

Word Up – the power of words

Language. Words can be funny things, can't they? In fact, the English language is so full of peculiarities, odd spelling patterns and grammar rules that sometimes it's simply baffling! I'm a fan of words and am often guilty of using too many and waffling. I'm often envious of people who can succinctly summarise in just a sentence – there's quite an art to that.

Parents were asked recently about the skill that they thought would most help their children get ahead in the world and the most popular response by far was 'communication'. It beat reading, writing, teamwork and logic. Maybe that's surprising? But in a world where we're communicating in a host of different ways, many of them digital, it's essential our children grow up having the skills to express themselves verbally – how they're feeling, what they're thinking and how to share thoughts and opinions. Of course the first place they learn about doing this is with parents and carers – those closest to them. So if we can encourage lots of talking, we're doing well in placing those foundations for life later on. The article¹ goes on to suggest the ten most powerful things we can say to our children – things that will build them up, give them confidence and serve them well as they grow into adults. Reading that list reminds me that there are some that I definitely need to try and do

more – why not take a look and think about which ones you'd like to do more often?

It's been said that for every negative comment made we need to say four positive ones to counter it. Yet it can often feel that the negative ones come much more easily. This reminds me of a phrase I occasionally heard as a child, usually if I was berating my brother for some reason: "If you can't think of anything nice to say, don't say anything at all!" I like the way Kid President has adapted it, though, by saying, "If you can't think of anything nice to say, you're not thinking hard enough."

This encourages all of us to spend time finding the positive thing to express rather than opting to threaten or chastise. Of course it can take time to adjust an old habit but we might just be pleasantly surprised by how it improves our conversations and relationships – not just with our children but also others in our families, our friends and neighbours too.

As much as what we say matters, it's also how we say it that can bring a whole new dimension to our meaning. Whether it's whispering, hesitating, shouting or stumbling over our words it all has an impact. If I'd like someone to make me a cup of tea I know there's a much better chance if I ask kindly rather than screech through the house making it sound like a demand from a



You are precious,
beautiful, special,
loved, unique,
a gift from God.

dictator! Shouting and losing our rag is harmful for all involved, but for children especially it raises stress levels. As Rachel Calum² (professor of child and family psychology at the University of Manchester) says, "Shouting can frighten children and put them in such a state of heightened arousal that they can't concentrate on the message given. It also increases the chance of the child having a hostile reaction and shouting back." So it may help an adult in the short term to vent but nobody benefits in the long run.

We've all raised our voices on occasion – maybe out of frustration or even desperation – but if we're able to maintain a calmer approach it can make a big difference to both the atmosphere at home and our child/parent relationships. It's probably not possible to be cool and collected all of the time but keeping our yelling to a minimum can help everyone's sense of wellbeing – not least our own.

¹[10 most powerful things you can say to a child](#) [Parenting.com]

²[Shouting at your children](#) [Huffington post]



Care for the Family's aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties.

Care for the Family, Garth House, Leon Avenue, Cardiff, CF15 7RG
Tel: 029 2081 0800 Email: mail@cff.org.uk Web: www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Care for the Family – A Christian response to a world of need.
A registered charity (England and Wales: 1066905; Scotland: SC038497).