

5 Things Parents Shouldn't Say to Their Kids

By [Charlene Prince Birkeland, Team Mom](#) | [Team Mom](#) – Mon, 30 Apr, 2012 4:17 PM EDT



Say what?

It's no secret that parents should pay attention to how they communicate with their children. **Even tiger moms** and parents following the **French style of raising children** could agree that what we say to our kids -- and how we say it -- matters. Tiger moms and French parents get the results they want largely *because* of what they say. But besides using words to get kids to do what they want, how moms and dads communicate with their kids directly impacts the parent-child relationship long term. And it's the simple statements parents make, usually in a moment of frustration with their young children, which can cause the most damage later on.

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"Words hurt and they can't be taken back, so be careful" says Debbie Pincus, a therapist, parenting coach and author of "The Calm Parent: AM & PM." **Team Mom on Shine** asked Pincus and other parenting experts about the most common phrases that moms and dads say to young kids in the midst of parental panic. Don't feel bad if you've said them -- most parents have! "We're human. Our lives are crazy and sometimes we don't give ourselves time to pause and think," she says. "We don't want to be so careful that we're not authentic. We're real. Be passionate with your kids, be real, say what's on your mind. Say it passionately. Just be conscious and responsible, no matter who we talk to." Pincus adds that calm is contagious and better things come out of our mouths when we stop ourselves from reacting in the moment..

The bottom line is that as parents, we're teaching our kids how we want them to behave in similar situations; modeling the desired behavior is key. Check out what Pincus and others had to say about five things parents shouldn't say to kids--and how to turn a moment of frustration into a positive life lesson.

"I don't care."

Little kids love to share details...of their playground conversations with friends, of the cloud formation they think looks like a sea serpent, of why they squeezed an entire tube of toothpaste into the bathtub. And sometimes? Parents just don't want to hear the specifics. But beware of saying "I don't care!" because you're cutting off communication with your child and saying that something important to him or her isn't so important to you. "Most parents have a difficult time once children reach the adolescent stages and complain that their teens are not communicative with them. Well, the question must be asked then, 'How has the parent-child communication been nurtured throughout the child's life?'" says Melinda Garcia, a licensed clinical social worker with ESCAPE Family Resource Center in Houston. "The process of parent-child communication must evolve positively over the years. There's an unspoken trust that occurs when communication is nurtured." **Try this:** Garcia recommends that parents let the child know an issue can be discussed later, perhaps at a better time when the parent is more focused. She stresses, however, that parents must follow through. "Don't let the day end without addressing your child's need to share with you."

"Act your age!"

Your daughter is seven years old but you think she's acting like she's three...and you tell her so. Pincus says this common

reaction is less about the child's behavior and all about the parent trying to manage his or her own frustration. The child may, in fact, be acting their age. "It's just not working out for the parent," she says. "It makes us feel better in the moment." The result? Kids hear their parents criticizing them at a time when they, as children, are having trouble and perhaps need some help gaining control. **Try this:** Says Pincus, "When you are stirred up, just take that pause. Come up with an effective response instead of a reaction. Most of what we do is a knee-jerk reaction. That pause helps to get that adrenaline down so you can get the thinking part of your brain working instead of the emotional part of the brain."

"Say you're sorry!"

Your preschooler takes a toy from another child and makes him or her cry. You instantly tell your child to say sorry for his or her actions. You're trying to teach your child to be compassionate, which is a laudable goal. But "forcing a child to apologize does not teach a child social skills," says Bill Corbett, a parent educator, author, and producer/host of the parenting TV show "Creating Cooperative Kids." Young children don't automatically understand why they have to apologize. Corbett says that if parent forces a child to say they are sorry, "it could delay the child's natural acceptance" of apologizing. **Try this:** Apologize to the child for your kid as a way to model the behavior you're trying to encourage. And make sure that when you're in situations where an apology is warranted, you deliver it just as easily.

"Don't you get it?"

You've taught your kid how to catch a baseball five times over. Or how to add and subtract fractions. But when your child shows signs that it's not clicking for him or her, you hastily ask, "Don't you get it?" Learning specialist and author Jill Lauren tells Team Mom on Shine that this comment is degrading. "If the child 'got it,' which he desperately wants to do in order to please his parent, it would be clear. Implicit in a 'don't you get it' comment are the judgments of 'Why don't you get it?' followed by 'What's wrong with you for not getting it?' While a parent may not mean to send those messages, that is the message the child receives." **Try this:** Take a break. If you're stuck on how to teach your child something, step away. Return to the "lesson" when you're ready to try again, perhaps after researching alternative approaches to teaching whatever it is your child is trying to learn.

"I'm going to leave without you!"

Your kid refuses to leave the toy store or a park and you are going to be late for an appointment. So you issue an ultimatum sure to freak your child out: "I'm going to leave without you!" For young kids, fear of parental abandonment is very real. But what happens when your threat doesn't work? "The biggest problem is that we want our kids to believe what we say. For a whole host of reasons, we need our kids to believe us. If you want them to believe what we say is true, we cannot say something that is patently false," says Deborah Gilboa, a family doctor, parenting speaker, and mom of four boys. The result is that the child quickly learns that mom or dad makes empty threats. "Parents say it because they don't know what else to do...it's a bad idea," says Dr. Gilboa: "You need to strive not to make empty threats. If you plant a flag, you have to defend it...say what you mean and follow through." **Try this:** Don't tell your kids you're going to leave without them. Instead, plan ahead. Chances are high that you've seen your child behave this way before. You know what will trigger a tantrum. What will you say if your child throws a fit or refuses to leave? "It's okay to identify unacceptable behavior," says Dr. Gilboa. "You can tell them it's not acceptable but you have to motivate them with a consequence that you can carry out."

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