

Courageous Conversation

1. Initiate: Let the person know you want to talk with them about something important to you and your relationship with them. Have the Courageous Conversation early in the day.

2. Describe: Share your experience, your view of the situation. Talk about yourself, what it looks like and feels like for you. Use the Wise Mind, the balance of emotion and rational thought.

3. Identify Needs: Listen to understand the other person's experience. Use AIV while they are sharing. Identify the unmet needs of each person as it relates to this situation.

4. Brainstorm: Together, think of several solutions or action steps that can be taken to meet the needs of each person in the situation.

5. Agreements: Come to new agreements. Jot them down on a note in your phone to create a screensaver, or post them in a visible place. Implement the new agreements.

6. Check-in: Depending on the issue, decide when to check-in again regarding how well the new agreements are being upheld. Make adjustments as needed.

2. Describe: _____

3. Unmet needs A: _____

Unmet needs B: _____

Courageous Conversation

Step 2: Describe

Here are some examples of ways to describe the situation in a courageous conversation.

INEFFECTIVE DESCRIPTION	EFFECTIVE DESCRIPTION
Parent: You're a slob! I can't believe you can live in that mess.	Both your dirty and your clean clothes are on the ground. There are food plates and cups in your room. You can't find things you look for because so many things are out of place. When I see your things on the ground and not being taken care of, it makes me feel like I don't want to buy things for you.
Teacher: You don't care about school. You have terrible work habits.	Teacher: You have been off-task in class. I see you doing other things when you are supposed to be getting started on assignments. Sometimes you are talking with other students or moving around the room. Your grades are already being affected. If you continue with these choices, you may get so far behind that it could be difficult to rectify and you may even end up failing this class or getting a grade that will bring your GPA down significantly. This could keep you from achieving the bigger goals you have set for yourself.
Therapist: You are lying a lot.	From what you've described and what your parents shared with me, it sounds like you've been having some trouble lately with telling the truth. You have said things that are not true, or are only partly true, and the rest is more of a story. A couple of times you have told lies that have helped you get to do things you probably should not have been able to do.
Grandparent: What's wrong with you? You don't have anything to be upset about.	You seem to be sad or upset about something. You are usually cheerful and helpful. You are not talking very much or helping out with things. You're just not your usual happy self.

Summary: You are describing your experience of the situation to the other person.

Courageous Conversation

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

At this point in the Courageous Conversation, you have initiated the Courageous Conversation and shared your experience of the situation. Now, it's time for the other person to share their perspective. This is when you will start acknowledging and validating the other person. You will do this throughout the time they are sharing their perspective. Below are some phrases for acknowledging someone after they share a piece of information and especially after they share their emotions. Acknowledging and Validating is actually a 3-step process. The following pages describe each step in detail. The pages after that give specific examples, showing how each step will look for each example. With a little practice, it becomes second nature.

1. Acknowledge:

Immediately after the person shares a piece of information, you will first acknowledge what they said. This lets the person know you heard what they said and confirms that you heard it right. It gives them a chance to correct you if you have gotten it wrong. There is no judgment or fixing or helping at this time. You are simply saying back what the child has said, and asking them if you got it right.

Words for acknowledging

I'm hearing you say...

So, what you're saying is...

So, when you _____, _____ happens?

Let me see if I get this...

What you're telling me is that...

Let me give that back to you to make sure I got it...

In other words...

Let me share what I heard and you can tell me where I'm wrong...

2. Identify the value:

The next step is to identify a value that the person holds that is either being crossed or left unfulfilled because of the situation at hand. This step is done silently within yourself. To identify the value, quietly think about the person you are talking with and the current discussion. This is not a time to think about *your* values, or what *you* would do or want. What value of *THEIRS* is showing up in this situation? Remember, you are looking to identify a value that is being crossed or unfulfilled because of the circumstances at hand. Use the list of common values on page 12 as a place to start. See if you can look at the situation and identify 2 or 3 key values that relate to what is happening. Even if you can only identify one value, that is enough. In general, the more values that are being crossed or unfulfilled, the more emotionally charged or difficult the situation may be. That is why identifying these will help you greatly in the last two steps of the Courageous Conversation. This step will make more sense once you read the examples that follow.

Courageous Conversation

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

3. Validate: After you acknowledge the person and silently identify the values being crossed, it's equally important to validate their feelings. Validation of feelings does not mean you agree with their feelings, or that you would have the same feelings in a similar situation. It does not mean you condone their feelings or actions. At the same time, it does not place any judgment on feelings or actions. It simply lets the person know that the way they felt or acted is understandable *given their values or the situation as it was*.

This is very important. We all have a fundamental need to feel normal, regardless of what we are experiencing in life. When people are validated, they share more. They feel more whole. They remain open and emotionally alive. With children, this helps ensure that maturation does not have to be a deadening process. When you validate someone, you become approachable. With a spouse, this deepens connection because you can remain vulnerable and authentic. By doing this with children, you are teaching them that they are safe to learn and grow with you as their guide.

Words for validating

It is understandable that you feel that way...

No one could blame you for feeling...

I can see that you feel _____ and that makes sense...

That's perfectly normal. It can be very upsetting when something like that happens.

Based on your values (or beliefs, or the way you saw that), it's no wonder that you feel that way.

It's ok to feel that way. Just feel it and don't judge yourself.

You will likely notice as you read through this that validating someone is different than how most of us communicate on a regular basis. It is our natural tendency to evaluate and solve things. When we refrain from judgment and the need to fix things right away, we allow a space for the person to just sit with their reality for a few moments. This has the effect of de-escalating any emotions that are associated with the issue. With emotions in check, the first step of effective problem-solving can commence in Step 4, *Brainstorm*. If you start problem-solving at this point, you will miss out on some golden nuggets of information and sharing. Resist the urge to jump into fixing it or, worse, telling the other person your opinions or ideas right away. It's worth repeating: **RESIST!**

Cara Day

Courageous Conversation

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

Here are some examples of what it sounds like to acknowledge, identify the value, and validate. The examples in this book are with a child, but the format is the same for a person of any age or circumstance.

Example 1: Parent

Parent: Both your dirty and your clean clothes are on the ground. There are food plates and cups in your room. You can't find things you look for because so many things are out of place. When I see your things on the ground and not being taken care of, it makes me feel like I don't want to buy things for you.

Child: I want my room to be clean, it's always a mess and I can't stand it that way. But, it's a waste of time for me to clean it because it just gets messy again. Besides, I'd rather be doing other things.

Acknowledge: Parent: I'm hearing you say you want your room to be clean, but you are having trouble keeping up with it because you'd rather be doing other things. And, it's frustrating that it always seems to get messy again. Did I get that right?

Child: Yes, that's right.

Parent silently identifies a possible value or two that is being crossed or unfulfilled.

Values identified: Organization, cleanliness, cooperation, fun

Validate: Parent: It's understandable that you might have difficulty keeping up with it because you are more excited about your other activities than you are about cleaning. Most of us are like that! It can seem like a waste of time to complete chores that you have to do over and over again.

Explanation of values identified:

Organization: The child likes to have her things and surroundings organized.

Cleanliness: The child likes to keep her things and her surroundings clean.

Cooperation: The child likes to please her parents by being a cooperative member of the family, which includes keeping her own room clean.

Fun: The child likes to do things that are fun.

If you feel like you just accomplished nothing because nothing has been solved, think again!

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Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

Example 2: Teacher

Teacher: You have been off-task in class. I see you doing other things when you are supposed to be getting started on assignments. Sometimes you are talking with other students or moving around the room. Your grades are already being affected. If you continue with these choices, you may get so far behind that it could be difficult to rectify and you may even end up failing this class or getting a grade that will bring your GPA down significantly. This could keep you from achieving the bigger goals you have set for yourself.

Child: I have to get up at 6:30 every morning and I don't get home until 7:30 at night because of soccer practice, then I have 2 hours of homework most nights. It's too much. I don't like school anymore and sometimes I think what we are learning is useless. So, sometimes in class I just want to take a break.

Acknowledge: Teacher: Let me see if I get this. You have a 12- to 15-hour day every school day and that feels very overwhelming to you. It's making you not like school and also causing you to 'check-out' sometimes while you're in class.

Child: Yes, that's it.

Teacher silently identifies a possible value or two that is being crossed or unfulfilled.

Values identified: Self-care, tranquility, recreation, fun, learning

Validate: Teacher: Since you have to get up at 6:30 a.m. and don't get home after soccer until 7:30 at night and then have homework to do, it's perfectly understandable that you would be feeling very overwhelmed. Anyone in your shoes would feel the same way. It also makes sense that if something seems uninteresting to you and you don't see how it's going to benefit you, or how it lines up with your bigger goals, that you would have a hard time focusing on it.

Explanation of values identified:

Self-care: The child requires 10 hours of sleep to feel rested and to support healthy growth.

Tranquility: The child requires downtime to be happy and relaxed.

Recreation and fun: The child requires time to just have fun in order to increase engagement when its time to work

Learning: The child is curious and likes learning about things he feels he can apply to real things in his life or that he is interested in.

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Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

Example 3: Therapist

Therapist: From what you've described and what your parents shared with me, it sounds like you've been having some trouble lately with telling the truth. You have said things that are not true, or are only partly true, and the rest is more of a story. A couple of times you have told lies that have helped you get to do things you probably should not have been able to do. What are your thoughts about this?

Child: I don't know why I lie. It just comes out. Sometimes it feels easier to lie or I want someone to think something about me.

Acknowledge: Therapist: Ok, let me give that back to you and you can tell me where I'm wrong. You are not always aware when you are lying, or sure of why you are doing it. Sometimes you lie to make things easier or so that other people will see you in a certain way. Did I get that right?

Child: Yes, that's it.

Therapist silently identifies a possible value or two that is being crossed or unfulfilled.

Values identified: Honesty, attention, harmony, cooperation

Validate: Therapist: Well, I know that you like things to go smoothly and you are very cooperative. That's one of your strengths! It's understandable to me that you might think lying could be easier sometimes in terms of keeping the peace. It's also natural to want attention from others and to think that lying might be a way of getting that. It makes sense.

Explanation of values identified:

Honesty: The child wants to be honest.

Attention: The child wants to be noticed.

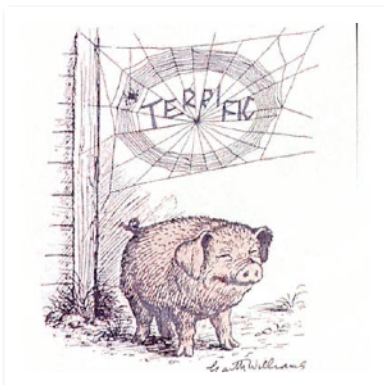
Harmony: The child wants the people and situations around her to be harmonious.

Cooperation: The child likes to be a cooperative person which includes being honest with others.

Courageous Conversation

Skill: Center

AFFIRMATION	MEANING / PURPOSE
There's room for this, too.	In this affirmation, the word "room" means "space." The space that is being created is symbolic within me. The word "this" means something that is unexpected or annoying. This affirmation helps me create a spaciousness within myself for something I do not necessarily want to have showing up in my life at the given time, or at all. For example, you may be coming home from work and want to come into a quiet house. When you get home, your kids are making all kinds of noise. By taking in a deep breath and quietly saying the affirmation, "There's room for this, too," you can center yourself and avoid feeling annoyed, or as annoyed as you might have been. It can be used with something as small as a child making an unnecessary noise, to a time when someone gives you devastating news, or something similar.
May I be the space for this.	A variation on the previous, serving the same purpose.
One chance.	This reminds me that I have only this one chance to respond to the situation. There are no true do-overs in life and the quality of life is determined in large part by how we handle its most difficult moments. This affirmation helps put me in that space in a potentially difficult or escalating situation.



"With the right words, you can change the world."

~Charlotte A. Cavatica, *Charlottes' Web*

Courageous Conversation

Skill: Center

Affirmations: Continued

AFFIRMATION	MEANING / PURPOSE
First, last, only.	A variation on the previous. Affirming that this is potentially the first, last, and only time for this interaction.
I am love.	This affirmation helps me operate from love, rather than fear. I believe we come from a source of love and that therefore we <i>are</i> that love. Love is our true essence.
I am light.	A variation on the previous. I imagine my light (love) shining out through me.
I am a flute and love plays through me.	A variation on I am love, with a visual that I like.
I have enough, I give enough, I am enough.	This puts me in a space of being whole, complete, and perfect, just as I am. It reminds me that I am enough, at this very moment. There is <i>nothing</i> more that is needed.
I am safe.	This affirmation helps me remember that, existentially, I am safe in the world, that all things are as they should be, even this experience, and that fear is an illusion of the ego when it's threatened. Unless someone is sticking me with a pin, I am not in pain, and all suffering is a creation of the mind.
No big moment.	This affirmation grounds me in presence as a reminder that there is no future, big moment that is going to happen that brings meaning to life. The only meaning is in this moment, a gift that has been given to us. Happiness is created on a moment to moment basis and I want to experience each little one of them fully.
Play full out.	A variation on the previous, serving the same purpose. (This is also our family motto.) This life is not a dress rehearsal. This is it. We live it passionately and fully.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

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Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Introduction

The words you use, how they are put together, combined with the open, expansiveness of your eyes, your tone of voice, and the warmth of your body language help determine the quality of your communication with your children. This is what they are going to remember. They are not going to remember whether the floor was clean, or what kind of car you chose to drive them around in. They are going to remember how your face looked throughout their childhood, how easy your smile came, and how you handled yourself at life's most challenging moments. I wrote these lists because a couple who attended a Happy Kids class I presented said to me during the class, "But what are the actual words you say?" This had also come up frequently in coaching sessions with parents. It was then that I realized that many parents struggle with finding the right words, even if they are already adept at staying calm and centered. I spent the next year writing down everything I said that help creates our family culture so it can be shared here.

The questions and phrases are grouped into sections, although many overlap. The lists can also be used as a tool for centering. This means you can quietly read one or more of the lists to yourself as a way to get into a space of being ready to listen, empathize, empower, and guide your loved one. Post the pages you are concentrating on in your closet, by your desk, or anywhere you regularly look. Read through the questions, take a cleansing breath, and begin your day. Use it as often as necessary to recenter. Put some of your favorites on sticky notes in key places, or on the notepad in your phone. Sometimes I print a question or phrase out very small, in 6 or 8 pitch, and tape it to my smart phone as a reminder about something I'm working on at the time or with a particular child or person in my life.

General Do's and Don'ts of the Winning Ways to Speak

Things to do:

- Ask open-ended questions. This means the question cannot be answered with only a yes or a no.
- Make eye contact. Take cleansing breaths as needed while you speak with your loved one.
- Most of the questions in this mini-e-book can be followed up with, "Tell me more about that." Sometimes, several times. Get as much as you can from the questions.
- When the person you are talking to says, "I don't know." Say, "What would it be if you did know?"
- When a child is afraid of punishment or judgment, say "There's probably not a lot you could say to me that I have not done or felt myself. I can almost guarantee that. I'll help you no matter what."
- Telling children regularly, "You are safe. I'm not going to give up on you. This is a safe space for you. I will always help you." will help them start and keep sharing.
- Center and re-center on creating connection, as needed, throughout any discussion.
- Only say things that are true, kind, and needed.

Things to not do:

- Explain how you are older and/or wiser and know more.
- Look at your phone or take a call during a conversation.
- Express exasperation that you are having the conversation again, if it is a repeat topic.
- Talk about yourself or your own experiences without asking permission first.
- Ask your child, "When will you ever learn?" or similar shame-based language.
- Use put-downs or zingers.
- Hold the need to be right.
- End the conversation before they do, unless a boundary needs to be set for your own well-being.

Following these guidelines will help you avoid common pitfalls that stifle communication and cause children to get out the brick and mortar.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Rejoining

Words for when:

- You see your child after you have not seen them for a little or long while.
- You want to give your child an open-ended chance to share.
- You want to ask your loved one how their day was without saying, "How was your day?"

Tell me something new.

Tell me something I don't know about you today.

What's new with you today?

What's the best thing that happened today?

What great thing happened today?

Tell me a funny story from today.

Tell me something you think might surprise me about today.

Tell me about you.

What wonderful thing happened today?

What could have been better about today?

What would you have done differently today, if you had a little time machine?

What are you going to take away from today?

What are you going to do differently tomorrow because of today?

Who or what challenged you today?

What's a goal you have for tomorrow as a result of today?

Praising

Words for when:

- You want to give your child specific feedback about choices they are making.
- You want your child to know that you notice him or her.
- You want your child to feel your love verbally.

Important note: Instead of saying, "Good job," or a similar phrase when your child is on track, describe what they did and the specific or likely outcome of the choice they made. This is the type of praise that will have meaning for your child, will likely lead to more effective choices, and will help them learn how to give this same type of praise to others.

You got everything you had to get done first, and now you can enjoy playing.

You helped clear and wash the dishes, everything is cleaned up, and we are ready for tomorrow.

Your room is tidy. You know where everything is and you are taking good care of your belongings.

You chose not to argue back with him. You avoided escalating the situation and that is helping our whole family.

You showed courage in talking with her. No matter the outcome, you can know you did your best.

You are full of good choices. The choices you are making are helping everyone to get along and do better. Thank you.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Loving

Words for when:

- You want to show your child how excited you are to be their parent.
- You want to increase the loving feeling in your home.
- You want to express love and gratitude to your spouse or partner in front of your children.

I love you
 Thank you...
 I love it when you...
 You make me smile so much!
 You make my heart go pitter-pat when you...
 You are so great!
 You are a magical part of our family--thank you!
 I'm so lucky to have you in my life.
 You are so great--I can't believe you're mine!
 That was super. I think you're wonderful.
 Wow. Look what you did!
 Thanks for loving me.
 Thanks for loving me through this.
 I love the way you love me.
 You give the best love.
 We have such a great family.
 This is so much fun.
 I can't wait to snuggle you when I get home.
 Thank you for helping our family.
 I can't believe what a lucky duck I am.
 You're making our family great.
 You are such a fun person.
 You are the BEST. (Men especially like to be told this.)
 I can't believe I get to live with all these great people.

Look at us, having so much fun.
 I looked forward to seeing you all day.
 You're a GGT. (Guaranteed Good Time)
 You crack me up.
 You are my gift.
 Look at us! We are so awesome.
 I feel so happy inside.
 Look at you! You're shining.
 We are such a great team.
 Oh my goodness, you'd better hug me.
 Wow, now we're on a roll.
 I love being with you.
 Who wants to give me a squeeze hug?
 This is such a special day.
 I love our family. I'm so glad you're in it.
 Wow, look at all this love.

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Words for Connecting

Words for when:

- Your child is wanting to share information or a story
- You are wanting your child to share information or a story
- You are in a potentially emotional discussion with your child, or you are discussing an issue or problem
- You are wanting to create a safe space for your child to share openly
- You want your child to be gentle with him or herself and not judge the way they are feeling or what they are experiencing

Tell me more.

I'm curious about that. What else can you tell me?

Can you dig a little deeper? I want to know more.

I'm not going to give up on you. I believe in you.

I want to know more about you. Tell me something else.

I can see you are struggling, be gentle with yourself.

Why do you think you're going through this right now?

What gifts do you think might come from this experience?

How can I best love you right now?

In what ways are you settling or selling yourself short?

What will it take for you to take the next step?

What would it look like if you removed all judgment?

What would the highest version of you say about this?

Let's write down everything on your mind so it can be more clear.

Let's talk about the worst thing that could happen. Chances are it won't be that bad.

On a scale of 1 - 10, how _____ are you? (upset, engaged, anxious, hopeful, etc.)

Let's brainstorm options for the possible outcomes.

Tell me what's going on for you right now.

You seem frustrated and I want to get your thoughts.

What's in front of you right now?

You seem weighed down. What's causing that weight?

Tell me about something that's important to you right now.

Why are you feeling so happy?

You seem angry and I want you to feel understood.

If you feel unsure about something, I can help you think of ideas or make a decision.

I can help you solve a problem if you want me to.

You seem sad and if you want I can help you figure out why.

You seem overwhelmed and I'd like to help you get a handle on things.

I know you haven't done this before. In what ways does it feel a little scary for you?

What is one thing you can tell me so I will understand you?

What kind of love do you need right now?

I'm going to love you through this. What's the first thing I can do to love you right now?

How do you feel about tomorrow?

At what other time have you felt this way?

Why do you think this is happening?

What's holding you back?

How can you be the space for this?

How could you allow room for this, too?

What can you do about that?

What's going on in there?

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Empowering

Words for when:

- You want to help the people you love move past limiting beliefs they may hold about themselves, others, or the world.
- You want to help the people you love move past habitual thought patterns that may be keeping them from greatness.
- You want to show your family that you are willing to dig deep with them, not just stay at the surface with things that are important to them or are affecting them.

What can you do about this situation?

What is something you could do that might seem like the opposite of what you've been thinking?

What would you do if you had no fears around this situation?

If your best friend was in this situation, what would you say to him or her?

Can I describe it to you from my perspective?

Would you like to hear my thoughts on this?

Can I challenge you a little bit on this?

If it's ok with you, I'd like to share my feelings on this with you.

Can we explore that a little more?

What are you really trying to say here?

What's holding you back?

What really bothers you about doing that?

What would it take to get over that obstacle?

Let's think about your values and see how this lines up with them.

What would it mean for you if you overcame this?

What could you do differently?

How have you overcome a similar challenge in the past?

Let me ask you about that idea. Where did it come from?

How is your idea working for or against you?

How emotional are you in this situation?

If this situation comes up again, how do you think you will handle it?

What do you mean by _____?

Talk to me about what it means to _____?

How true is that belief, really?

How has holding that belief affected you?

How might you let that belief go?

How can you put that into action, right away?

What's your first action step going to be?

What's another way to look at that?

What might be the completely opposite point of view about this situation?

What might a good friend say to you right now?

Think of a few other possible ways to look at this.

What would someone else you know that you respect say about what happened?

What do you really want to come out of this?

Winning Ways to Speak with Children

Shifting

Words for when:

- Your child is at a point where a situation is likely to escalate and they may get “in trouble”
- You notice you are escalating and want to help yourself maintain your emotions
- You want to empower your child to make a change in their words or actions, right in the moment
- You want to offer your child an opportunity for your child to avoid receiving a penalty (see Choice Chart, page 7).

Your mind is very powerful. Think of something positive right now and see if you can shift yourself.

Check in with yourself. What do you need right now?

Get control of yourself. Take a breath and know you are safe.

Please listen so you can understand.

Please stand in the focus position.

Look at me, please.

Please give me your full body attention.

Please keep your body still and listen to what I am saying to you.

Think about what is going to happen if you cannot shift yourself right now.

If you want, we can have a do-over. Let's start over right now.

Ask yourself how this is going to work out for you.

If you continue with this, you will be _____, and we will all be _____.

(for example, “in your room” and “out here playing the game.”)

Think about what it is like right now for all of us who are interacting with you.

What is your contribution to this situation going to be?

How do you want to show up right now?

What can you do to be your best self right now?

Press your pause button and let me know when you are ready.

Take a moment for yourself please. Let me know when you feel better.

Get ahold of yourself and make a choice that is going to make you feel better.

Shift yourself so you can feel good.

Shift yourself so you can make a good choice.

You can make a new choice, right now, right away.

Are you helping our family to be strong right now?

Please think about the choice you are making.

Please come up with a choice that is going to make you feel great.

Please decide where you are going to go to be able to make good choices right now.

Please decide who you will be near in order to be able to make good choices right now.

Please think about a boundary you can put on right now that will help you be your best self.

Take some time for some silence right now please.

Please remember you can make a new choice right away and start having fun again.

Remember it is a choice to feel good.

Remember it is a choice to be your best self.

Remember your choices will determine how this is going to work out for you.

I am here to help you. I am not going to give up on you.

How can I help right now?