

Child Behavior Pt.3 - How to talk to your child(ren)

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.4] CW: Hello, this is Dr. Char Wrighton and this week, we're going to continue our discussion on child behavior, this is part three. Today's discussion is called, how to talk with your children. As always, I speak to my audience who I picture out there is a teacher, a parent or a grandparent of children early aged children.

On the other hand, so much applies to any age. You know, I just ask you to modify your thoughts as you're listening. You know what's interesting? Nobody is trained on how to talk with children. I'm even thinking back to my college, all my education and college in preparation to be a teacher and I know that I had some training but when I think back to all the years that I've been teaching and then parenting and then grand parenting and then at the Safari Learning academy, preschool and kindergarten, primary.

I look back and think, you know? So much is just in the trenches doing it and finding out what works, what doesn't work. What I want to do is share with you a lot of my experience that isn't as much book knowledge as, being in the trenches with children. Like I said, raising them, teaching, teaching special education children, regular education children.

You know, talking with children at our school here in town. A lot of experience and in a lot of it is a philosophy, almost like an internal philosophy that says, how can we help children to grow, become strong, become sensitive to other people, the needs of others because we need to be another oriented person in order to survive in society.

[0:02:19.2] CW: Selfishness doesn't really go far. And still be kind and cordial to our children when they're stepping on our last nerve. Parenting so often can – you can build that sense of frustration because children just have a tendency to go against what a parent wants because I see parents and teachers, nothing is different between teachers, parents and grandparents.

Grandparents, if they're not raising the children themselves, they can send their kids home. But parents and teachers pretty much have those children for either all day as a parent or as a teacher. You have to know how to talk with children to get them to focus the attention back on the adult, what the adult is saying and actually have to convince them to stop whatever behavior that is not appropriate, to do a different kind of behavior that the adult wants, that is appropriate.

[0:03:27.9] CW: I have some suggestions for you and I really feel like they're tried and true. I don't think you ever learn 100%. I think you're always still growing. I know that I'm always still growing as an adult, as an educator, it's one of those lifelong learning things. I think that I'm forever reading, I'm always reading research or reading other people's articles and I weigh them.

I always ask that anything that you hear me say, weigh it, think about it, analyze it, evaluate it. Judge it. See if it fits with your own personal framework or morals or beliefs and then having an open mind, perhaps see that it might fit, if that's not how you were trained or taught or brought up. Perhaps there's some truth here that might be worth looking at and using. That's all I ask.

The other day, I was having dinner with my husband in a restaurant and across the room, say maybe 10 feet from us, at another table were three ladies and a young boy. I would say he was probably four to five years old. The adults want to talk and the little guy doesn't. He wants to wiggle and he wants to get out of his seat. The parent was so impatient and as time went on and her frustration was growing, she became harsher and harsher and louder and louder.

[0:05:07.2] CW: First of all, for me, my first urge is to go over there and try to help her out and say, you know, you can't yell at your kid like this. But of course I won't do that. I would if I saw something that were heavy handedness I would definitely interfere but this I did not feel comfortable. On the other hand, she was making other people feel really uncomfortable around because we were all hearing it.

I thought to myself, I want to share this on the radio as just a springboard for how to talk to children, how to modify the behavior but also, and even more important is, how does that talk resonate with that child consciously and subconsciously. How long does that conversation last?

I'm going to postulate that it lasts a lifetime and I'm going to tell you my theory and of course it's not just my theory, which is based on many times listening, reading and then of course being in the trenches. A thought, especially, you know, dads, males have been taught in prior hundreds of years to be strong and to be tough and suck it up a bit.

Sometimes, there's a lack of sensitivity there where we have forgotten what it feels like to be a hurting child or a sad child or a antsy child or a bored child. We often take the tough route and tell them it's okay, when it's not or suck it up or it'll get better or whatever we say. I want to suggest that there are better ways perhaps to approach these things and I think it's probably one of the most important things that we can do.

[0:07:08.5] CW: Because, this is the messages that we are giving every single day to the children we either teach or live with. A harsh voice sends a huge message and we know, I know in my heart that for the most part, the vast, most part, parents love their children. Grandparents love their children. Teachers love their children, they wouldn't be there.

Sometimes the voice belies the love and affection. If the frustration is a daily thing, children can be irritating daily, just because again, I always go back to that exhausted parent. You know, working, trying to get the house clean, trying to get lunches packed, trying to get kids bathed, teeth brushed, book read to, prayers listened to. All the other details in a person's life, your own personal needs.

That sometimes we just – the relaxed atmosphere is missing in the home. Same thing in the classroom. If we – at that moment, are struggling with our own personal emotions then often, two things happen. A strong harsh voice comes out or a very high pitched voice comes out and as I've said in prior radio shows that if the voice becomes high pitched, the child immediately interprets it as, "I've got you, you're out of control."

That is not the position we want our children to be, we want to be the ones that are always in control and always calm and always comfortable and we always know that's not true. I want us to think about this kind of long lasting feeling that a child gets when they hear a harsh voice or a frustrated voice or even that high pitched, "I'm out of control," voice.

[0:09:20.2] CW: Because none of it speaks gentleness or love. I know. I've gone through it myself. I know exactly how it feels to have that frustration. You can ask my children. They've heard that voice in me. They've heard my words. I've been there and I would never ever want anyone to think that I had not – you know, ivory tower advice givers rarely do a very good job giving advice because they have no idea what it really feels like to be down in real life.

I certainly have. The child as they're listening. Little kids bounce back really fast but there's that still that feeling during the time where the parent's voice is harsh or the words are harsh. I mean, there's words and there's voice, there's tone of voice and they both usually go hand in hand.

Soft voices, soft feelings, peacefulness and then harsh cross, cranky, irritated, annoyed, the voice, the face, the facial expressions, the body language. Those give lasting memories to children. If it doesn't hit the conscious level, it absolutely hits the subconscious level, now, that's horrors because it's tucked in there for a lifetime.

So often and too often, what we hear and see as little children are the people we become when we're adults. If we have an unsmiling, especially mother, because the mother is the face that the child sees most of the time. If the faces is unsmiling. But dad too, anybody, is unsmiling, then the child often doesn't smile very much.

It may be something that you've never thought about, teachers too. Teachers can get in that same thing where we're just – we're tired. We've got 12 kids or six kids, whatever our ratio is in our preschools, that – it's a long day for us and so we start losing our smiles somewhere midway, maybe before lunch, maybe after lunch but mid-way, somewhere along the line, we lose some of our smiles.

[0:11:40.4] CW: Be conscious of your facial expressions as well and your body language as well as tone of voice and words. Because I truly feel that these go into the subconscious mind and then what a child

sees is what a child becomes and that's the parent the child becomes. It could be the employee that the child becomes, in adulthood.

I want to give you – this was done for me by one of my site coordinators, Jo McKee, when she came in to do an object lesson for her teachers. I thought it was one of the most significant things that I'd ever seen and it stuck with me, from that point on, the rest of my career and even now as a curriculum creator for Zoo-phonics and director, owner of Safari Learning Academy is that, this is the story she told, she stood up in front of my children. My special ed kids. She had an eight and a half by 11 piece of paper and on it was a drawing of a child.

She started as if it were the child's morning. She said, "Picture this as a real person. Picture this picture as a real person." First thing in the morning, the child wakes up but starts dawdling and the mom is racing around the house trying to get lunches in the car, kids dressed, teeth brushed, hair combed. Her own stuff. Racing against time because she's got to go to work, kids have got to get to school or preschool and the sharp tone of voice starts happening. Not because the parent doesn't love. But because the parent is frustrated. But the child doesn't understand frustration. I mean, they go through it themselves.

[0:13:42.3] CW: But the child doesn't necessarily understand that the parent is frustrated and quite honestly, they are so often the cause of the frustration. Because they don't react when a parent needs a child to react. Especially if you got more than one child that you're trying to get out the door. This is the time where something breaks or you have your coffee cup and your first eggs are on the floor and the coffee cup goes flying all over your blouse.

This has happened to me, I can't even tell you how many times. Now, my frustration level is high and so I yell. I say, "Get in the car," or I say, "Grab your stuff." And so my tone of voice is tough and the child feels it because it doesn't feel great, I don't care who you are, it doesn't feel great. Tear off a little corner a picture of that child, just tear off a little corner. Then, on the way, the parent is driving and is hitting red light after red light and the frustration is getting even greater because now, the parent is going to be late for work.

Maybe after getting the child late for work. Now, the child is making noise because children do make noise and she yells stop it. Maybe it's two children in the backseat of the car and they're fighting, stop it, knock off the noise. The words are tough and harsh and just tear off another piece of that page. Then, we're getting out of the car and the child darts off before we can get into the school lobby.

The parent yells again, "Get back here!" And the child feels it and you tear – not that the parent's wrong, it's just that I want to have this feeling of how the child might be responding to this. You tear off another little piece. Because the morning was so crazy, the breakfast was half eaten and left in the kitchen and the tummy's child is not full. Now the child is feeling hungry. Maybe a little bit hangry. Tear off another piece.

Then the child comes in and the child starts crying because he doesn't want to separate to the parent. Tear off another little piece of that picture of the child and now the teacher is receiving the child and picks up the child and the child is kicking and fighting but now the teacher is beginning to feel a sense of frustration and says, "Stop, stop kicking, stop crying." And then you tear off another little piece and then finally we get the kid calm and the child is playing with another friend, within a couple of minutes and a child comes and grabs a toy out of their hand.

And they are angry and they are frustrated, tear off another little piece and the whole point of this is that by the end of the day, by the time has told, "No, stop, be quiet. Hold still." You know, crisscross, apple sauce, listen, line up and the commands are coming constantly for this child, the child begins to feel a bit decimated, especially if it is one of those kind of children that needs a lot of instruction and a lot of direction and we have them because they are just wiggly kids.

And so there is that child by the end of the day, they are still going home, they are still maybe too noisy in the car. They are still running around the house like crazy people because that is what they do. They just run, the parent is still exhausted and so until bed time and then there is more for the last time, get in bed and stay in bed and so again, the child could go through the whole day without a kind or gentle word and that could be a gross exaggeration but unfortunately for too many, that is a reality.

Because I don't think that we don't pass our children on and say, "Hey it is really been a rough morning this morning. Please understand that is a rough morning. We just hand the child off and head off to our

work or our job and now the child has to now become a little student in that school whether it is pre-school, kindergarten, first grade or whatever. And then the parent picks the child up again and then home starts. So what we do is we are little by little putting like a little nick into that child's self-image and feeling of self-worth.

[0:18:12.2] And then you do that 365 days and yes there is days where things are lighter and parents are less frustrated, less pressure, less things to do or have to cope with. On the other hand, we are still raising off to soccer. We are racing off to basketball or dance class or we are having to grab or we forget the dance clothes and we have left them at home and now we have to cross town. I mean there is just so many reasons in life to be frustrated.

And so therefore obviously parents need to learn, parents and teachers have to learn coping skills with stress but we have to remember what that little guy is going through whether that is five years old, six years old, seven years old or teenagers, adults, spouses. I feel like too often there isn't enough gentleness and appreciation and enough words where we tell the child of their worth to us. We might wait until the very end of the day and kiss the child and say, "Good night, I love you."

But has the child heard that enough that day or heard messages of, "You are a smart person," or, "You did that so well," or, "I sure like the way you help me clear off the dishes today," or, "You were so sweet to your little sister," or, "I saw that you fed the dog, I sure appreciate that." We need to be able to see the child and verbalize your affection to that child to make sure that that child really knows that they're the apple of your eye and it really doesn't matter how the adult feels because we are adults.

We need to say it anyway and my favorite expression and I have been using this for years and I did make it up. We need to catch the child in the act of being terrific. It is our motto at Safari Learning Academy. It certainly has been our motto raising children. It certainly is my motto with my grandchildren. It certainly was my motto when I was teaching special ed because specially with a special ed child, that often has behavioral issues that go along with the academics, those children hear a lot of negatives.

[0:20:27.4] They hear a lot of nos. If they have social issues, between friends, they pick up a lot of social cues that are not positive for themselves. So we don't live and all these gentle time is we go through a life and it is pretty much from the time we're little sometimes we get to knocked down emotionally and

kids, children have a tendency to take it pretty quietly but it starts building. I would picture a stalagmite, with calcium water in a cave dripping on it and it drips, drips, drips all day, all night, every day.

And by the end of years, it is a tall calcium deposit, that has been built up by one drip at a time and I have to say it breaks my heart when I think about it because I feel that children should feel terrific about themselves. I think that as you have heard me say in the past, I feel like the parent has to be the adult and I think that the parent has to and the teacher, the adult, the teachers have to be the adults and they have to set the consequences. They have to set the limitations.

They have to keep their promises and keep the consequences, if they set them. They cannot go back on them because the child will take advantage of that. But I want us to all remember that the more love that a child hears and the less frustration, the better the child will feel about themselves, the stronger they become, the more independent they become. The more able they become. If you have a poor self-image, then it is very difficult to grow into a 'can-do person'.

A person who has the confidence to try new things. To try things, to fail and to try things again. We don't always succeed, if we are little and we are out there playing soccer and we start kicking the ball down the wrong way and we kick it into the opponents net and score it for their side, I think of other examples, it is embarrassing and humiliating and the coach is yelling, "No you are going the wrong direction." And the child doesn't realize it.

[0:22:53.5] And then now the child has to feel the humiliation and the embarrassment of knowing that they have just made a huge mistake for their team. That is just one example but it is those things. I remember being such a sensitive child. I remember my family decided to give me roller skate lessons. They thought it would be fun for me and it was fun until I went in the wrong direction. Everybody was forming a circle going off to their left, I went off to my right.

I was so embarrassed, I never went back again and I grew up to be very strong person, a very strong-willed person yet that humiliated me and embarrassed me so much. And so we don't know what children feel. We don't often ask them, we assume that they are fine just because they are quiet but we can't assume that they are feeling terrific about themselves and the only way to build up that child can

do, I can do it, feeling inside that wonderful sense of confidence, is by giving them messages that tell them that they did well.

And children are going to make mistakes and children are going to be naughty. So that is where our calm voices giving them setting the limits, setting the parameters, giving them consequences and keeping those consequences. That is where that calm voice that says, "I am the boss right now, you are the child and this is what you need to do and this is what I expect," and that calm rather than frantic, that is my whole point.

Because once the voice gets loud or harsh or high pitched then the child begins to feel that little piece of that decimation and that is what I am trying to avoid. When we are talking to our children as I have stated in prior radio shows is to be very, very specific about what you are asking for children but you know in a very calm, peaceful voice, to stick with facts. State it clearly, state it simply. Remember that when you are talking with young children, basically one or two words and that is pretty much what you – that is what they're going to understand.

[0:25:03.8] So you need to say, "No, not okay." Or, "That is not okay." Because it is simple and it is to the point and children can read your face and read your voice but again, we don't have to be that emotional, enter that emotional stage. The next thing is to definitely explain to the child what your expectations are or what the behavior is important. "You may not hit your friend. You may not bite. No biting." Or "That made your friend cry. That made your friend hurt."

And so simple senses and then say, "You may not do that again. If you do that again you will not be able to play with your friend." And again, simple consequences and then if it happens again, you have to keep the consequences, whatever it is. Remember consequences always have to fit the crime. If it is small, it has to be small and for children it has to be short term because beyond that you will lose them completely, like if you put a child on timeout.

And they always say, one minute per the age of the child because they forget. They completely forget while they are in the timeout chair or the timeout place. Whatever it is in the home or the classroom. You know watch a child be in timeout and you will see that pretty soon they are distracting themselves

because they are bored and now they are playing with their shoe, playing with their shoelace. They are on the floor. They are upside down on the chair.

They will do anything to entertain themselves and they have forgotten, 100% why they are there. It is important for you to go back and say, "The reason why you are sitting here and you are not playing with your friends is because..." And then state what they did. I like to take a child and remember, we work with 18 months through seven years old or first grade. When I am talking to a two and a half or three year old child or three and a half year old child I ask them questions.

[0:27:12.9] Remember we had talked in another radio show about peripatetic and that means moving around teaching that moves around and the Socratic method, which means I ask questions I don't do all the talking. As the adult I ask questions. I asks the child, "What happened? What did you do to get you in trouble? What, can you call tell me?" I am asking because I need them to tell me. I will also say if I set the parameters, I set the rules down.

I will say, "Now can you tell me the rule back? Can you tell me what is okay behavior and what is not okay behavior?" And then if kids do not have a tendency to come out with what you want them to say, a lot of times the majority of them will look at you as if you are speaking a different language and then he or she understands or they will shrug their shoulders and say, "I don't know." Because verbalizing their thoughts is not easy for them at this minute, at this time.

So therefore you have to say, you have to bring it down to their level again and then remind them, "Did you hit your friend? Yes or no." And you can now say shake your head. "Nod your head, tell me which one." And then you say, "Was it okay?" And then the child again has to answer. So now you are putting the ball in that child's court and that is really, really important.

Different ages of children, children are all in different ages, they are in different stages. They have different receptive and expressive vocabulary. Receptive, is what I understand in my head, expressive is what I am able to say and talk about. The vocabulary that I use. You have to make sure that you are on the child's understanding level or else you have lost the child completely. So make it really clear but then a fewer words with younger children, you can use more abstract concepts with older children but definitely not with preschoolers.

[0:29:15.7] They need to hear very concrete concepts and then they need to be part of the decision making process. They have to be part of the solution. It isn't just you being the boss where the child takes no responsibility for their behavior or no responsibility for the solution. They need to be right in there, helping, because it is them. It is themselves. Just remember that your tone of voice gives the child a message that is going to last them a lifetime and chances are that is the mother or father they are going to be.

And remember, that their feeling of self-worth is so much directly related to the hugs, the snuggles, the facial expressions, the body language, the words and the tone and pitch that you use. And if it is decimating, that is what they are going to use when they grow up. And that is how they feel about themselves and it is very difficult to be a productive citizen that is going to be one that has self-initiative, if the child doesn't feel great about themselves.

And above all, always, always, catch the child in the act of being terrific and tell them the minute you see them, what a great job they are doing. We don't attack the child with bad child, good child or I mean we don't even compliment good boy, bad boy. We don't do that not even the positive. You just address what the child is doing, how the child is acting and once you address that the child understands the kind of behavior you are looking for and so that is what we are going towards.

[OUTRO]

[0:30:56.3] **ANNOUNCER:** That was Ed. Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio, live on 103.5 FM, or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please e-mail your question to dr_char@zoophonics.com. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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