

*A letter from a teacher to parents of a child in her class*

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bhati,

Since we meet almost every week and are just a phone call away on most days, you may be surprised to receive a letter from me. Please consider it as a reflection on my journey with Tarun. Through these words, I travel back in time, gather precious memories, and present them to you with care.

Like many children, Tarun was first introduced to me with a set of labels — labels no parent or teacher would ever wish to hear. I must admit, I doubted my therapeutic abilities for two reasons: his manipulative and aggressive behavior, and the fact that I had never worked with a seven-year-old boy like this before.

We met once a week, though there were interruptions from both sides due to genuine reasons. So, although it has been nearly two years, it feels slightly shorter in continuity. There were days so intense that I almost decided to discontinue therapy — not because of him, but because I questioned my own capacity.

I learned that confronting one's own limitations can feel disturbing and even shameful, yet at the same time deeply liberating. It pushed me to expand my understanding and explore beyond my usual framework. That is when I discovered synergetic play therapy. Reading "[Aggression in the Play Therapy](#)" by Lisa Dion was an eye-opening experience — a true Eureka moment for me.

Through his messy and destructive play, Tarun allowed me to witness his inner world. It felt chaotic, demanding, and overwhelming. His reactivity, defiance, and manipulative patterns seemed like protective shields. Beneath all of it, I sensed a confused and lonely child.

At the same time, I saw parents who were equally overwhelmed and searching for relief. You were navigating confusion, hurt, and urgency. On one hand, you wanted to protect Tarun from the harshness of the world; on the other, repeated allegations made trust feel complicated. It is not easy to know whom to trust, whom to protect, and how to guide your child through such situations.

During one of our scheduled meetings, Tarun's hyperactive brain wanted the wafers that had been kept in the pantry area. My 'play practitioner self' was keen to use this as a learning opportunity. Understanding boundaries is an important skill that children learn in the playroom, as freedom cannot be fully experienced without them. It was a very stressful situation for his ADHD brain to distinguish between "now" and "later" and to make a decision focused on a future reward. For him, holding the wafer and waiting for a bite for

seven minutes felt like seven years. But he realized he was not alone — someone was acknowledging his struggle and constantly helping him overcome his craving, by being with him and understanding him. That day, I wanted him to realize that if I could trust him, he could begin to trust himself too.

Then came the day I met Mr. Bhati. I spoke openly, in front of Tarun, about how his messy play was triggering for me, as he was constantly pushing boundaries. That session pushed me to my limits. I felt I was sitting with two vulnerable beings — one angry and helpless, the other deeply scared. Something shifted that day. Tarun witnessed that my reactions were not driven by anger toward him, but by confusion and a desire to understand. He began to sense his father's anger differently — as someone desperately trying to protect him but unsure how to do so. That day, he witnessed two people showing their authentic selves.

After the discussion was over, Tarun returned and asked if I could request his father not to hit him. I hugged him and assured him I would. I then gently requested the same from his father, as physical punishment would only deepen the damage.

Since then, things have gradually changed. No, he has not stopped being reactive entirely — but he has become more aware of his actions.

Recently, you mentioned that you received a call from the class teacher. Her tone was rude, and her words were very harsh. According to her, Tarun used abusive language at school, and she somehow assumed that the source was his family environment. According to Tarun, some slang words were written on the wall, and he and another child were reading them aloud and having fun. However, the teacher completely ruled out the possibility of another child being involved in the matter, as the other child has a very good impression on her.

We may not be able to control how the world perceives Tarun. Changing others' perspectives takes time. With growing awareness and loving support, he will become more mindful of his own actions and their consequences. At times, he may push boundaries just to see how far he can go. What will truly anchor him is the sense of safety he feels at home. However, there is a difference between pampering, indulging, and truly loving. As long as he knows he is loved unconditionally, he will gradually learn not to internalize every external judgment. He does not need to prove himself to earn your love. He does not need to fight for belonging. He already has it.

I apologize for the length of this letter. There are a few more clarifications I must make to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding.

When expectations between parents, students, and teachers misalign, everyone experiences struggle—the struggle to be understood. The responsibility to understand first lies with the person who can see beyond behavior and recognize it as a form of communication; that person could be anyone.

You may be wondering why we want to fit Tarun into some benchmark, or where the autonomy of the child lies.

I can guess where these questions are coming from—when I narrated how I engaged him for seven minutes before he took a bite of the wafer. I understand that it may appear as if someone is deliberately being corrected just to make him belong. After all, why should there be any control when someone is simply enjoying a wafer?

Well, to be very honest, you are right. Children learn to self-regulate only when they experience co-regulation. Co-regulation is not about demanding compliance (through punishment, scolding, spanking, or lecturing); it is about being present. During co-regulation, children borrow the calmness of the adult brain and gradually learn to self-regulate.

The adult is neither raising their voice nor negotiating with the child nor ignoring them. There is no rush in their body language. The adult acknowledges the struggle the child is going through and helps the child process the discomfort by being present. It is not about distracting the child, making false promises, or pampering him. It is about separating the child from the behavior with love and care.

My role is not to question your parenting skills or to blame Tarun or his teacher, but to understand the disconnection and bring awareness rather than trying to fix it. I would also love to speak with the class teacher to understand her perspective and the challenges she may be facing, if she is willing to share.

With warmth and care,

Purna Mukherjee