

Winning Ways to Speak



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Winning Ways to Speak

Dedicated to Annelise, Mackenzie, Thomas, and Addison Day for
always creating opportunities for me to find just the right words to love you best.

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An excerpt from the appendix of *The Chit Chat*

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Winning Ways to Speak

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 (and other loved ones). 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.

The questions and phrases in this ebook are grouped into sections, although many overlap. It's useful to 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 as a parent. 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, or post the words as a screensaver.

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-ebook 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 the 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 language.
- Use put-downs or zingers.
- Hold the need to be right.
- End the conversation before they do, without good reason.

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

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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.

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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 squeezey 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.

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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. What about it feels 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?

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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?

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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 at Daychild.org).

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?