Watch Your Language

> *All children experiment with rude words and swearing at some point. How can we encourage appropriate language, and what should we do when they slip up?*

Do not feed the reaction

Children can use bad language to get a reaction, and if we visibly react, they get a big payoff of attention that all but guarantees it will happen again. Calmly walking away without a lecture removes that payoff. It is not letting them get away with it, it is saying “I deserve to be treated with respect, and I choose not to listen to that.”

Be clear on family expectations

“Other people might say that word, but it's not okay in our family” sets a clear boundary. It is worth keeping an eye on what children are exposed to through TV, music, gaming and social media, and being ready to turn something off or change it if it does not sit right.

Look for what is behind it

If swearing becomes frequent, it is worth understanding why: trying to fit in, struggling to express anger appropriately, or testing for a reaction. If anger is the root cause, offering another outlet helps: “I can tell you're really angry, let's talk about it once you've calmed down.” Persistent or escalating bad language can sometimes be a sign of a deeper power struggle worth looking into further.

Model it yourself

Most importantly, children copy what they hear. If we swear ourselves, it is very hard to convince children the rule does not apply to them too; “do as I say, not as I do” rarely works. We are the biggest influence on our children's language, so it is worth making sure what they copy from us is language we are happy to hear repeated back.