

# Jaime Koo, Mama Best Friend (MBF)

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*The first of a three-part reflection series on parenting middle schoolers during the pandemic on the home front, facing political realities with pre-teens, and practical considerations regarding school re-opening.*

Most people are bashful when it comes to tooting their own horn, but Friends, I am really proud of this recent acknowledgement – I’ve recently been conferred with the honorary title MBF, otherwise known as “Mama Best Friend.” You see, this designation comes from the notoriously difficult, the most critical and defiant, the extremely hard-to-please individual – yes, that’s right, my 13-year-old daughter. It has taken me a lot of hard work in these 13 years to earn the title, and to be granted this distinction during the COVID-19 pandemic is both extraordinarily humbling and extremely gratifying.

What did I do to receive such an honor, you ask? Well,

we've come a long way, my daughter and I. Allow me to provide some examples: When trying to maintain discipline and order when she was a toddler, she would commonly shriek "I hate you" or scream "You don't love me anymore!" Once, when she was 8 years old, she got so angry that she impulsively opened the front door and ran down the street. When she was about 10 years old, I was driving my daughters to a doctor's appointment and so did not pay attention to her demands. All of a sudden, she got enraged and started repeatedly kicking the back of my driver seat, all the while screaming "Why aren't you listening to me?"

I share these incidences with you, dear Reader, because these nightmarish parenting situations might be something you can relate to. Parenting isn't perfect and certainly; I am not a perfect parent. While I believe that parents have the responsibility to establish discipline in the parent-child relationship, I also believe it is the parent's job to initiate and model a respectful relationship with our kids. Each one of these episodes caused me to reflect on my own actions that might have contributed to the problem. Here are a few strategies I employed to build a healthy parent-child relationship with my daughter.

## **I communicated my love to her in her preferred love language.**

One pivotal incident between my daughter and I was when we were having a heated discussion about an incident. I was coming from the perspective of how she could improve her situation when all of a sudden, a deflated, tearful

11-year-old said, “Why can’t you just comfort me and tell me that everything will be ok? Can you just give me a hug?” From that moment, I realized that I was trying to show my care for her by finding solutions. However, what she really needed from me was words of affirmation and physical affection. I quickly learned about the [Five Love Languages](#) and began to consistently communicate my love to her in her preferred love languages.

## I became an ardent student of who she is and celebrated her.

I showed sincere interest in the things she liked and learned as much as I could about it. I let her be the expert in these areas and asked her to teach me all about her current fascination. If she liked K-Pop songs, we would listen to them in the car together. Even though it was trivial to me, I also learned all the different types of Pokémon (especially her favorite), their power level, and the different stages of Pokémon evolutions. When she was interested in basketball, I signed her up to play in local competitive leagues and took her to watch local college women’s basketball games.

## I invested time to listen to her.

From my perspective, some things that interested my daughter were superficial and insignificant. However, I realized that if I actively listened to her and she could trust me with what I regarded as “small things,” one of these days, she would also trust me with the “big things.” Of course, the pandemic hit at the end of her 7<sup>th</sup> grade year and is now affecting her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year – a

milestone year. We have since had many “big” conversations about how this pandemic will affect her end-of-the-year activities, her participation in the competitive basketball league, how she will connect with her friends, and the implications distance learning will have for her high school and college ambitions. You never know when chit-chat in the car or small talk around the dinner table will evolve into valuable connections with your kids!

And so, Friends, parenting middle schoolers is difficult, and parenting during this pandemic is especially challenging. However, it is precisely *because* we are parenting during the pandemic that we need to slow down and pay attention to our children’s needs, whether those needs be physical, mental, academic, emotional, or spiritual. It hasn’t always been an easy journey and there’s no telling what the high school years will bring, but my relationship with my daughter is valuable to me and the effort is worth it.

Wishing you well on the parenting journey,

Jaime Koo, MBF

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