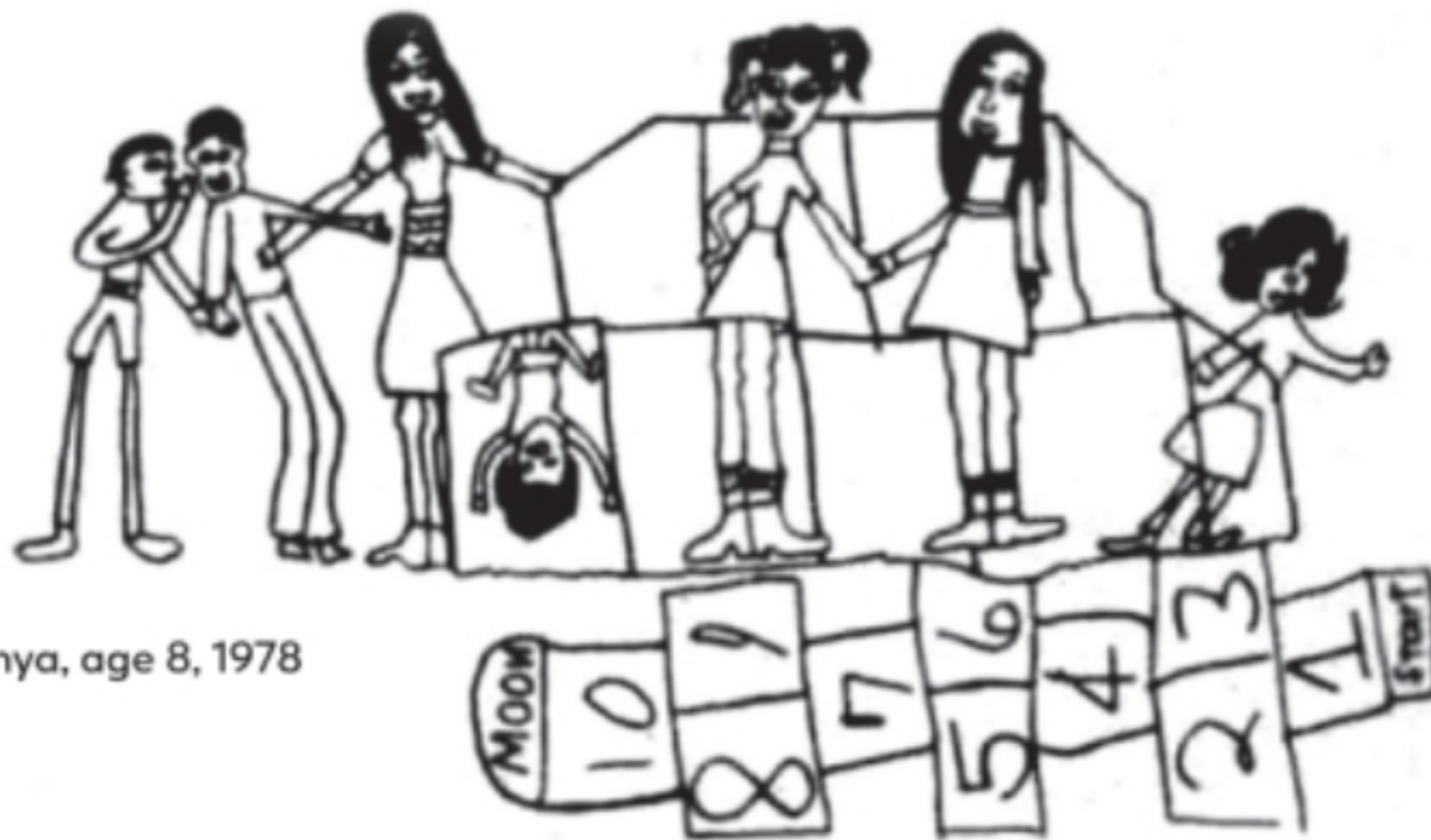
While the clouds prance across the sky.

We are on the stone on top of the cliff.

Crash! The rock breaks. It is time to go inside.

As we line up, we hope with two words:
extra recess.

—Aidan, age 9, 2012



—Sonya, age 8, 1978

Dear Highlights,
In school, I am one of the unusually smarter kids. So in math, when the problems are really hard, the other kids are always asking me what the answers are, or they're telling me to do the work for them. Can you help me?

—Emma, age 11, 2007



Dear Emma,

It's great that you're such a good student, Emma. We understand it can put you in a difficult spot with your classmates. Although you might like to help them sometimes, you seem to realize that it's important that they do their own math. Also, it's not really fair for you to do the work and for them to get a "free ride."

We encourage you to talk with your teacher at a time when your classmates aren't around. Let your teacher know that you feel uncomfortable when others ask you for help on schoolwork that is meant to be completed independently. In a very respectful and calm voice, explain why this bothers you. You might ask the teacher to keep

an eye on the students sitting around you the next time the class has an assignment that is not meant to be done as a group.

When your teacher assigns group work, we encourage you to do your best to help others. However, there is nothing wrong with politely refusing to give others answers when you know that they are supposed to be completing their work on their own, whether it's classwork or homework. If your teacher would like you to help your classmates sometimes, try to guide them in finding the answers instead of doing the work for them. Your teacher can give you tips on how to do this.

Fights at school



Dear Highlights,
Every day at school

I always get in a fight
with somebody. And I only
feel like telling my mom
about the parts where I
get hurt, and she fixes me
up. Highlights what should
I do about my problems?

-Cody, 2000

Dear Cody,

It's great that you want to solve this problem. We suggest that you tell your mom more than the parts you feel like telling her. Even if you have to take some of the blame for fighting, you will have to face up to all of it before you can find a solution to your problems.

Think back over the last few fights you have had. We think you will see that in each case, you were not able to control what the other person did. You can only control what you do. If the other person picks a fight, that person will get a fight only if you agree to it.

If other kids are bullying you—or trying to bully you—then you should tell your mom about it right away. Bullying is serious and adults need to become involved to stop it. Remember that telling an adult is not “tattling” when someone is being hurt.

One thing you can do is learn how to control your temper. Many people say that they feel less angry if they walk away from the situation. Others stop what they are doing and slowly, silently, count to ten. Then they have more control over their anger and can react without fighting.

Dear Highlights,
I'm going to a new school
and I don't know if it's
safe and secure or not.
Please help!

—Owen, age 12, 2019



Dear Owen,

If you haven't already, we encourage you to talk to your parents about this. They want you to feel safe and comfortable in your new school. You can also talk to a teacher and school counselor, who can reassure you that the adults at your school and others in your community work hard to be sure that everyone is safe.

Of course, if you notice that someone or something might pose a danger, it's important to report it. It's not tattling to protect someone from being hurt.

Dear Highlights,

My third grade class is doing swim safety lessons. All of the girls have to change in a locker room together and some of my friends are embarrassed. What should I tell them.

—Hannah, age 8, 2012

Dear Hannah,

It is a perfectly natural response to be shy about undressing in front of other people. Everyone's body is beautiful, and we all come in different shapes and sizes. Everyone should respect one another and focus on what's important: swim safety and having fun. If a friend feels especially nervous, perhaps she can change in a bathroom stall. If any of the girls are unkind or not respectful, we suggest you speak to your mom or gym teacher about this.



Dear Highlights,

During this summer I went on vacation for 3 weeks, but the problem is, you see, I have to go to summer school. I'm having no fun and doing assignments most of the time. I believe that this contradicts the point of summer. Whenever I try to convince my parents to stop having me do this, they always say, "It's to prepare you for the next grade . . ." They won't even let me have a week off of the summer school! And whenever I do bad (get bad grades, etc) they get mad at me and I start to cry. The worse thing is, I have the same summer school as my after school! The last thing that makes this place so bad is that they teach us things that are way too hard!

—Jacob, 2017

Dear Jacob,

We hear from many kids who do not enjoy attending summer school. It can be difficult to focus on schoolwork when you feel as if the rest of your friends are having fun.

It may not feel this way right now, but summer school is one of the best ways to prepare yourself for the new school year. Each grade gets a little more difficult and attending summer school allows you to get a head start on the new material. This could be why the assignments feel more difficult than your homework last year.

Did you know that some schools never take summer vacations? These schools often take long breaks, but the students attend year-round. This is to help them remember what they've learned all year.

We encourage you to discuss your feelings about summer school with your parents. They will be able to explain their decision to you. They can also help you with your homework or help you talk with your teacher about ways to make things more manageable. We encourage you to talk to your teacher, too. Ask questions when you don't understand an assignment. The teacher is there to help you.

Dear Highlights,

I just started 4th grade, and it's very hard for me. I have to keep up with my Chrome book and charging it, and filling out my reading log, and many other things. Any Idies?



P.S. If you decide to put this in, could you base the picture on this?

—Gabriella, age 9, 2017

Dear Gabriella,

We hope you will talk to your parents about this. Since they know you best, they will have helpful ideas. Your teacher can give you some good tips, too.

It might help to develop a schedule for yourself. For example, you could set a special time each day to charge your Chromebook and fill out your reading log, perhaps right after dinner each evening. Or choose a time that works best for you. Eventually, you will find that it has become a habit and you won't forget.

It's good to set a schedule for yourself because as you get older, you will have more responsibilities and are likely to be involved in more activities. We encourage you to write down everything you do during the week—school, homework, reading, family time, chores, extracurricular activities, time to exercise, time to relax, and spending time with friends. By making a plan, you will probably find that everything is a little easier. We hope you will talk to your parents as you develop a plan that works for your family.

Dear Highlights,
I am 10 years old. I would like to tell you about my school. We have a school government with a Governor and a Council. I ran for Governor two times and won once. When we run for Governor or Council, we have to make speeches and have a campaign. We have jobs like watering the plants, police officers, taking roll, and we get paid play money once a week for doing our job. If we talk when we shouldn't, we get fined. We even have savings bonds and checking accounts. When we have four hundred dollars, we can buy a chair anywhere in the room. You really learn about life and living with our government.

—Scott, age 10, 1968