

# Suddenly, We Are Teachers

*Fabiola Santos*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Tell a story (from your own experience or not) about supporting school-age children during the pandemic.

## A New Full-Time Job

I am a parent of three children in grades three, five, and six. The remote school was hard for my family. We had to teach our children, and we were not prepared for it. It takes a lot of time to watch children while they are in school at home. It was a full-time job!

## Tablets, the Internet, and Zoom

Each child needed their own tablet for online school. At first, we didn't have any tablets. The kids had to use my phone. But it was only one phone for three kids. The city started providing tablets to families. I filled out an application, and the city sent me three tablets.

It was good for each child to have their own tablet. However, there were other problems. I live in a basement apartment where the internet is not strong. I was sometimes running from child to child when they lost internet access.

There were other challenges too. It was hard for my son to focus on his tablet. He got distracted. I spent a lot of time trying to keep him focused on school. The little one wanted to learn her lessons, but she needed a lot of help. Fortunately, my oldest daughter didn't need much help. She is a very responsible. But sometimes, she missed school because she couldn't get on to Zoom. She felt upset. I tried to help her. I called the teacher.

## Helping Other Families

Many parents had to work. Many parents did not know about how to use tablets or how to connect to the internet. They needed to buy internet access. It was even harder if they could not speak English. I tried to help them. I helped them apply



for tablets. I was a volunteer in my kids' school, so many parents knew me.

The worst thing about remote school is that, in my opinion, the children don't learn as much as they do in regular school. As a parent, I believe school is important for my children and for all the children in our community. I worked hard to make sure the children kept getting their education during the year of the pandemic.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Fabiola says that parenting three kids at home in remote school was a full-time job. Write a job description for someone in this role. Draw from her experience and your own if you like.

---

*Fabiola Santos is from Mexico. She is an ESOL student at We Make the Road/New York in New York City.*

# STRUGGLING TO CARE FOR MY SON

FATOU DAFFEH

When I first came to the U.S., I struggled a lot because I couldn't speak English. Not speaking English was a problem for many reasons. The hardest problem was that I have a child with autism. I have no family here, and when I first came to this country, I had no way to get help for my son.

I knew something was not right with my child, but I couldn't tell the doctors what it was. I had to find someone to come with me to tell the doctor how to help me to help my child.

The doctor evaluated my son. She told me that my son had autism. I never heard of that before. I asked the doctor to write the word for me. Then my friend and I went to the library. We took out a book about autism. When my friend read parts of the book to me, it felt like she was just talking about my child. I asked her, "Are you reading a book, or are you talking about my son?" She said, "I'm reading the book to you." I cried because I was so sad.

The doctor helped me to find a school for my son, but I still had some problems. I couldn't always speak to my son's teacher. She wrote to me every day, about his progress, but I couldn't write well enough to write back to her. I finally decided to go to school, to learn. As I learned more reading and writing, I found that I could write to my son's teacher and read what she wrote to me.

*Fatou Daffeh was born in the Gambia. She is a student at Lehman College Adult Learning Center in New York City, and she says, "I will not stop going school. I know I am late most of the time. But being late is better than not coming at all."*



My son's school had Parent Training Workshops. I decided to take a Parent Training class about how to deal with children who have autism. After taking that class I learned how to deal with my son. That helped me a lot.

It's taken me 4 years of struggling. Now I can read almost anything, but I am still struggling with my spelling. These days I'm working as a teacher. I am an Early Childhood Teacher. I thank God and the Adult Learning Center. Now I can speak and read and write in English! And I can support my child by making sure he gets the resources he needs.

## NOT ALONE

What "teams" did Fatou Daffeh create around herself and her son?  
How did it help?

# Defending my Son against Racism

*Daffeh Fatou*

When my son went to public school, some children tore his books and bullied him. They made fun of his name and called him an “African Boodie Scratcher”! One boy kept making fun of his name and changing the letters around to something very rude. The teacher didn’t do anything. She said that my son was being a troublemaker. But he never started any of the trouble!

It happened more than 10 times. We had many meetings with the teacher about this problem. She never did anything to help. If this same

---

**Confronting the teacher and the principal was hard. But it was even harder for me to see what my son was going through.**

---

thing happened with other people, I think the teacher would have done something more quickly.

Finally, we had a meeting that included the teacher and the principal. The principal told the teacher that she must tell that boy to stop being a bully. Confronting the teacher and the principal was hard. But it was even harder for me to see what my son was going through. Compared to that, going and talking to the principal was not very hard to do.

After the meeting with the principal, the problem was solved. No more problems at school!



Before this happened, I always believed whatever a teacher said. That was my mistake. I even decided to volunteer at that school, to see what was going on there. That’s how I realized that my son was being bullied and that the teacher’s story was wrong. I became a Learning Leader at my son’s school. I learned that it is good to listen to your child and believe your child. What they are telling you is the truth.

---

*Daffeh Fatou is a student at the Adult Learning Center, at Lehman College, in the Bronx. She is from Gambia, in West Africa, and was born in a city called Banjul. Her family worked as farmers there. She has been living in the Bronx for the last 27 years.*

## Write to Daffeh!

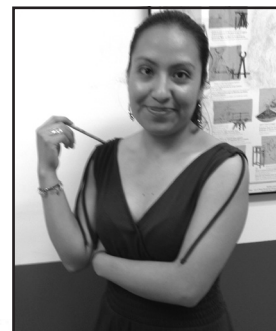
**In your letter,** notice how this experience helped her grow and change as a parent. Acknowledge the efforts she made on behalf of her son. Base your observations on the text.

**Share with Daffeh your experience** of advocating for your child or for someone else you know. How did it change you or affect you? In your writing, use temporal language (first, later, finally) and transition words (consequently, furthermore). See p. 49 for more ideas.



# A Healthy Idea

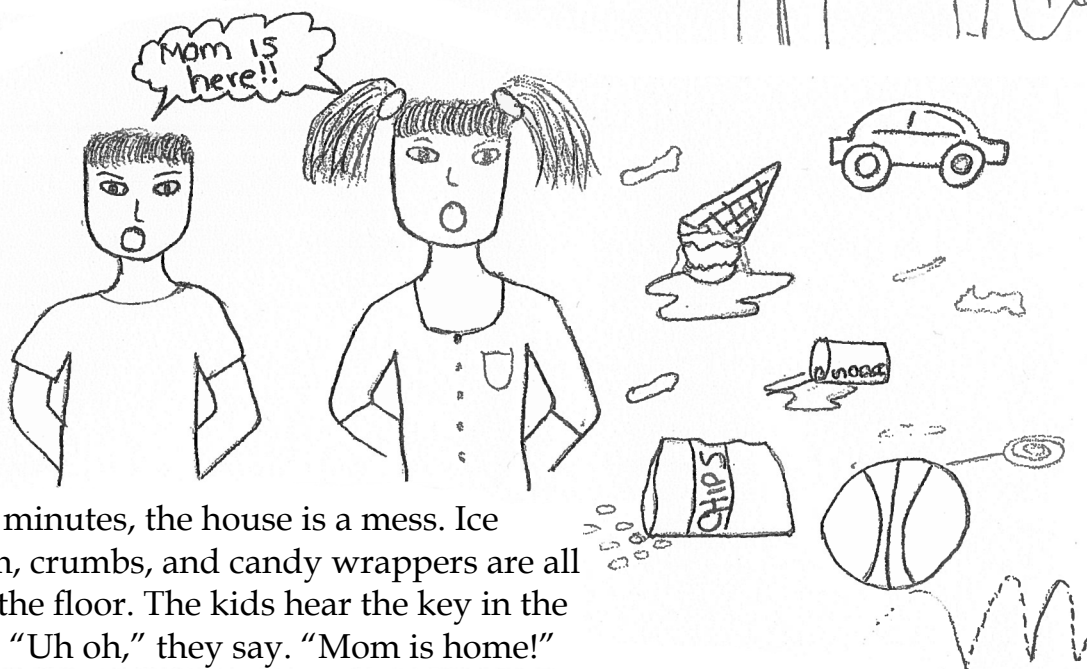
Yanira Montes



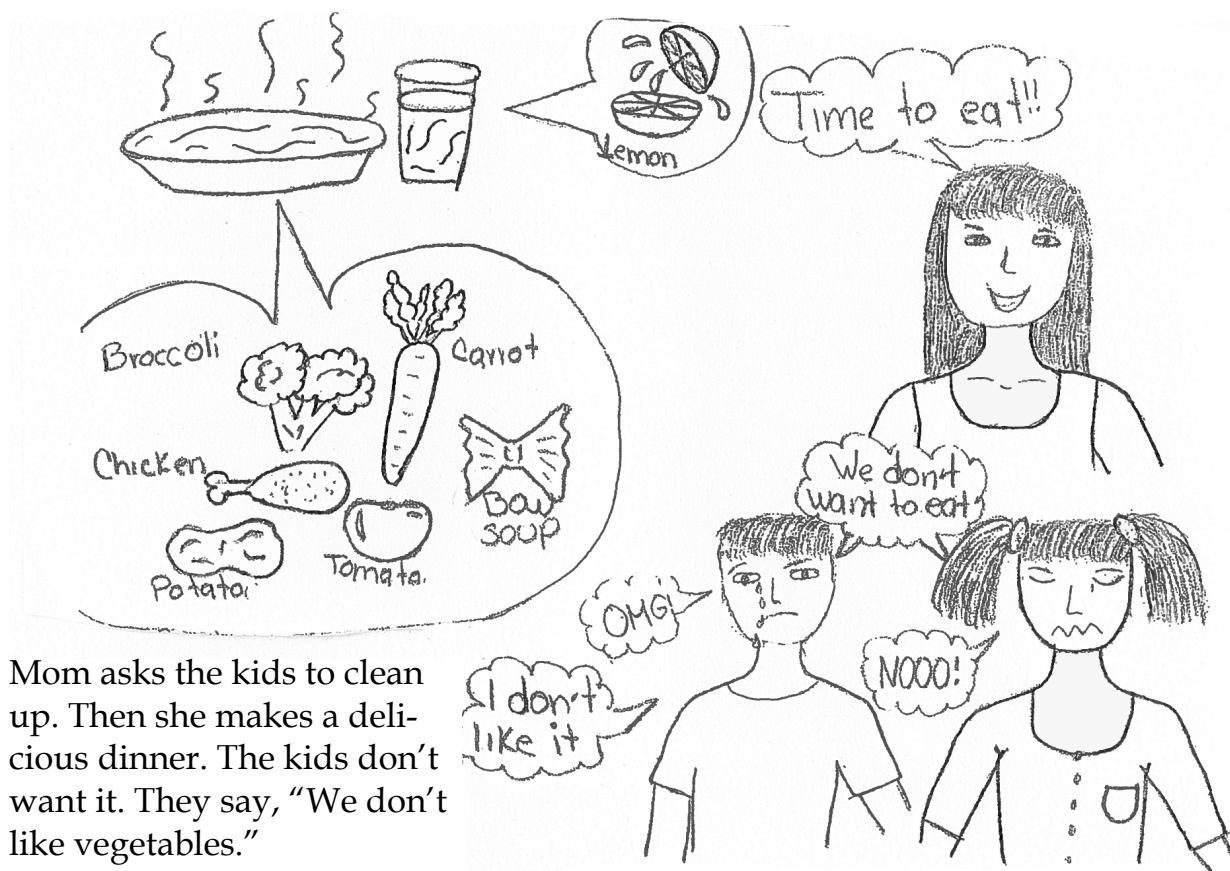
Yanira Montes is student at the Adult Learning Center at CUNY in Brooklyn, NY.



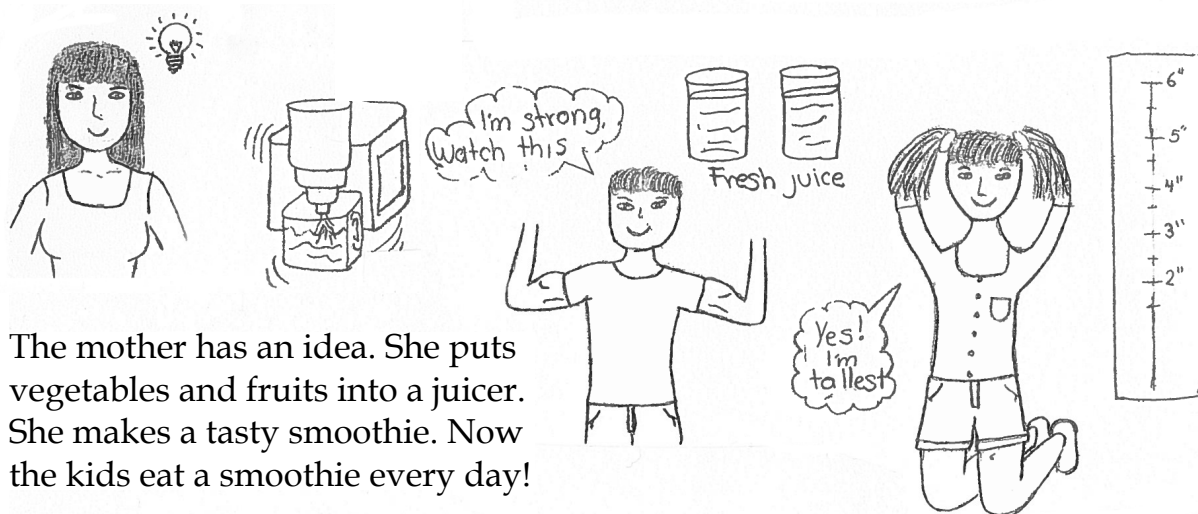
The mother goes to the store to buy food. The kids stay home and eat forbidden junk food.



In 30 minutes, the house is a mess. Ice cream, crumbs, and candy wrappers are all over the floor. The kids hear the key in the door. "Uh oh," they say. "Mom is home!"



Mom asks the kids to clean up. Then she makes a delicious dinner. The kids don't want it. They say, "We don't like vegetables."



The mother has an idea. She puts vegetables and fruits into a juicer. She makes a tasty smoothie. Now the kids eat a smoothie every day!

**AFTER YOU READ**, name a problem the mother in the story faces. Find a solution that she tries. Make a picture story of a time you faced a food problem and solved it.

## Family Skills Are Work Skills

Fill in the chart below using examples from your life. Use general things you do (like the first two examples) or specific things (such as, how Nuzhat Jahan organized a large graduation party for her son). List the skills that you use (or used) to be successful.

What are some of the things you do for your family?	What are some of the skills connected with this activity?
<b>Example 1:</b> I take turns with neighbors walking our children to school.	Good time management and communication skills; able to use a calendar to schedule responsibilities; able to manage a large group and have a contingency plan
<b>Example 2:</b> I prepare _____ meals per day, _____ days per week.	

**Take it further:** Use the information from this chart as well as the chart on p. 19 and create a resume. Add work experience you have outside the home, too!

# Things I Have Done



Consider all you do outside of the traditional workplace. Include work you have done for your family, your community, and your place of worship. Put a check mark next to all that apply.

## Working with People

- ☐ Take care of a sick relative
- ☐ Give medicine to a child
- ☐ Care for child who is disabled
- ☐ Help at a school event
- ☐ Make phone calls, use social media
- ☐ Visit friends and family in nursing homes
- ☐ Take care of children
- ☐ Teach or coach a sport
- ☐ Organize parties for family or friends
- ☐ Teach at my place of worship
- ☐ Help children with their homework
- ☐ Participate in events in my community
- ☐ Volunteer at a library
- ☐ Work with other parents in the schools
- ☐ Go on field trips for teens and help out
- ☐ Play music or dance for others
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Working with Data

- ☐ Write checks and balance a checkbook
- ☐ Do a budget for my family
- ☐ Record income, maintain sales records
- ☐ Handle the finances for a small business
- ☐ Read a map, follow directions
- ☐ Apply for a loan or credit
- ☐ Fill out forms and applications
- ☐ Enter data onto a computer
- ☐ Select and price items to be purchased
- ☐ Choose colors for sewing, crafts, decorating projects
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Working with Things

- ☐ Take care of plants, garden, farm
- ☐ Cook, prepare meals for large groups
- ☐ Clean and repair things at home
- ☐ Arrange flowers
- ☐ Care for animals
- ☐ Type, file, office work for an organization
- ☐ Use a computer
- ☐ Take photographs
- ☐ Operate TVs, modems, computers
- ☐ Build furniture
- ☐ Repair equipment, repair appliances
- ☐ Use tools, operate equipment
- ☐ Drive buses, vans, taxis
- ☐ Cut grass and other landscaping tasks
- ☐ Cut down trees
- ☐ Give haircuts, or do hair styling
- ☐ Take care of cars
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Working with Difficult Situations

- ☐ Support someone in a health crisis
- ☐ Advocate for yourself or someone else to get health insurance coverage
- ☐ Survive homelessness, addiction, abuse
- ☐ Procure benefits from government agencies
- ☐ Interrupt a fight or mediate a conflict
- ☐ Provide court support or navigate the criminal justice system for yourself or others
- ☐ Handle bullies or support someone who is being bullied
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from *Integrating Career Awareness*, p. 45, published by the National College Transition Network and SABES <[www.sabes.org](http://www.sabes.org)>, 2009. Download the complete curriculum and find other related resources here: <[www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org)>.