

PARENTING IS NOT FOR COWARDS

"I hate you!"

"You are the worst parent ever!"

"I wish I lived with a different family!"

"You are the only parent that is like this!!

"You are the meanest parent ever!"

"You never let me do anything!"

Has your child ever spewed hurtful words like this in your direction? The same child that you sacrifice everything for. The one you would literally die for? You may be thinking: How ungrateful and disrespectful! How dare they speak to me that way!

Though I am not a child psychologist or a behavioral specialist, I am a seasoned parent of 4 young people and a social worker for more than 25 years. I have learned a lot from other parents as well as my own mistakes.

It is not okay to hurt other people's feelings and what is our child REALLY trying to tell us?

It is difficult to not feel personally attacked and somehow you have failed as a parent. I assure you, you have not failed, in fact when a child says these words, it may actually be a good thing.

Let me explain, though we feel that our kids should be appreciative and maybe indebted to us, they do not. Considering their brains are not fully developed (and sorry to tell you that this won't happen until they are in their 20's!), they honestly cannot view the world and situations from anyone's perspective other than their own. They are SUPPOSED to be self centered and egocentric.

Let's unpack what such hurtful words and insults really mean and possible responses. It may be surprising to learn that it is not about you at all, and therefore, very important to not take it personally. If you respond as though its personal, you have essentially given power to your child and taken it away from yourself which reinforces the negative behavior.

Hurtful words and insults are more about not knowing how to express a deeper, more frustrating, nameless pain. Like us parents, it is always easier to respond with anger than to pause and examine what is the underlying need. Our job, with our (hopefully!) developed, adult brain, is to dig a little further to discover what the issue really is.

Kids will always act out with the person they feel the safest with. They know you aren't going to abandon them or ever stop loving them. Hurting your feelings shifts the pain from them onto

you, which is easier for them to manage. It is our job to teach them how to recognize the underlying pain AND express their feelings without hurting others.

Regardless of your tendency, saying hurtful things back or engaging in the argument is a recipe for losing the battle. Not only will your child think you are not in control of your feelings, they may think you do not have the ability to help them solve their problems. Subconsciously they may hope that hurting you will help them get what they want, so don't play that game with them.

This is when we really need to be strong and regulated as a parent. Our ability to remain calm in moments like this is where we will see the greatest rewards.

There is beauty and strength in taking a pause, a deep breath, rolling your shoulders back, controlling your facial expressions and body language, and repeating in your head that this is not about you.

Downplay the words and stick to the topic.

Keep your responses clear and direct:

"I am sorry that you feel that way and you are still not going to the party tonight"

"I know you are disappointed with the rules. When we both cool off, we can talk about it"

"You sound very angry and when you can stop yelling, I will be able to help you with your math"

With tweens and teens, don't fall into the comparison trap "all the other kids are allowed to..." This is about their feelings of missing out or not fitting in. Listening and validating their feelings will help them feel heard and respected even if they don't like your decision.

After the storm has passed and both of you are feeling more calm is the time to talk about the underlying issues, how those words hurt and to teach other strategies and alternatives.

This article was written by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She supports and advocates for students, parents and caregivers to promote wellness and success in school. Tammy has been a Registered Social Worker for more than 25 years and is a mother to 4 children; 1 in high school and 3 in university.