

# MAKE EVERY DAY VALENTINE'S DAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN WHILE BUILDING THEIR ASSETS!

*by Vera Lane and Dorothy Molyneaux*

**ASSET BUILDING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**  
Who are only 20% of our population, but 100% of our future

## TEN WORDS AND PHRASES TO BE USED AT LEAST ONCE A DAY

**Thank you.** It's important to acknowledge your child's efforts to help you or others. You might say: "Thanks for helping me look for that missing sock" or "Thanks for setting the table; I got the salad made while you were doing that."

"Saying 'thank you' communicates that you see and acknowledge your child—a wonderful thing to let him know," says Heidi Feldman, chief of the division of general academic pediatrics at Children's Hospital, in Pittsburgh. "A child is much more likely to try to please a parent who acknowledges his contribution and his thoughtful, helping behavior."

**Tell me more.** Words like these show your child that you are listening and that you would like to hear more about what's on her mind. "Tell me more" encourages conversation without passing judgment or giving immediate advice—two responses that discourage further communication from your child.

**You can do it.** Your expression of confidence in your child's ability to do many things without your help is important. A toddler can respond to, "You're getting to be such a big boy. Pretty soon you'll be able to get dressed all by yourself." As your child grows older, there will be many times when your encouragement will mean the difference between his giving up on a challenging task to seeing it through.

**How can I help?** Let your child know you are willing and available to help her accomplish a particular task that may be difficult for her to manage on her own. You might say: "I think you can read that story by yourself now. Let me know if you need help with a new word." As your child takes on projects in school, encourage her to think of specific steps that are necessary to complete a project. You both can decide which tasks your child can handle on her own and which ones she'll need help with.

**Let's all pitch in.** A child is never too young to learn that cooperation and team effort make many jobs easier and speedier-and often more fun: "Let's all pitch in and finish raking the leaves so we can go in and bake cookies," or "Let's all pitch in and clean up or we'll miss the movie." Family activities and group chores can develop into pleasant rituals that enrich a child's life and create fond memories.

**How about a hug?** Don't just tell your child you love him-show him. Research indicates that young children deprived of physical touch and displays of affection often fail to thrive. Tiffany Field, director of the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami, says this: "Touch is as essential to the growth and well-being of a child as diet and exercise." As children grow older, they vary in the ways they like us to show affection. Some love to be cuddled, while others prefer a quick hug or pat on the shoulder. It's important to be aware of what your child enjoys most at a particular age.

**Please.** After all these years, "please" is still a classic. When you ask a favor of anyone-including children-this "magic word" acknowledges that you are asking for a behavior that will help you and/or make you happy. (P.S. Don't forget to say "thank you" when the job is done.)

**Good job.** Good for you. Self-respect and self-confidence grow when your child's efforts and performance are rewarded. Whenever possible, give your child lots of praise. Be sure your praise is honest and specific. Focus on your child's efforts and progress, and help her identify her strengths.

**It's time to...** "It's time to get ready for bed," or "do homework," or "turn off the TV." Young children need structure in their daily lives to provide a measure of security in an often insecure world. It is up to you as a parent to establish and maintain a workable schedule of activities, always remembering that children benefit from regular mealtimes and bedtimes.

**I love you.** Everyone needs love and affection and a feeling of acceptance and belonging. We can't assume that children know and understand our love for them unless we tell them. "A child must feel very, very loved," says Feldman. "It's one of the most important things." Letting your child know that you love him (and showing him with countless hugs) is important not only in toddlerhood, but as he gets older too.

## **FIVE WORDS OR PHRASES TO BE USED UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

**I'm sorry.** Parents need to acknowledge their own mistakes and express regret whenever they cause their child unhappiness or distress. "I'm sorry I got soap in your eyes," or "I'm sorry I wasn't listening; tell me again," or "I'm sorry I can't read any more stories to you; I have to make a phone call now." By expressing your sincere regret, you are showing your child that you are being considerate of her feelings and providing her with a model of good behavior as well.

**No.** "No, don't do that; you might hurt someone," or "No, we don't behave that way," or "No, we don't have enough money to buy that." "Many parents have a hard time saying 'no' to their child," says David DeMaso, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and clinical director of the department of psychiatry at Children's Hospital in Boston. "But these kids grow up without knowing how to respond to limits." DeMaso notes that parents can provide their child with some freedom of choice (for instance, let your child pick out his own outfit, or let him decide what he'd like to eat for lunch), but be prepared to set boundaries.

**That's enough.** "That's enough TV," or candy, or roughhousing, or arguing. This phrase sets limits and paves the way for your child to develop a sense of self-control. Sometimes a "time-out" period is necessary if your limits have been reached and your child isn't responding to the verbal message you are trying to send.

How do you suppose she feels? Asking this question provides an opportunity for your child to consider the effects of her actions on another person, and it gives her the chance to develop empathy toward others. When you and your child read stories or watch TV shows together, look for opportunities to talk about the feelings of others.

**This isn't working. Can you think of another way?** Considering alternative ways of behaving in difficult situations is one of the steps of problem solving—an important skill that is useful throughout life. How you respond to problems that arise in daily life, at home, or at work provides a model of behavior for your child. Aside from these key words and phrases, you may want to add others that are relevant to your specific family situation. For example, families with religious convictions may want to add a prayer of thanks to God before meals and a bedtime prayer to their lists.

## **How to Say It**

Communicating with your child involves more than the words and phrases you use. What you are saying will be more effective if you:

- Try to speak to your child in a pleasant tone of voice instead of an angry one.
- Speak in a light conversational tone instead of yelling. If you do end up yelling, apologize to your child.
- Take the time to really communicate with your child instead of rushing through a conversation.
- Devote your full attention to your child when she is talking to you, and try not to let your mind wander.
- Use facial expressions that correspond to the words you're speaking and the emotions you're feeling.
- Let your love and respect for your child guide your words and actions.
- Let the responsibility of being a parent be reflected in your willingness to take control when it's necessary.
- Smile more often than you frown.

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