



11 Powerful Phrases

FOR INTENTIONAL PARENTS

“At the same time...”

Instead of using the word “but” (which can undo everything you said before it) choose the phrase, “at the same time”. It conveys the message that your child has been heard. “At the same time” you can still state your concerns.

“It’s time to....”

Sometimes we unintentionally make things sound optional. “Would you like to get dressed?” “Want to eat now?” If it isn’t really a choice, don’t make it sound that way. “It’s time to get dressed.” “It’s time for dinner.”

“Tell me about....”

When we engage with our children as they create or play, it’s tempting to show our interest by passing judgement. “What a pretty drawing!” “That’s a good house!” Rather than stating our own opinion, make your interaction more genuine by asking your child to tell you about it. “Wow! Tell me about this drawing.” “You’ve been building that for a very long time. Would you like to tell me about it?”

“What do you think you could do?”

It’s tempting to jump in and solve our kids’ problems. But they need experience as problem solvers. Rather than telling them what to do, we can simply support them through the process, beginning with inviting them to own the challenge and brainstorm out loud.



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“How can I help you?”

Similarly, there are times when a child clearly needs our help. But we need to be sure to help, not rescue. We want to offer our abilities without taking away their responsibilities. “How can I help you with this broken glass?”

“How can I help you clean your room?”

“I see....”

“I see two children who both want the same toy....” “I see you look very upset...” Stating your observations as you come upon a problem helps to prevent you from placing blame or making assumptions. And that keeps everyone more open to problem-solving because you’re starting from a place of trying to understand, rather than trying to place blame. Simply start by describing what you see in a completely nonjudgmental way. Then invite the children to help you fill in the rest.

“What I know is...”

There are times when our kids tell us things we KNOW are not true. But when we jump to, “That’s a lie!”, they typically shut down or become defensive.

Whether it’s lying, magical thinking, or a complete misunderstanding, we can avoid an argument or an overreaction by calmly starting with what we know. “What I know is that there were four cookies on the plate when I left.”

“What I know is that toys can’t move by themselves.” “What I know is that Jesse’s mom wasn’t home today.”



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“Help me understand...”

Similarly, inviting a child to help you understand, is less accusatory than “explain yourself”. It communicates that you don’t understand, but you WANT to. “Help me understand how this got here.” “Help me understand what happened.”

“I’m sorry...”

Kids aren’t always the ones making the mistakes in these difficult situations. Sometimes our imperfections are the best starting point for important learning opportunities. When we apologize for our shortcomings, we model how to make appropriate apologies, but also teach our children that we all make mistakes. When they see us acknowledge and apologize, they learn that they can do the same.

“Thank you...”

Along with all the hard situations, we have to acknowledge the great ones. (Or even a great sliver of a really hard day.) Just like we want to know our hard work is appreciated every day, our children want to know that their effort is noticed as well. “Thank you for packing your lunch this morning.” “Thank you for being such a respectful listener.” “Thank you for helping your sister.” Even, “Thank you for doing your jobs. I know you wanted to do other things first. (Unspoken: Because you threw a big fit beforehand.) I really appreciate you doing it even though it was hard.”

“I love you.”

Before, during, and after our most challenging situations with our kids, we should convey to them that they are always safe and loved, no matter what.