

Words define something in our minds! This is especially true when we are using words with our children. **Our words shape the identity and sense of self in our children. When you say it, your child believes it.** “Calling a kid ‘selfish,’ or implying there is something wrong with her is harmful,” said clinical psychologist Melanie Greenberg, Ph.D., in an article for Psychology Today. “Kids internalize these negative labels and begin to see themselves as ‘not good enough.’”

Words

Your words shape how your child sees themselves! For this reason, **sexually explicit words should NEVER be said to a child.** Mom, dad, boyfriends, family friends...no one ever should say these ugly words to a child. When this happens, children live down to the words that define them. If you have a child and there is someone close to you who calls them “a little bleep” YOU must step up and stop it. Your child simply cannot defend themselves. And when a parent doesn’t speak up and defend them, then the only conclusion the child can come to is that it is acceptable.

Damaging Words

Damage can also be done to children’s identity with careless words. Parents often say negative things about their children without thinking of the impact on their child.

The words that do the lasting damage are words that define the child’s character. What does that mean? When a child does something wrong, the role of the adult is to help the child see what they did wrong and how not to repeat it. If there are consequences for the bad behavior, they need to be put into place and to be followed through. Everything that is done needs to be about the action the child did. This is healthy and helps the child grow into a responsible adult. **The most damaging words are when you respond, not to what your child did, but who they are as a person.**

The Pain of Harsh Words

If you were raised with harsh words then you know the pain. You will likely pass them on to your children. You can change. If you love your child and want what is best for them, you will change. Listen to yourself when you correct your child. Do you address the action or do you belittle the character? Is it about what they did or who they are? Parents cannot change how they were parented. We aren’t stuck with it. We have the power to change bad patterns and start good patterns in our parenting. You won’t do it perfectly every time. As you become aware of your words, you will find yourself changing and giving your child what he or she needs to grow. Change instead of hurting them with your words. When they see you trying to change, it says to them they are important to you. There will be times when you will blow it. But this is an opportunity to show them you care by apologizing. This is a powerful way to undo the damage and teach them a positive lesson in the process.

Resources:

1. Greenberg, Melanie. “Worst Mistakes Parents Make When Talking to Kids.” Psychology Today, Sussex Publishers, 18 Sept. 2012, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mindful-self-express/201209/worst-mistakes-parents-make-when-talking-kids. Accessed 01/2023