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Faced with telling toddler daughter she can't hug her grandparents, local doc pens kids' book



Dr. Benjamin Lindquist reads his book "I love you when you're close and when you're far away" to his daughter, Kiley, in the front yard of their Menlo Park home. Photo by Magali Gauthier.

by Kate Bradshaw / Almanac

How do you explain to a toddler that she can't hug her grandparents right now?

Like many parents of young kids these days navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it has wrought, Dr. Ben Lindquist, who works as an emergency room doctor at Stanford Hospital and lives in Menlo Park, struggled to answer that question. So he wrote a book.

Kiley, his 2-year-old daughter, now has words like "mask" and "germ" in her vocabulary, and she's learning how to use hand sanitizer, with supervision.

But her whole world is flipped upside down right now, he said in an interview.

In early March, before the shelter-in-place orders took effect and before it was known how widely that people without symptoms could still spread the coronavirus, Lindquist said he and his wife Alese took Kiley to visit Ben's parents.



Kiley Lindquist looks at a drawing of herself dancing with her grandmother on one page and another of her dancing over Facetime, in the book "I love you when you're close & when you're far away" by her father, Benjamin Linquist, in the front yard of the home they share in Menlo Park on May 14, 2020. Phoot by Magali Gauthier.



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They took extra precautions, and both grandparents and grandkid alike had to refrain from their usual ways of showing affection.

Lindquist said he decided to put some rhymes together to help the toddler understand.

Initially, he'd envisioned the book as an extended family project, which people would contribute photos to, but then his sister, a graphic designer, put him in touch with the artist who ended up illustrating the book, Jena Holliday.

Normally it would take months to come up with the illustrations, but, he said, Holliday completed the illustrations for this book in only a couple of weeks. The illustrations were based on photographs of Lindquist's daughter.

Shortly thereafter, they self-published the book through [Amazon](#). Proceeds are being donated to the nonprofit at [getusppe.org](#), which provides personal protective equipment to health care workers nationwide. So far, the effort has generated about \$1,000, Lindquist said.

Early readers of the book, he said, have told him the story and illustrations resonate with their own experiences.

One of the rhymes in the book is the couplet, "I love you when you're close and when you're far away. / I love you when we're holding hands, and when across the street I stay."

The illustrations for the first line show a child and her grandmother holding hands, then the child waving from inside a house to her grandparents across the street.

The imagery has resonated with people who now have to maintain space from their extended family members and friends by visiting in socially distant ways, waving to each other through windows, backyards or cars, he said.

And the story's lesson carries resonance beyond the coronavirus pandemic, he added. For households with family members who suffer from illnesses that compromise their immune systems, the message that they're still loved even when hugs and physical contact are off-limits is a powerful one.

"It was a fun way to describe to her (Kiley) that her loved ones deeply care for her, even though they can't show it in the way they previously were able," he said.

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