

## Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

### Watch your @\*%\$! Mouth!

As much as it makes us cringe, all children experiment with foul language and swearing from time to time. Young children often have a fascination with "toilet language", whilst older children can be more colourful and even offensive in their use of language. How can we encourage our children to use appropriate language and what should we do when they don't? Here are some thoughts ...



Firstly, we need to make sure our children have plenty of positive ways to get attention. If they have enough positive attention, they don't have to use foul language to get us to notice them. If they come out with a word we don't like it's helpful if we don't over-react. Children can use foul language to get a reaction from us. When they see us get upset, they score a big payoff of attention and this just about guarantees that they'll use the word again! What can we do when we hear offensive language? We can let our child know that we will turn around and walk away without saying a word. (This removes the "payoff" for the behaviour.) Walking away without words isn't letting them "get away" with foul language, it's saying, "I deserve to be treated with respect and I choose not to listen to swearing". Our actions speak much louder than our ongoing lectures.

We need to be clear about what words are OK and not OK in our family; "Other people may say that word, but it's not OK in our family". We need to monitor TV, song lyrics, online gaming and social media. Do we know what our children are being exposed to? If we're not comfortable with what we hear coming from the television or games console, we need to have a conversation about that and be prepared to turn it off or change the programme/game. Of course we know that we can't control everything that our children hear and they will learn swear words, whether we like it or not. What's important is that we communicate our expectations with our children.

If children are swearing a lot, try to understand where it's coming from. Are they trying to fit in or act cool? Do they struggle to express their anger in appropriate ways? If the swearing stems from anger, suggest other ways to communicate; "I can tell you're really angry about this. Let's talk about it when you've calmed down and we can have a respectful conversation." Remember, it's OK to be angry, it's what we do with our anger that matters. If swearing and foul language become more frequent and increasingly offensive, our child may be using bad language to engage us in a power struggle or using it as a revenge tool against us. At this point, it's time to dig deeper and determine what's really behind the behaviour.

Before you speak:

**THINK**

**T** = Is it True?

**H** = Is it Helpful?

**I** = Is it Inspiring?

**N** = Is it Necessary?

**K** = Is it Kind?

**MOST IMPORTANTLY**, we need to watch our own language, speak respectfully to our children and other adults and model appropriate language. Children are keenly sensitive to double standards. If it's OK for us to swear, they don't understand why it isn't OK for them. Unfortunately, the old adage "do as I say, not as I do" just doesn't work. Whether we like it or not WE are the biggest influencers on our children's speech and behaviour. We know that little ones start to copy the things we say from a very young age. Let's make sure that what they are copying won't shock us when we hear them using it back at us!

For more advice you can email me at [parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk](mailto:parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk)