

SWEARING

Good language is about respect in action

Like other forms of language children need to learn that there are times and places when its use is unacceptable or causes distress to others.



Children swear for many reasons: to experiment with language; to attract your attention; to make themselves appear bigger or older than they are; and even as a challenge or expression of personal power.

Swearing needs to be considered as a form of language – albeit an unacceptable one. This is not to say that you condone it. Rather, it is an acceptance of the fact that your children will hear many forms of unacceptable language and they need to understand its use and purpose. Like other forms of language children need to learn that there are times and places when its use is unacceptable or causes distress to others.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE AIR TURNS BLUE

- **Avoid over-reacting when children swear.** However, make the message clear that you are unimpressed with swearing and you are willing to leave them alone when they swear. Consider withdrawing your cooperation temporarily if they swear at you.
- **Discuss the concept of appropriate language with older children.** Teach them that language may be appropriate in one context or be accepted by one group but it is not acceptable in every situation. While not condoning swearing get across to children that they need to learn to control their use of language and adjust it to suit the situation they are in.
- **Children, like adults, can use inappropriate language out of habit.** If this is the case make up alternative words that replace swearing. One family had replaced certain words with fruit. They had a fruit for every situation!
- **Try the penalty system.** When family members swear they are fined an agreed amount which is placed in a money-box. At the end of the week or month the money can be given to a worthy cause or spent in a way that benefits others. Of course, parents should join in this as well.
- **Examine your own choice of language** to judge if it is an acceptable model for your children. It is scary how much language and behaviour children pick up by observing their parents.
- **Try shock tactics with older kids who swear.** I know one mother who kissed her teenaged son whenever he swore in public when he was with her. It was a habit he soon broke!



Parenting *ideas*
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