

8
MAGICAL
PHRASES

YOUR CHILD Needs to Hear

It's easy to let communication with your child slip into a string of negative words: 'No', 'Stop it', 'That's enough', 'Not now', 'Don't be silly'. Break the pattern and slip these positive messages into conversation, then watch the magic happen, says motivational speaker and author **Ariane de Bonvoisin**

Whether they realise it or not, children are always listening out for messages that greatly impact their self-esteem. Are they smart? Are they worthy? Are they beautiful? Are they wanted? Are they important? Are they safe? Are they respected for what they say and do? Are their parents happy or are they a giant sacrifice or burden for them?

They are also picking up cues on how you see them: am I still a baby or a young child? Am I al-

ways going to be inferior? Will Mom/Dad ever be fair to me?

As parents, we do everything we can to give our children a happy childhood, but so many grow up lacking healthy self-esteem. Why? Perhaps we can discover some clues to this not only in what we say to them, but, more importantly, what we forget to say. Here are eight phrases your child – however old – needs to hear. →



Asking your child for help shows you need them

1 'I'M SORRY'

It's easy for children to grow up thinking they're the ones who are constantly doing wrong. They didn't clean their room, do their homework, finish their food, apologise for using bad words. They broke, lost or forgot something, were responsible for why you and Dad had a fight.... It's natural for children to think they are the reason for you being upset, stressed or impatient.

Sometimes, however, it's important for adults to turn this trend around, accept responsibility for errors and say, 'I'm sorry'. What do you need to apologise for? For being late, swearing, being impatient, working too hard, missing something important to them, not helping them with something.

When you say you're sorry, your child learns that you too make mis-

takes and that it's okay. It shows that even though we are not perfect, we can still love each other. It lets your child see the importance of apologising and that good things come from it.

2 'YOU ARE RIGHT'

The very nature of the parent-child relationship means that from an early age your child expects you to have all the answers, and that those answers will be right. Invariably, because of the very nature of the relationship, many discussions between a parent and child end with the parent 'being right'.

Too often, however, parents practise double standards when it comes to the behaviour they expect from their child. For example, maybe you spend hours on your tablet, but your child isn't allowed to.

So, next time your child points out something that makes you uncomfortable – it may be your eating habits, that you are messy or that you spend too much time on your phone – acknowledge that they are right, and own it.

Children need to grow up knowing that sometimes they themselves have the answers, and that sometimes they are right. It's also a good lesson to show your child that they too can use this phrase – 'you are right' – in their relationships, instead of always trying to 'win' the argument.

3 'I NEED YOUR HELP'

As a mother you probably find you are constantly telling your child what to do. Often what they hear is that you are unhappy, they are incompetent, and they should be doing something different. To them, you are the ones making the decisions, and they simply have to execute whatever you ask of them.

Next time, say: 'I need your help.' Your child is then likely to hear that you need them and that they are valuable. You aren't reminding them of what they haven't done, but how useful and even powerful they are. Unlike telling your child what to do, these words are calm and neutral, and the response you will get will probably reflect that. What your child hears is, 'Wow, Mom needs me.'

So, try asking your child their opinion on what you should wear for a work meeting, whether you should do something or not ... anything, really, where they truly can help. By asking your child for help, you can make them feel someone needs them, that they have something to say, that they will be heard and that what they contribute matters. These are valuable lessons for children to carry into their adult years.

4 'WHAT DOES YOUR INTUITION TELL YOU?'

We are often quick to tell our children

the answers: what to do and how to solve something, whether it be their homework, feelings or making decisions for them. It's a gift to help them not only to get in touch with their intuition, but also to trust it as a real source of guidance for them in their lives.

There will come a day when they are not at home with you and they will have to find answers inside themselves. It's never too early to teach them that they have an inner voice and that it will always be there for them. So, whether they are choosing clothes or what to eat in a restaurant or what they might want to study later on, remind them to tune in to their intuition for an answer.

If intuition is hard for them to access, ask them to close their eyes and ask whether their body is giving them a yes or a no. With time, they will come to trust this part of themselves.

5 'WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE DOING TODAY?'

It can sometimes feel easier for us parents to plan everything rather than rely on our youngsters to do some of the planning themselves. Yet, if you want to get to know your children on their terms, let them be in charge sometimes.

How about they decide what restaurant to go to for Sunday lunch? What would they like to do on the weekend? They might surprise you and suggest things you may not have thought of. You can even extend it to holidays: let your children decide and even help plan your break using the Internet. It's a wonderful way to help children feel involved and included – a way to show them that their voice really does matter.

6 'CAN YOU SHOW ME HOW TO...?'

Children are often perplexed that their parents don't understand things like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, using a smartphone's camera and figuring out

WHAT DOES YOUR CHILD NEED TO HEAR YOU SAY?

EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE. Take time to figure out what they need to hear from you, says motivational speaker and author Ariane de Bonvoisin.

There is something right now that your child needs to hear you say. What is it? Is it that they are beautiful or handsome – something that is especially important for teens? Is it that they are smart and deserve to do well at school? Is it that the reason you and Dad are not together has nothing to do with them? Is it that they are unique and for you to stop comparing them with their siblings? Is it that they are resilient and can get through this tough time?

Pick up on these clues and give your child what they most need to hear and know. Be sincere – and repeat frequently so that the message becomes ingrained not only in their minds but also their hearts.

functions on the TV remote. This is a golden opportunity for your child to be able to teach you something – but only if you let them. So go ahead – give them the opportunity to switch roles and have them be your teacher. But don't do this from a place of shame – 'poor me', 'I'm too old for this' – as this will only perpetuate the sense of distance between you and your child. Children want to feel equal to you – or at least that you look up to them for something. Let them teach you. Let them see you fail, make mistakes, try again. It's humbling for you and empowering for them.

7 'THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH'

From a very early age, your child is trying to get your attention, your 'well done', your big smile and happy face because they did something right – whether that's doing well in exams, scoring goals in soccer or stacking the dishwasher correctly. As parents we need to be careful that our children don't interpret this to mean that not only do they need to do things perfectly but that they also need to be perfect to earn our appreciation and love.

So many adults suffer painfully from the curse of needing to be perfect. They are scared to try something new in case they fail or make a mistake.

Instead, tell your child that what

they did, tried or said is good enough and that the effort they put in, rather than whether they did something perfectly, is what counts. Your child is more likely to pursue their dreams, ask someone out on a date and even speak up if they aren't concerned about perfection. Show them instead how to be concerned with trying something new, having fun and doing their best.

8 'I AM SO HAPPY YOU ARE MY CHILD'

Yes, this may sound corny at first, but let me explain. Your child may often notice what you aren't happy about. They might feel you are always running around, preparing, washing, ironing, cooking, working on your computer, fighting with their dad, exhausted, complaining that you don't have any time for you, or that the house is a mess.

From all this, it's very easy for your child to assume that they are the cause of all this distress, or it's because of them that you aren't in a better mood or that you aren't going to the gym.

So, it's important for them to hear that you really are happy they are your son or daughter. The burden a child feels towards their parents can be big, so lighten their load and make them feel really loved and wanted, and that your stuff is exactly that: your stuff. ■

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