



## CELLO

### It's Time for a Hug

by Teresa Richardson

“Which card would you like next?” I ask my daughter, Clara, as we both look down at the remaining five cards on the floor.

With her violin in rest position, she adjusts her glasses, and taps her toe on the middle card. I turn over the card, and Clara reads, “Allegro, (staying) in the bow zone.” But we notice simultaneously that there was another card hiding beneath the Allegro card, and we both smile. “HUG CARD!” we exclaim, and Clara puts down her violin and jumps into my lap. I give her a big, Mama-bear squeeze lasting several seconds, and plant a few kisses on her sweet, soft, six-year-old forehead. Then she pops up, grabs her violin, finds her playing position feet, and begins the piece.

Being a Suzuki parent is hard. When Clara started violin at age four, I fully expected that it would be hard. It challenges me every day to focus on a single practice goal and to channel my innermost calm. I conscientiously turn off my over-critical professional musician mode and try with great effort to keep standards and expectations in check. I do my best to choose my words carefully to keep the mood light and positive and not let things get intense. I have learned that using my firm teacher voice backfires nearly every time.

Prior to last fall, Clara's violin practice occurred during her younger sister's naps. Clara would only engage in practice if I made it fun and novel every time, which was no easy feat. We concocted elaborate games together involving My Little Pony figurines taking turns on an obstacle course, or ones where I hid stuffed animals for her to find after completing each practice task. Clara has always responded well to games involving paper “cards” representing her practice assignments.

At some point, in my effort to create a practice session with extra variety, I thought that adding a hug card would be nice. I did a Google image search for “mother hugging daughter,” selected an image, hit “print,” and cut the image into a rectangle shape.

Little did I know how important that card would become.

I noticed instantly how the hug card gave me and Clara an opportunity to reconnect and take a mental break. It had the effect of dissipating any intensity or tension that had started to build. I started exclaiming, “My favorite!” when Clara picked up the hug card. Letting her know that hugging her is my favorite part of violin practice tells her that our relationship always comes first. Despite the countless reminders and quiet cues to keep her chin on the chin rest and curve her bow thumb, I want her to remember that my love is unconditional.

The hug card is now worn and shows evidence of struggles. It is torn on one corner from a time when Clara was so frustrated that she ripped it in a display of defi-



ance. That was toward the beginning of a two-week period when she refused to even touch the violin. Knowing how important the hug card had become, I felt hurt when she ripped it. But we worked through that time and came out on the other side. The back of the card has blue marker on it from when little sister, Madeline, felt jealous and rushed over to scribble on it while Clara was



practicing. That was my signal that Madeline needed to somehow be involved in

Clara's practice.

Long gone are the days of elaborate practice games. Violin practice now happens during the ten to fifteen minutes before Clara throws on her boots, coat and backpack and heads to the bus stop. Our practices have become short and efficient. No matter the length of the session, the hug card is always hiding beneath an assignment card. Little sister, Madeline, is often the one choosing the cards for her big sister. She looks forward to the hug card just as much because it means that she also gets a turn getting a Mama-bear hug. Madeline chomps at the bit for Clara to finish so she can grab the bow in a fist and saw out a taka-taka-stop-stop on an uneven double stop, grinning ear to ear with pride.

Inevitably, there will come a time when Clara will no longer have interest in hugging me during violin practice. In the meantime, I will relish every sweet, enthusiastic hug and gently store it in my memory. What began as a way to switch up the variety of activities for Clara became something special and important to both of us. That hug has lowered my pulse and kept me from losing my cool on too many occasions to count. Above all, it instantly realigns our priorities and puts the focus back on our relationship. I love my little violinist, and I am excited to navigate this Suzuki journey with her!

“Where love is deep, much can be accomplished.” – Shinichi Suzuki

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