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4 Simple Phrases to Help Teach Kids to be Respectful

Children get mouthy because they haven't learned how to handle the overwhelming feelings of anger, disappointment, and frustration.

by [Adina Soclof](#)



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Children are usually disrespectful because they are angry, disappointed and frustrated. When they're not able to get what they want or do what they want to do, they often resort to:

You're not the boss of me!

We have the stupidest family ever!

You never let me do anything!

Children haven't learned how to handle the overwhelming feelings of anger, disappointment, and frustration. So they get mouthy. They say things they don't mean. They haven't learned the art of diplomacy.

So when they say, "You're not the boss of me!"

They mean: "I am in the middle of a great game and I don't want to go to sleep. Can I have 5 more minutes?"

When they say, "We have the stupidest family ever!"

They mean: "I am really jealous of Sara. She just went to Disneyworld with her family and she is bragging about it all the time. I really want to go too!"

When they say, "You never let me do anything!"

They mean: "How am I going to save face in front of my friends? I have to tell them that I can't go with them to the coolest party of the year."

If they just told us what they really meant, if they expressed their anger, frustration and disappointment respectfully, we would feel more compassion. Don't worry, this doesn't mean we need to rescind our rules and our decision. However, it certainly would help us refrain from

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our usual angry response which usually only exacerbates the issue and causes more fighting.

To encourage children to tell us what they really mean and help them express their rough feelings we need to act in a way that is counterintuitive. We need to under-react and meet the disrespect with calm. It's even better if we give children an opportunity to translate what they are saying, in essence teaching them how to express their anger, frustration and disappointment in a more emotionally intelligent, diplomatic manner.

Here are 4 phrases that can help us do that:

1. "You sound upset and angry..."

Responding to a child's back talk with empathy is probably the most effective tactic you can use. You have now just given them the vocabulary words they need to tell you how they feel. It can calm kids down pretty quickly so that they can think straight. It is also an invitation to start a conversation as to what is really bothering them.

2. "What you really wanted to say but couldn't was..."

Tamar Chansky, author of *Freeing Your Child from Negative Thinking*, says that this is her favorite phrase because it is a lighthearted way to teach respectful language. It gives children a script and a second chance. For example, when your child says, "You got only vanilla ice cream, not chocolate! I wanted chocolate! You never buy me anything I want!" You say, "What you really wanted to say but couldn't was 'Mom, thank you so much for doing the grocery shopping every week and feeding the family. You usually buy me the treats that I like and make me my favorite foods. I am disappointed about the ice cream; chocolate is my favorite. Please can you get it for me next time?'"

3. "Listen I know you're upset, but can you say that respectfully..."

Empathy and a gentle reminder to be respectful can work wonders with kids who are a little more savvy and have been taught how to be respectful and voice their concerns in a reasonable manner.

4. "I know you know how to speak respectfully...can you try saying that again?"

Similar to number 3, it is also a gentle admonishment. In essence you are really saying, "You are being completely disrespectful but I know you can turn this behavior around."

[Respectful behavior](#) is one of the most important people skills that we need to teach children. These 4 phrases can help you do just that.



October 15, 2017



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