

8 Things You Should Never Say to a Mom

By Charlene Prince Birkeland, Team Mom | Team Mom - Wed, 18 Apr, 2012 12:20 PM EDT



I'm sorry, did you just say
I'm too young for so
much grey hair?

Parents are careful about what they say to their kids. They even pay attention to questions they might pose to their child-free friends. But sometimes, when comfort levels are high around mom friends -- or people forget to think before they speak -- folks can get careless with their comments. A simple remark by a well-meaning friend to a new mom could hurt her self-confidence. Or a casual comment to a mom with a "spirited child" may do more harm than you'd imagine.

Team Mom asked the experts about the impact that eight comments could have on a mom. Here's what they had to say:

"You're so dressed up!"

Your mom friend is wearing casual clothes or a little makeup instead of the yoga gear and ponytail you may normally see her sporting. Psychologist and mom of two, Elizabeth Lombardo, Ph.D., tells Team Mom on Shine that the mom could interpret your statement as: "You always look like a slob. Nice of you to finally put some makeup on. What is wrong with you?" Lombardo, author of "A Happy You: Your Ultimate Prescription for Happiness," recommends that if you want her to know she looks pretty, say so: "You look great!" And if you just want to know her plans, then ask "So, what are you up to tonight?" or "Doing anything fun today?"

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"You look so tired."

Whether you're talking to a new mom or a mom with older kids, telling her she looks tired is just another way of saying you notice she's not at her best. But she may have other reasons for her tired appearance. "Looking or feeling tired can, unfortunately, stem from a number of different issues ranging from lack of sleep or quality sleep, to poor nutrient status due to inadequate nutrient intake or absorption, to side effects of medications or chronic health conditions," says Nancy Steely, a naturopathic physician. If you're really concerned about how your mom friend is doing, ask her: "How's everything going?"

"You must really want a girl."

Moms of boys hear this question all the time. Amy Williams, a mom of two boys and founder of BoyMom Designs, says the second she was pregnant with her second child and announced she was having another son, the responses also included, "I'm so sorry!" and "Oh no! Two boys!" Sometimes people would make these comments in front of her other son. "It was awful and so negative," says Williams. "It hasn't been an 'oh-no' experience. It's been a blast." Her advice is to focus on the fact that a woman is having a baby, which is wonderful on its own. She wishes her friends would have said, "Congratulations, two boys!" or simply, "You're having a baby...that's terrific."

"My son/daughter would love to have a play date with your child. When can I bring him/her over?"

We love play dates, but this request sounds like veiled attempt to get free babysitting. Erika Myers, a licensed therapist and a

mom, says it can lead to "one parent feeling responsible for hosting--and sitting for--another child." Myers recommends offering a trade. "If it works well, you can set up a regular system of alternating play dates giving each of you a much needed break." Other alternatives include meeting at a park or a kid-friendly location. "If your kids get along, chances are there may be many play dates in their --and your--future. Why not spend some time getting to know the mom of your son's new BFF. Down the line she may become a source of support and possibly a very good friend," Myers tells Team Mom at Shine.

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"When did you get so gray?"

We seriously don't know why women *ever* say this to their friends...but they do. Are you trying to tell your friend you notice that she looks different? Or are you worried about her? Tell her. Because the mom hears something totally different, says Dr. Lombardo: "You look terrible; you really let yourself go. She thinks 'I used to take care of myself before the kids. Now I have no time. I am just a mess. And I can't even control these kids. I am worthless.'"

"When are you due?"

Before you ever ask any woman when she's due, *ask yourself* if she's actually told you that she's pregnant. "Asking a non-pregnant woman if she is expecting can trigger feelings of insecurity, guilt, and tap into body image issues," says Myers. If the mom is not pregnant, you've just reminded her that she hasn't lost her baby weight from a previous pregnancy. Or what if she's gained weight because of health issues that you weren't aware of? Try this: Don't say anything.

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"When are you going back to work?"

The implied statement under this question is that being at home with the kids isn't work, and strikes at the heart of mommy wars. "It's one of the worst questions. It causes huge guilt," says Diane Lang, a counseling educator who leads workshop for moms on creating balance and re-entering the workforces. "All we're doing to moms is making them re-question their choices and causing mom guilt and unreal expectations. There is no win-win. You're setting up a mom for failure for failure." If you're really just interested in finding out what your mom friend is up to, focus less on her employment situation and more on her, as a person (e.g., "What have you been up to?").

"I remember that stage. He/she will grow out of it."

It's nice to feel like you're not a rookie parent anymore and can offer guidance to another mom friend. Or maybe you're just trying to comfort a mom who is struggling. But perhaps the outburst you're witnessing isn't something a child will "grow out of" because unbeknownst to you, he or she has behavioral issues. Say Myers: "Unfortunately, it can come across as patronizing and dismissive. When a child is going through a difficult phase, or potentially has significant behavioral issues, parents can feel overwhelmed, inadequate, and defeated." Sometimes you just need to be a good listener. And if you feel the need to comment, Myers recommends trying something like "We went through something similar when was that age. It was really tough."