

WHY DO THEY SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT?



So next time you are confronted with a tone of voice from a child that makes you take a sharp intake of breath, it may be helpful to consider these points:

- Remain 'in the adult' - Model the tone of voice that you want to hear. Resist matching their tone of voice.
- Respond to the words, not the emotion - This will give you a much better understanding of what they are trying to communicate to you.
- Allow them to feel heard - Use this interaction as a learning for them. Both about the relationship that you have together and as a way of modelling to them how to handle this type of situation in their different relationships.
- Address the unwanted behaviour - This is a really important step as it will help your children begin to understand healthy boundaries in relationships.
- Move on - Let it go as it will allow your relationship and you day to move forward.



WHY DO THEY SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT?

I'm sure we all recognise this one!



Parent: "it's time to get ready for school, please put your game off and get dressed."

Child: 'NO! five more minutes!'

Parent: No now.

Child: One more Minute!

Parent: If I wanted you to do it in a minute, I would ask you in a minute! Put it off and get ready!

Child: NO!! I'll do it in a minute!

Parent: Don't talk to me like that! DO IT NOW!! If I have to ask again, I'm taking that game off you for the rest of the week!

Child: NO!! I'M NEARLY FINISHED, JUST ONE MORE MINUTE!

Parent: That's it, you were warned!....

Child: NO!! NO!! NO!!

Parent: GET DRESSED AND GET IN THE CAR!!

Not the best start to anyone's day. I can't count the number of times I've had this conversation with families that I work with. Why not have a go at rewriting this conversation, using the steps I have suggested, before reading on.





Now let's rewrite the start to this day

Parent: "It's time to get ready for school, please put your game off and get dressed."

Child: 'FIVE MORE MINUTES!'

Parent: I can really tell you want more time on your game.

Remaining 'in the adult', by keeping a neutral tone of voice and a non challenging response will help to prevent this situation from escalating further.



Parent: I understand that you want to keep playing and I can see you are having fun but it is time to get dressed for school as I am sure you do not want to be late. Let's see if you can get ready really quickly so that you can have five minutes before you go to school.

When we listen to the words your child is using and respond to these, rather than the emotion, the situation is less likely to get out of control and your child will feel heard as you have acknowledged that this is important to them and you are trying to help.

Parent: I've been thinking about this morning, when I asked you to get ready for school. You seemed to be really cross with me about this because the tone of voice you used was very different to the way you usually talk to me. I'm sure you understand why I didn't like it. It's OK to feel cross but if it happens again, could you please try to talk to me the way I always try to talk to you, with respect."

Try not to skip the final step as this is a real learning opportunity for the child. How you do this will very much depend on your own personality and how you wish to interact with your child. This is an example of how this conversation could go.

Parent: Dinner will be ready in about half an hour. would you like me to remind you in 20 minutes so you can finish up what you are doing?

Child: Thanks

By moving on to the next part of your day, it brings the situation to a positive conclusion for everyone and ensures that the relationship is repaired.



WHY DO THEY SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT?

So how does this work in a classroom setting?



This is an interaction that I witnessed during a Y6 maths lesson. The teacher in question is an Outstanding teacher with 8 years experience of teaching. However, on this day there was something about this pupils tone of voice that really got to her. I'm sure many of you have had similar experiences in your own careers

Teacher: Now it's your turn. Everyone needs to complete questions 1 - 7. If you manage to do this then you can try the next questions.

Pupil: I'm not doing that!

Teacher: Everyone is doing 1-7!

Pupil: Everyone except me!

Teacher: EVERYONE!

Pupil: I don't even know how to do it!!

Teacher: Yes you do, I have shown you all how to do it!

Pupil: WELL I'M NOT DOING IT!

Teacher: You are doing it, so you can do it now or you can do it during lunchtime!

Pupil: OR I WON'T DO IT AT ALL!!

Teacher: GO and do your work in another class, right now!!

Pupil: YEAH BECAUSE I'LL KNOW HOW TO DO IT NEXT DOOR!!

Teacher: GO!!

I am sure many of you have experienced something similar to this in your own careers. Why don't you have a go at changing this interaction using the steps before you read my thoughts on how this could have been handled a little differently to achieve a better outcome.

Teacher: Now it's your turn. Everyone needs to complete questions 1 - 7 if you manage to do this then you can try the next questions.

Pupil: I'm not doing that!

Teacher: Is everyone clear on what they need to do? If anyone is not sure, please let me know.



By remaining in the adult, and directing your comment at the whole class, you are minimising the risk of this situation escalating at this point.



Pupil: STILL NOT DOING IT!

Teacher: It seems that you haven't got started yet. How can I help?

Pupil: I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO DO IT!!

Teacher: OK, let's go back to the beginning and you show me where you are becoming confused?

In this situation, the pupil was clearly anxious about not being able to complete the activity. By responding to the actual words spoken 'I don't even know how to do it!' rather than the emotions being displayed the situation is more likely to remain calm and controlled and the pupil will learn that you understand what they need and that you will always try to respond in a way that is helpful to them.

Teacher: I could really hear that you were not looking forward to trying the independent activity in maths today. Sometimes children struggle with parts of their learning and that's Ok but today you chose to use a tone of voice that was disrespectful, instead of asking for help. Please remember that I am here to help you and I will always show you respect and I hope will do the same for me.

When the time is right, come back to the unwanted behaviour, in this case the tone of voice and address it in a way that will be a learning experience, rather than a shaming experience.

Teacher: Science this afternoon, can you remember what we are going to be doing?

Pupil: yes ,you said we are doing an experiment. Great!

Move on - taking the child out of the moment and into a different thought, will allow them to consider the relationship repaid and be able to let go and move on.

