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| **Bite Your Tongue: 15 Things NOT to Say to Your Children This Holiday Season** |

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Yet, there might be another important kind of talk we deliver to our children, talk that we don't give as much attention to as we do explaining traditions and beliefs or giving lectures on values. That talk, which often goes unexamined, is the words that come out of our mouths in everyday situations. There will be a lot of that common, unconscious "speak before you think" talk uttered this holiday season. So let's take this time to examine some of it before it passes our lips and is delivered to our children. Consider the following 15 utterances that enter the ears of the people we care about the most. **1. "Uncle Edmundo offends me with his swearing."** **2. "Your whining is annoying me."** **3. "You made me very happy."** The three examples above communicate a belief that others are responsible for your feelings. By not using language that owns your feelings you communicate to children that they don't have to own their own feelings either. Use self-responsible language instead. Say, "I choose to be offended when I hear words like the ones Uncle Edmundo is using." "I'm doing annoyance right now." "I'm creating happiness in this moment." **4. "Don't upset your father."** This style of language teaches your children they are in charge of their father's emotions. No, they are not. And it is not their job to take care of their father. It is the father's job to speak up for himself, ask for what he wants, and manage his own emotions. **5. "We have to go to Aunt Janice's for dinner."** Not true. There are no have-tos. This is a choice you make. You could choose not to go there. Say instead, "We get to go to Aunt Janice’s for dinner." **6. "You better behave or the elf on the shelf will see you."** A great example of shame-based parenting. A manipulation of behavior that teaches that outside forces are watching us. Children learn to behave because they might get caught rather than because it is a helpful, respectful choice. **7. "I always overcook the turkey."** Not true. The turkey turned out fine in 1999. Using the words "always" and "never" paints a picture in your mind of yourself as being *that way*. Seeing yourself as *that way*increases the likelihood that it will indeed turn out *that way*. This is not language we want our children to learn and use in their lives. **8. "No, we're not going to the movies. It's too expensive."** It is not too expensive to go to the movies. You can afford it if you buy one less present or one less bottle of expensive wine. By saying you can't afford it, you speak and think words of lack and limitation. Refrain from teaching your children to believe there is not enough. Say instead, "We're choosing to invest our money in other ways, so we are going to . . ." **9. "You should bring your dirty dishes to the kitchen."** Why not make this holiday season a should-free zone? Stop shoulding on your children and on yourself. Replace "You should bring your dirty dishes to the kitchen" with "Dirty dishes belong in the kitchen." Instead of "You should apologize to your grandfather," say, "You could apologize to your grandfather. Would you consider that?" **10. "You shouldn't have put all the food on your plate if you weren't going to eat it."**Should have and shouldn't have can also be added to that should-free zone. They are often used as shaming tactics. "I see you took more than you chose to eat. That can happen this time of year. That might be a helpful thing to remember for next time" is language that teaches rather than shames. **11. "I told you so. I knew you were going to get a tummy ache."** Being right doesn't work. It sets up a big me/little you relationship. If you want to increase resentment and create emotional distance between you and your child, say "I told you so" often. **12. "Tell your cousin you're sorry."** Why not just tell your child, "Push down your own emotions, pretend they don't exist, numb them out, and go over to your cousin and lie"? Actually, that is what you just told them when you said, "Tell your cousin you're sorry." It doesn't teach anything. It's too easy. Tell them, after they have calmed down, to tell their cousin what they learned and what they intend to do differently next time. If they want to say they are sorry after that, fine. Make "sorry" optional. **13. "Oh, I just love this present."** Do not say this if it is not true. Not to your children, your mother, or Uncle Alan. Children have built-in crap detectors and can tell if it’s true or not. So do others. If you do not like the gift, model these truthful words for your children: "Thank you so much for this. I appreciate you thinking of me and taking the time to find/make it." **14. "You have no one to blame but yourself."** Let's make blame the equivalent of a four letter word for the rest of this year and refuse to use it. Instead of being concerned with finding fault or assigning blame, concentrate on solution-seeking and teaching. Search for solutions instead of pointing fingers. Include yourself in this.  **15. "You were good kids at Grandma's and I'm proud of you."** How about we just have a moratorium on the word "good" until 2055, give or take a couple of years. "Good job." "Good girl." "Good meal." "Good pie." "Good manners." "Good story." "Good gift." Good grief, we're sick of hearing the word "good" already. "Good" is evaluative and gives no information about what was good about it. How about we all agree to say, "You did it," instead of "Good job" this year? Thank you.  **Chick Moorman** and **Thomas Haller**are the authors of*Parent Talk Essentials: How to Talk to Kids about Divorce, Sex, Money, School and Being Responsible in Today’s World.*They are two of the world's foremost authorities on raising responsible, caring, confident children. They publish free parent and educator newsletters. To subscribe to the newsletters or obtain information about how they can help you or your group meet your parenting needs, visit their websites today: [www.thomashaller.com](http://report.mynewsletterbuilder.com/t.js?s=5669afd9ddb36d05098b7169&u=35240894&v=3&key=b9a8&skey=6f8e8bc850&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.thomashaller.com) and[www.chickmoorman.com](http://report.mynewsletterbuilder.com/t.js?s=5669afd9ddb36d05098b7169&u=35240896&v=3&key=e3c5&skey=6f8e8bc850&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.chickmoorman.com).  |