



## HOLDING A SPACE FOR YOUR CHILD'S GENIUS TO EMERGE

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Raising successful, confident children is a goal to which most parents aspire. To that end, I created the parental practice tool known as "holding space," which is based on belief in the impressive power of the emotional current that exists between parent and child.

Psychologists refer to this phenomenon as the "Pygmalion effect" after the ancient king who believed so strongly in the beauty of a statue he created that Aphrodite, the goddess of love, brought the statue to life. Likewise, by believing passionately in our children's potential, we can help them manifest it.

It is a simple, yet powerful, concept from which any child, near or far, can benefit. Requiring just minutes each day, it can be accomplished anytime and anywhere, and it does not require changing any behavior—only thoughts.

This strategy was born from necessity in my own family. Within two years of graduating high school, one of my three daughters had attended four colleges and changed majors six times without much success. She lacked confidence in her own ability to earn a college degree although she professed to want one. I advised and counseled her, yet nothing seemed to work. So I advised and counseled her several more times! It is hard to let go of old habits. Yet, her college savings were quickly dwindling with little progress made toward the goal.

"Everyone is born a genius, but the process of living de-geniuses them."  
— Richard Buckminster Fuller

I eventually realized that not only did she not believe in herself, but I didn't believe in her either! I was fearful for her future and frustrated. Would she be on my payroll forever? Could she ever be happy in a family of college graduates? I felt desperately sure she must get a college education to live a happy, productive life. So I kept trying to change her, over and over again, ad nauseum.

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Much to my chagrin, my husband suggested applying a principle I teach in my coaching practice to our own situation: change yourself first. Rather than focusing on “fixing” my daughter, which only reinforced the idea that she was somehow “broken,” I needed to focus on myself and change my approach to this problem. Here, it meant a shift away from seeing changes she needed to make to realizing I needed to create some changes.

To begin, I cleaned my own “house” first. I packed up my negative thoughts, impulses to “win” or control the situation, ego and many more I am embarrassed to admit to you. I put aside my judgment and old baggage and emotional debris. Uncluttering my own inner space created more space for her, the real her, to emerge. It also enabled me to be more fully present for her thoughts.

My spiritual awakening journey led to developing three steps that embrace the practice of “holding space” for our children to become their best selves and advance their own awakening. Taking these steps moves you closer to creating the Pygmalion effect in your child’s life.

### **STEP ONE: Create “a grand vision”.**

Create a grand vision in your mind for this child, a vision of a space where you always, wholeheartedly believe in them and their ability to thrive and achieve greatness. Demonstrating this belief constantly reminds your child of who they are. They will see as in your heart’s mirror a positive self in the positive, non-judgmental space you hold for them.

Most parents begin making positive predictions when first setting eyes on their newborn. What a magnificent being! Surely this is an extraordinary child! What long fingers; perhaps (s)he will play piano. We interpret even the first newborn screams positively—what a strong personality! Allow yourself to remember that momentous day when you acknowledged your child fully as its own person and the positive place you held naturally.

The first time I held my daughter, I was awed by her peaceful, blissful expression. What a happy child! In those moments, I connected with her spirit and believed unconditionally in her life’s potential. If I were asked if I thought she would be successful in college, I would have unequivocally shouted, “OF COURSE!” Anything was possible!

A positive beginning to such a sacred responsibility as raising a child is easy at first but

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becomes more challenging. We tend to forget that initial grand vision. However, the more we can reconnect with that first, instinctual perception of our child, the easier the child's ability to see and feel their own true, unlimited nature.

Next, I consciously recalled her many gifts and talents. She was a gifted athlete, had an extraordinary sense of humor, and easily forged long-lasting relationships. By seeing more in her than she could see for herself at that time, I created a space for her to grow into.

Replay your child's earliest positive memories and character traits; involve their other parent and family members. Then take your time and formulate your own grand vision for your child. Stay focused on positives. Use intuition, fantasy, and invention to describe an unlimited vision of your child's potential.

### **STEP TWO: Hold Unlimited Expectations for Success.**

It may seem confusing to ask you to not hold specific expectations when I have just instructed you to design a grand vision. Herein lies the paradox: your grand vision must not include concrete expectations, only unlimited possibilities.

Carl Jung believed that one of the most destructive powers of parenthood is a parent's unfulfilled life projected on a child with specific expectations. I expected my daughter to pursue a college degree immediately after high school because I had not pursued one until later and both of her parents held PhD's. Expectations such as these ruin a child's chance to become their Authentic Self. The child will either feel pressured to please or react to the pressure by pulling in a negative direction.

This may be the most difficult step. We easily hold spaces for our children when they are being "successful." However, we must also believe in our children when we are most scared and worried for them. Worrying is like preparing for their failure, which is the opposite of holding space. Our children need our belief and confidence at their most challenging times.

### **STEP THREE: Move Out of the Way.**

Parents often mistakenly believe they must protect children from negative consequences to be good parents. Instead, move out of the way of life's learning process and allow your child to experience the natural consequences of their decisions. This leads to self-examination which teaches them valuable lessons and guides their future actions.

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When she dropped out of college, I let her experience the consequences. When I quit paying her rent, she had to get a job waitressing. Years later, she revealed that job, mopping floors every night before closing, was the reason she returned to school to earn her degree.

Even in this seemingly dangerous world, the loss of security can serve a greater purpose—to shift our child’s focus from reliance on the outer world to trust in their inner self. Allow children these opportunities to learn difficult lessons and evolve. What your child resists will usually persist and return in the form of another trial until they master the lesson they were meant to learn. Adversity properly faced builds character.

Holding the highest image of positive thoughts for your child’s success in life is to create an opportunity, not an obligation. You cannot predict the future, nor can you really determine what is best for your child. Step three requires you to stop trying to determine the outcome of their lives. Trust in them to be their best and let their stories unfold.

I used to think, “If she would just listen to me, life would be so much easier.” But now I listen more than I talk and speak a new language, “I trust you to work it out. I believe in you, and I know you can do it. You are figuring life out all by yourself.”

Today, and every day, I hold a space for her to walk into career success, perfect health, loving relationships, and happiness within her own heart. I do this with confidence that the situation will work itself out and faith that life brings to us exactly what we need.

## **SIDEBARS**

Step 1: Create “a grand vision”

Step 2: Hold Unlimited Expectations for Success

Step 3: Move Out of the Way

Postscript: Twenty years later, I proudly say that Holding a Space works: My daughter has it all. She has the kind of career success we all crave: she is making a difference in people’s lives every day working as an Executive Director of Leadership in Allen ISD, Allen Texas. But mostly she is happy, healthy, and loving.

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