

I Promise: A Mother's Response to the Newtown Shooting

Category: Stories

written by Tamar Rubinstein | December 21, 2012

Tamar Rubinstein

Editor's Note: One week ago, a deeply troubled young man carrying a semiautomatic assault rifle and two pistols broke into a Newtown, Connecticut, elementary school and shot 26 people to death before killing himself.

Twenty of the victims were six- and seven-year-old children.

In a nation grown increasingly accustomed to mass shootings, the reactions to this massacre have been intense—and intensely personal. Today's Pulse story is one such response, that of a parent. Last Friday, Tamar Rubinstein, a Pulsereader, composed this heartfelt letter to her six-month-old son. In it, she voices thoughts and feelings inspired by a horror that is any parent's nightmare.

In the hopes of furthering an ongoing conversation about keeping our nation's children safe—and about protecting one another as well—we share her letter with you today.

December 14, 2012

Dear Alon,

An awful thing happened today. Your dad and I discussed it over your head at our dining-room table; you were sitting on his lap.

Then he turned you around to face him and asked you, "Alon, how does homeschooling sound?" Only half joking.

Perhaps you are too young for us to have a conversation about it tonight, but I feel compelled to tell you a few things, anyway.

I love you more than life itself, and if there was anything I could reasonably do to protect you from harm, I would do it. After hearing what happened today, it was hard to put you down in your crib to sleep. I wish there was some way I could hold you forever and be your human shield. But that would make for many awkward first dates.

I do promise this, though: I promise to try my best to raise you in a home that teaches tolerance of others and intolerance of violence. I promise to teach you to challenge people with words and debate, not force. I promise to do my best to create an environment that engenders curiosity, love, and respect toward the world and to steer you away from activities that

desensitize people to violence, even if this means making myself unpopular by banning certain games or toys from our home.

I promise that before I send you to a friend's house to play, no matter how socially inconvenient it may be, I will ask about the presence of firearms. I promise to vote, and vote responsibly, for who I think would best advocate for you and who is most likely to support legislation and policies that will help us keep you healthy and safe.

I promise to feed you vegetables. I promise to read to you every day we're together, at least until you can read to yourself. I promise to vaccinate you, in a manner recommended by evidence/science/expert opinion. I promise to teach you to buckle your seat belt and look both ways before crossing the street. I promise to insist you wear a helmet when you learn to ride a bike. I promise to always have a working carbon monoxide and smoke detector at home. I promise to never leave you in a tub unattended, at the very least until you're four. I promise to teach you how to swim or to send you to someone who can teach you better than I can.

I promise to help you with your homework. I promise to give you a pillow to pound and a listening ear you can vent to when you get angry. I promise to talk to you about safe sex, alcohol and drugs.

I promise to love you unconditionally, but not to take your love for granted.

I promise to tell you that I love you every day and say goodnight to you every night.

And I love you. A million times over, I love you.

Mom

About the author:

Tamar Rubinstein recently completed her pediatric residency at Johns Hopkins and will be starting a fellowship in pediatric rheumatology at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore in July 2013. She has a strong interest in narrative medicine and has been published in the [Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine](#). She currently lives in Baltimore with her husband and their six-month-old son.

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