

Parents Say the Darndest Things

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Kids say some ridiculous things. However, if we really listen we might hear the preposterous things that parents say and ask. Of course we are talking about the neighbours, right? Since we can't improve on the Smiths, let's see if we can observe and catch ourselves by putting on "Erma Bombeck" ears. Consider some of the following:

When parents say "Don't be so full of yourself," of whom do they want their children to be full? Definitely not Jack the Ripper. Don't we want our kids to be full of their own very best selves? An encouragement such as "Please consider other people's feelings in what you are saying," gives a clearer and more useful message. "Don't make a fool out of yourself," is in the same directive category. Probably a parent means, "What you are doing right now is inappropriate. I feel embarrassed."

A slight deviation from this theme is the order to "Grow up!" How is a child to do that? Next week that same child may hear a vague command to "Act your age!" with no sense of what behaviour is actually desired by the parent. Here is an example of clear parental guidance, "I don't understand your words when you whine. I will listen when you speak clearly."

Note the parent who asks "Do you want to go home now?" when their child is in the middle of some energetic play at the park or her friend's house. Does it not seem inapt when the parent has a hissy fit after the child answers the question honestly with "No?" The child thinks "Why did they even ask?" Better to not ask and announce, "It is time to go home."

When a parent says, "There's nothing to feel afraid of," they are inviting a child to turn off their emotional system. Emotions tell us everything about us. It is true that feelings do not tell us that a rubber snake is not dangerous. Information, processing our experiences and thinking with our fine brains, teaches us about the world's realities. In the meantime feelings are never wrong for anyone. If they we feel afraid, we feel afraid. Feelings are merely bodily reactions to our understandings and beliefs. A child can be helped by first having their feeling acknowledged and then invited to consider the thinking through the situation. "I hear you feeling afraid. It's a pretend snake. How can I help you feel safe?" This template can be used when a child is feeling sad, hurt, angry or happy. Thank goodness, in these enlightened days, we seldom hear parents say, "Wipe that smile off of your face. You've got nothing to be happy about," or "Stop your crying or I'll give you something to cry about."

How about telling a child "You are selfish" in the hope to motivate him to share, "You are lazy" in the hope to stimulate him to act cooperatively or "You are stupid" in the hope to support his good use of his intelligence? Effective parents

“catch” their children in sharing, helpful and learning moments and make encouraging and acknowledging statements. “I like how you shared your toys.” “Thank you. I appreciate your help.” “I see you working hard to learn for your exam. Good going.”

There is a classic comment attached to spanking. “This hurts me more than you.” How does another individual have any idea to what degree another individual feels pain? It is well researched that pain thresholds vary. We do not live under another person’s skin. We can only guess at someone else’s experience. Regardless, an effective parent has a repertoire of alternative methods to corporal punishment, ways to discipline, without inflicting physical pain on anyone. Various methods of discipline are described in books such as **Kids Are Worth It** by Barbara Coloroso, **Between Parent and Child** by Haim Ginott and **How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk** by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, and are taught through many of the parent education courses listed in this magazine.

Parents who read parent education books and take courses, if caught on Candid Camera on occasion, would still be saying some absurd lines to their children, especially when those parents are under stress and old habits are triggered. Many of these outlandish phrases are passed on from one generation to the next like a well glued family album snapshot. The good news is that behaviours are learned and can be unlearned. As TV Psychologist, Dr. Phil asks, “Is it working for you?” If not, change it. Lastly, be gentle with yourself if you decide to transform your own menu of ridiculous lines and better communicate.

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