

GETTING IN TOUCH



1. What are some feelings a child might have when (s)he...
...asks, "Why do doggies bark?"
...says, "I hate you!"
...soils pants, or wets the bed, although (s)he's been toilet trained.
...keeps crying, but doesn't want a bottle.
...smiles and gurgles to self.
2. What are some negative ways in which parents react to the situations above instead of listening, e.g., when they are busy or in a bad mood?

CASE STUDIES



1. Questions, corrections, instructions, warnings, etc., are necessary at times, even though they are not 'noticing' comments. Can you pick out any of the comments below that you think are examples of 'noticing' what the child is doing? (i.e., 'play-listening') – though much obviously depends on the speaker's tone of voice!
 - a). What are you going to do with the ball?
 - b). You're going off with your ball to play.
 - c). No, don't go over there with the ball!
 - d). Why did you take the ball there?
 - e). That was a good hard kick!
 - f). Give me the ball, and I'll show you how to kick it.
 - g). You're getting better at kicking it!
 - h). Careful with the ball! Stay away from the baby!
2. Can you think of some 'noticing' comments you could make to a child in the situations below? (You might 'notice' colours, garments, shapes, actions, etc.) The child is...
a) playing in sand. b) dressing dolls and putting them to bed. c) building a lego house.

PLANNING



1. You are not expected to listen attentively all the time, but how will you make at least one child special by setting aside some time for 'listening,' perhaps two or three times in the coming week? Which child will you listen to? When and where will that child tend to be more receptive? – bedtime? bath time? at play?... What might help? – Eye-listening? 'Noticing' comments? Silence? Cuddling or touching?... (Note that listening is just as important for babies/ infants as it is for other children – they thrive on 'play-listening,' 'touch-listening' or 'eye-listening' long before they can talk.)
2. Would you like to arrange with your partner to have a regular time in the evening, or a few times a week, for listening to each other? You might talk, for example, about what's been happening for you recently, what you've been thinking, and how you've been feeling. (If you do not have a partner, you may like to make a similar arrangement with a friend – many people find it easier to cope with tensions and stresses when they can talk them out with someone.)

My plans _____

• Please read chapter four of your handbook before the next session.

CHAPTER 4: TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

"You're becoming a bully!"

There was a thud on the floor above, followed by a child's scream.

"What is going on!" Frank roared, as he tore up the stairs, "What has got into you both this morning! You haven't given me *one* minute's peace!" Upstairs, he continued to shout at the children, "Jordan, what do you think you're doing? You're becoming a little *bully*! And you wipe that smirk off your face, Janice, because you're just as bad – you haven't stopped pestering me all morning... Do you think I have nothing better to do than run up and down these stairs!..

Even as he shouted, Frank knew in his heart that he was making the situation worse. What he was doing was pointless, ineffective, negative, even abusive. He himself was doing the real bullying. Yet he felt as if he had little control over how he was acting.

And it was understandable. Frank was exploding with feelings that needed an outlet. He had been made redundant at work three months ago, and he resented being stuck at home minding children. This morning, he felt particularly helpless and worried for he had just heard that his mother, who lived far away, had broken her hip. The children's normal fighting and squabbling had irritated him a lot recently, but it was driving him crazy today.

"It sounds worse when I'm upset"

Back downstairs, he sat down and sank his head in his hands. Time to think. And to feel. "I'm not coping well. I don't want to be like this. What am I going to do?..."

A few moments later, it was clear to him: "I know. I'll *tell* them."

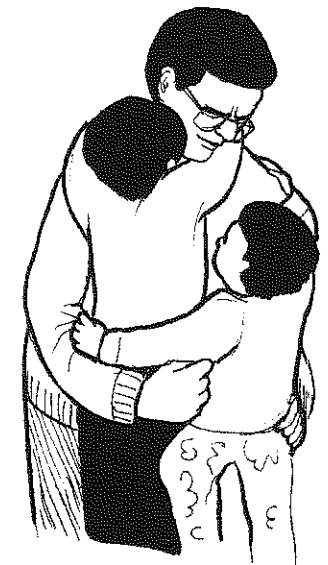
He went upstairs again and sat on the bed in the children's room.

"I need to talk with you for a minute." His voice already sounded softer. His feelings were no longer controlling him. He was taking control.

Five-year-old Jordan and three-year-old Janice looked up, uncertain.

"Listen, I'm in terrible form this morning. I've just got news about granny. She fell and broke her hip – that's this part here – and she's in hospital. I'm sure the doctors and nurses are looking after her well, but I wish we could see her. I'm sorry for shouting and saying those things. I didn't mean them – I was just upset. I love you both, but your squabbling sounds worse when I'm upset. Can you understand that?"

What happened next surprised Frank. Jordan came over and put his arms around him. Janice followed. Deciding to tell his children how he was feeling had changed a nasty situation into a moment of closeness.



a moment of closeness

A you-message or an I-message?

Think about what happened there. You notice that the first time Frank spoke with the children, his voice was raised, he was name-calling, faultfinding, attacking, not respectful. It was all 'you, you, you.' There are eight different 'you-messages' in what he said. **When someone uses the word 'you' a lot in an aggressive tone of voice, we can be pretty sure they are in a negative, blaming mood, putting people down and discouraging them.**

The second time Frank spoke with the children, the big difference was that he

used 'I' messages. He spoke personally instead of blaming. He used 'I' instead of 'you.' He took responsibility for his own feelings and said how he felt (I'm in terrible form, I'd love..., I'm sorry..., I was upset...)

This is not always easy to do. You may need to cool down first before you can talk. Or maybe you need to talk with a friend to off load some of your stronger feelings. But when you can speak personally, it is generally more effective. Even if it had not been effective, however, even if it had made no difference, it was *respectful*.

How we fail to show respect

That is what we are looking at in this chapter – how we can talk more respectfully with children. Perhaps a good starting point is to become more aware of the ways in which we *fail* to respect them. Very often, like Frank above, we would not dream of harming or frightening a child, but we can easily end up doing just that, without thinking; when we are weary, annoyed, or impatient and we react with anger or rage, unaware that **small children cannot understand or cope with raw adult emotions**. Or we dismiss children with "I don't want to hear any tales" – with the result that they may trust us less and we do not hear things we need to hear. Or we make scary threats like, "If you do that again, I'll give your Teddy away to one of those good boys!" or, "I'm going to get the police" (some of us even make God into a kind of policeman – "And remember – when I'm not here, God can still see you!") In doing this, we usually have no idea of the harm we may be doing or the long-term effect on the child. Some of our 'you-messages' may include words like thoughtless, stupid, rude, clumsy, bad, stubborn, lazy, mean, selfish, liar, idiot, pest, bully, thief, and so on. These names can stick, and may influence a child's thinking, sometimes for life.

But perhaps the main way we do not show respect is with the constant barrage of instructions and corrections delivered to a child in a bossy voice. Can you imagine how your visitors would feel if

you talked to them as you talk to your child? – "What did I tell you to do with that coat? Hang it up!... Not there – on the hook!... Are you blind? – there! Now, get onto the chair and eat up! Without a word!... Not there – that's my chair, and you know it! Come on, hurry up! You don't have to take all day! Eat up, I said. Now, look at the mess you've made! – a little pig would have more manners! Here, wipe your face!... That's not wiped – wipe it properly!... Come on, no talking, just finish!... Now, out you go to the garden and talk to Andrew! No fighting!... And don't let me see any mud on those trousers when you come back!..."

How many of your friends would want to come back? The relationship with your child will naturally suffer and the friendship between you will lessen. What can you do instead?

Using I-messages

One thing that helps is to **correct the behaviour but not the person**. It is better to say, "That was a naughty thing to do" than to say "You're a naughty little girl!" or "You're a lazy little boy!" or "You're stupid!" (It's best to say *exactly* what you didn't like, and not to use labels like 'naughty' or 'stupid' at all). Most 'you-messages' are unhelpful because they



"I'll give your Teddy away..."

blame or attack the *person* rather than the behaviour.

This is another advantage in using 'I' messages, for they, too, focus on behaviour rather than on the child – "I'm angry that you hit the baby – I won't take that behaviour."/ "When you shout like that, I get nervous you'll waken granny."/ "I'm annoyed you've spilt that when I've just cleaned the floor."

There is no guarantee that an 'I' message will *correct* a behaviour, but at least it does not attack the child and can be part of effective discipline (which we will look at in the next chapter).

Let's look at 'I' messages in more detail, for they offer a *respectful* way of talking with children. You use the word 'I' or 'me,' and:

- you simply say what you *feel* (I'm annoyed you got out of bed./ I was glad to see you playing with her./ I don't like it when you do that.)
- or you say what you *need* (I need you to be quiet./ I need a rest),
- or you say what your *position* is (I want you to eat with the spoon./ I can't allow you to do that).

Can you see how these statements do not accuse or attack? "I would like you to play quietly" is so much more respectful than "Hey! – don't be making so much noise in here!" – provided your tone of voice is also calm and firm.

Talked out or acted out

Sometimes parent educators can give the impression that everything will be okay if we only give the right 'I' messages to our children. 'I'-messages, however, can be used too often. "Please pick that up off the floor" is not an 'I' message, yet it is a respectful request. The point is that a disapproving, impatient or critical *tone of voice* will obviously affect the way a child *experiences* what you say. Showing respect has more to do with *how* we speak than with *what* we say.

That said, what we are teaching children with a good 'I' message is that it is okay to have feelings and needs, and that

there are healthy ways of dealing with anger – **that anger can be talked out instead of being acted out**. (You might at least say you are too angry to talk it out until you calm down a bit.) But if you *shout* an 'I' message, if your tone of voice is aggressive or threatening, or if it sounds as if you are blaming the child for your feelings, then that is no longer an 'I' message.

Talking positively

'I' messages are not just for giving corrections. It is important to share your vulnerable feelings, your concerns for your children, and your positive feelings – what you enjoy, your hopes, your love. In chapter two, we saw how encouraging it can be for a child when you speak positively, using 'I' or 'me' – "That helped me – thank you."/ "I love you just the way you are."/ "I was happy when I saw you doing that."/ "One of the best things I ever did was to have you."/ "I was pleased you stopped when I asked you to – thank you."/ "Mm. I like your picture. Can I put it up on the wall?"/ "I like going for a walk with you."

Even 'I' messages that correct can be made more encouraging if you add a positive ending. "I don't like it when you're bossy because it hides the lovely gentle side there is to you."/ "I don't want you doing that to the baby because it hurts her – though I know you don't mean to hurt her."/ "I'm disappointed you left your toys like this, because you tidied them well yesterday – you did a good job."

This emphasis on being positive and respectful is the single most important point in this chapter. Right through the book, we have continually seen the importance of giving positive attention to children. It would be difficult to exaggerate its effect on a child's confidence, self-esteem and behaviour. But speaking positively does not come easily to many of us. Psychologists observing parents communicating with small children recorded the number of corrections, accusations, instructions, threats, yes/no

questions, warnings and put downs they heard – and the number of friendly comments. They found very few friendly comments! Their conclusion was that, **even when parents are not speaking disrespectfully to their children, there is still a serious lack of positive communication in what is being spoken.** Corrections and instructions are a necessary part of parenting, but if positive communication is so essential for children's growth and development, isn't it sad when most of what we say is *Don't... Stop! No! Wait! Where did you leave your shoe? Hurry up! Why did you hit him? Be quiet! Eat up. Watch where you're going! Close the door. What are you crying about!*

So what can we do to make the way we talk with children a more positive, friendly experience for them?



"What would you like us to talk about?"

Talking with babies

Take babies first. A baby may not understand words, but she is remarkably sensitive and open to positive communication from a parent. She watches you carefully and senses your moods from the look on your face, the ways you touch her, your silence, your smile, your tone of voice... She does not need to understand your words to know that what you are

saying is friendly and positive and warm. Parents seem to know that instinctively. Many of us are excellent at listening to and talking with babies and small infants. It does not worry us that infants cannot understand our words – we tend to smile and chat and say lovely, encouraging things.

It is good that we tell them often that we love them, for researchers have found in many studies that these **messages of love from a parent have a calming, reassuring effect, even on tiny infants.** In talking like this, we do far more than help a child's language development; we give him a great, positive start in life and we give him a sense of belonging and security.

Making time for talking

As children get older, they have the same need for positive attention. **They need to hear often that we love them, not just to guess it.** And they need us to continue to chat with them, tell them stories and 'notice' them positively. There are lots of opportunities for little snatches of conversation during the day. What about your talk at the table? – or while you work, travel, walk in the park, or visit the post office or shops? When you decide to cut back on corrections and warnings – or 'baby-talk!' – and to start a chat, you can help to build on children's experience, naming what you are seeing and doing, asking questions, stretching their language and horizons and their ability to think. (As you perform a task, you can also avoid sexism by making your daughter familiar with a screwdriver, a spade, a rake, and by making your son familiar with a sieve, a tin opener, sewing materials...) You will probably find that discipline and correction are less necessary once your child is engaged and interested.

Some parents tend to be pretty good at giving positive attention at bedtime, but it is best not just always to read stories from a book. Try stopping in the middle of a story and asking, "What do you think is coming next?" or "How do you feel about that?" In this way you encourage a two-way chat.

Children also love stories 'from your head,' especially stories about when you (or they) were small. Telling them stories about what they used to do when they were smaller helps to build their sense of belonging and self-worth. Stories about when *you* were small are equally helpful – you may find memories come flooding back as you talk about your childhood, about your first day in school, 'adventures' you had, how you got on with your friends, what your parents were like with you, what toys you had and how you played. **Children are fascinated with these stories, especially by what you were like when you were the age they are now. And this gives them a sense of their own roots.** It helps, of course, to look at a child as you are speaking, because eye contact will help communication (but don't insist on the child making eye contact with you). It also helps to be close, to be touching or cuddling a young child, perhaps to get into bed beside your pre-schooler and ask something like, "What would you like us to talk about?"

Where will they get their values?

As well as the obvious benefits arising from these chats, there is the added advantage of helping children to form values and develop their sense of right and wrong. After all, who is influencing your children or helping them decide what is important in life? Will they get most of their values from television, or from friends, or from you? **Studies show that you have far more influence on them than anyone else.** You do not need to have a degree or be a wonderful communicator: all you need is to be yourself and to spend time with them. When you tell stories, when you explain what is important to you and why you act as you do (as Frank did in the story at the beginning of this chapter), you reassure a child, you stretch her imagination and her world, you encourage her to think, and you influence her value system as it forms. You release a child from guilt, and change how he sees things, for example, when you

say something like, "As you know, Dad and I don't get on well, but it's not your fault – we're just very different and we've often disagreed about things, even before you were born."

A message for yourself

Finally, a word about how all this applies to your relationships with other adults. Do *you* talk to someone when you are upset? Do you talk out feelings like anger with another adult, or do you remain silent? – or do you act out your feelings by shouting, banging doors, or going off in a huff? 'I' messages are not just for talking with *children*. They help to communicate feelings and needs to *anyone*, especially to a partner, if you have one. "I need to talk with you about something. When can you listen?"/ "I'll clear the kitchen if you vacuum."/ "I'm happy to get up with the baby tonight if you get up tomorrow night."/ "I'd love a hug." **Open communication is a powerful way to build a relationship.** Speaking openly about your feelings and needs also gives a message and a model to children that it's okay for *them* to be in touch with feelings and to say what *they* feel and need. Your behaviour with a partner or with others close to you can teach children a great deal.

But keep in mind that the ideas in this book are only suggestions and guidelines, not new rules or 'shoulds.' Most of us will continue to fly off the handle at times – we will act on our feelings and forget to speak personally and respectfully, or we will say things in a hurtful, aggressive or impatient way. Then the most important 'I' message may be to come back soon with "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I'm stressed at the moment and I wasn't thinking clearly."

Summing up

In this chapter, we have been looking at how we talk with children. We see that there is often a lack of respect in what we say and (especially) in our tone of voice. This is not deliberate. There may be deep feelings within us that make it difficult for us to speak calmly. A first step may be to

find someone to talk with – or a parent support group where we can talk frankly about our frustrations.

We won't change overnight, but it helps to use the word 'I' or 'me' instead of 'you.' It also helps to practise speaking more gently and respectfully, taking greater care to avoid an aggressive tone of voice. **When children live with intolerance, they learn to be intolerant; when they live with respect, they learn to respect themselves and others.**

A great deal of what we say to children from a year upwards consists of instructions, corrections, warnings and yes/no questions. There is a lack of balance when these account for *most* of what our children hear from us. We have seen throughout this book that a child thrives on positive, focused attention. When you are able to give this attention, you will have less *need* to give corrections, warnings or instructions, and you and your child will tend to get on much better together.



I'd love a hug

TABLE 4: TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

Try ticking one of your weak points (column 1) and one of your strong points (column 2). Then mark two things in the second column you would like to improve at.

UNHELPFUL WAYS OF TALKING Ways of talking that do not show respect to children.	HELPFUL WAYS OF TALKING Speaking respectfully and personally (using 'I' or 'me').
1. THREATS It is scary for a child to hear thoughtless threats about ghosts or the police, or "the big dog outside," (or God!), or leaving her somewhere, or giving away his ball to a 'good' boy.	1. If you're upset, give an 'I' message. <i>I don't like it when you do things like that, or: I feel sad when you talk like that, or, I need time to think about this.</i>
2. NAME CALLING An occasional slip can't do much harm, but try not to call a child stupid, bad, lazy, rude, liar, idiot, thief... Names sometimes stick – for life.	2. But do say how you feel about the behaviour – <i>I'm annoyed you banged the door</i> (rather than a 'you' message like <i>You're rude!</i>)
3. BLAMING AND SHAMING In chapter two we saw that fault-finding and criticising often <i>increase</i> misbehaviour – and may do lasting damage.	3. Encouragement is like sunshine for a child, especially when it's personal: <i>I like you just the way you are. I love watching you play. I feel better after that cuddle.</i>
4. NO TIME FOR CHATS TV and toys may be educational and stimulating, but there is no substitute for some positive personal attention from you .	4. <i>As soon as your TV programme ends, we'll switch it off and have a chat. Will we talk about when I was small or when you were small?...</i>
5. SHOUTING IN ANGER If you act out anger and annoyance – slapping, shouting, or speaking in an aggressive tone – don't be surprised if our children end up doing the same.	5. Show you can talk out anger instead of acting it out – but watch your tone of voice: <i>When you do that to the baby, I feel so angry that I want to thump something.</i>
6. BABY TALK Some baby talk may be okay, but using it a lot may prevent a child's language from developing at its natural pace.	6. Natural talking stimulates a child's thinking and language. Using correct words (including for parts of the body), lays a good foundation for the future.
7. GIVING ORDERS Bossing and giving orders may get children to do what you want <i>now</i> , but they may resent you as a result – and it may not help them to form values.	7. It helps to explain <i>why</i> – to give your reasons or values: <i>If your tricycle gets rusty, I can't afford another./ I'm sorry I was so cross with you – I was very tired.</i>

GETTING IN TOUCH



We need to give corrections/ instructions to our children, but it is a pity if **most** of what we say is correcting, instructing, etc. See if you agree with the

way the first six sentences below are marked; then see if you can mark numbers 7-12, using one **each** of the letters opposite:

1. "Leave the baby alone. Don't do that to her!" C
2. "I know why Andrew's crying – because you hit him!" A
3. "Put that down. It's dirty." I
4. "Are you stupid? How often do you have to be told!" P
5. "Do it fast – or you'll be sorry!" T
6. "It's going to rain today. There's a strong wind blowing." O

C (for Correction),
A (for Accusation),
I (for Instruction),
P (for Put-down),
T (for Threat),
O (Open statement that is none of these)

7. "Stop it. That's dangerous!"
8. "Would you shut up! – you never stop moaning!"
9. "If you don't get back into bed, you'll get a smack!"
10. "I wonder if Gran will arrive in time for dinner?"
11. "Now, close the door behind you, and pick up your Teddy."
12. "That's a lie!"

CASE STUDIES



1. What are some **unhelpful** ways to correct a child in the situations below?
 - Your son puts his head down and won't look at people you meet.
 - Your daughter doesn't come when called for dinner.
 - Toys are left scattered all over the floor.
 - You're preparing dinner and the children's noise is too loud for you.
 - Your toddler is whinging all day but won't play with anything.
2. How could you speak respectfully to your child in each of the situations above? If you can think of an 'I' message, saying what you feel or need, all the better. (For example, in the first two situations you might say, **a**) "When you put your head down like that and don't look at people, I feel disappointed because people won't know how friendly you are." and **b**) (calmly – at least not aggressively) "I've spent a lot of time preparing dinner, and it makes me mad when you don't come."

PLANNING

Would you like to choose one of the following ways to talk more positively and respectfully with your child(ren) this week?



1. What is your worst time of the day for scolding/ speaking aggressively? What might help? – Get up earlier?... Think ahead?...
2. Babies may not understand words, but they certainly 'understand' your tone of voice and your undivided attention. When will you set a few minutes aside this week to talk to a baby or other child, giving positive, focused attention? What will you talk about?
3. How will you speak more *personally* over the next week – not just to your children but to a mother, partner, friend, workmate... Include *encouraging* 'I' messages as well.

My plans _____

• Please read chapter five of your handbook before the next session.

CHAPTER 5: DISCIPLINE

"You can clear up your toys now, Nicholas. It will soon be story-time."

What Annette was asking was not unreasonable, for she had taken time to teach three-year-old Nicholas to tidy away his toys, and he was usually quite good at it.

"No. I'll leave them on the floor," he said, "I'll play with them in the morning."

"That's not one of your choices," Annette said. "the floor has to be tidied. If you don't tidy the toys, I'll have to tidy them myself instead of reading you a story."

You could see Nicholas thinking. He looked at his mother intently for a moment, and then continued to play. He played quietly, perhaps hoping his mother would forget. After a while, she took him to his room, settled him to bed, kissed him, and said in a friendly tone:

"I'll go and tidy your toys now, and you can have a story tomorrow night."

Nicholas threw a tantrum and screamed, hoping Annette would change her mind, but she simply left the room. Shortly afterwards, she came back to check on him and found him asleep.

Next day, he made no objections to tidying his toys before bedtime.



"You can clear up your toys now."

Effective and respectful

In this incident, Nicholas had learnt that there were clear boundaries and limits in his world, he had even tested the limits to see if they were firm, and he now felt more secure. **When children know you mean what you say, life is easier and more peaceful all round** – including for themselves.

Annette has not used any of the common ways of 'disciplining' children which hassled parents tend to fall back on – coaxing, bribing, making decisions on the hop, reminding, nagging, making empty threats, shouting, scolding, smacking... What has she done instead? Quite simply, she has offered her son a choice – to tidy up or do without a bedtime story. And she has respected his decision, allowing him to live with the consequences of what he has chosen. **Allowing children to make choices (within limits) and to live with the consequences is a respectful, effective method of discipline.**

This is not the *only* effective and respectful method. We have been learning about effective methods of discipline in every chapter of this book – ignoring some misbehaviours, avoiding unnecessary confrontation, encouraging, listening, making time for guidance, allowing a child to express feelings that are controlling her, giving an I-message, speaking in a respectful, non-aggressive voice – and, possibly most effective of all, making time to pay positive, focused attention to a child. All of these skills are part of good discipline. But parents will not be effective if they do not set *limits* as well as showing affection.

Learning from consequences

That is what is different with this method of discipline. Many parents make threats about what will happen if a child does not go to sleep, does not eat, does not stop squabbling... Quite often, they do not follow through on what they say. They talk, but they do not act! A child quickly