

I Don't Speak to You That Way. Please Show Me Some Respect!

A SNARKY, CRITICIZING TONE is one of the hardest things to tolerate. When it comes from a child, it is easy to see how parents can find it disconcerting. Children and teenagers with ADHD often can't read the social nuances of body language, facial expressions, mood, or tone of voice. This challenge often results in off-putting comments or tones that can create unhealthy dynamics.

Healthy communication patterns in families can fall apart as exhaustion, COVID fatigue, and the stressors of life invade the sanctuary we call home. Bad habits of speaking sharply, insensitively, or curtly with our partners and children can spiral if not realized, addressed, and corrected quickly. As we head into a new year, now is the time to reflect on what you want to model.

Move from condescension, derision, and annoyance to cheerfulness and empathy with these five tips.

1. Work on your own tone and promote more respectful banter in general as a family.

We all have times when our tone does not reflect our intentions. Chances are you have used that tone of voice. Model using a different tone, one that communicates respect. Start by asking the whole family, including yourself, to pay more attention to the words they use and the way

you all speak to each other. This way the child who struggles the most with their tone is not singled out, and the whole family tries to be more considerate. Consider a reminder or code word that family members can use when the tone is used. Eventually, you will catch it before you will need to be told. Be sure to share with your children what this respectful tone “looks like,” and admit it when you struggle.

2. Trade in the tell: use open questions and collaborative talk.

By asking open-ended questions, you encourage honest, candid, and thoughtful discussions. Open-ended questions use the words who, what, when, where, and how. Below are some conversation starters:

- How are you doing?
- What do you like (not like) about your situation?
- What interests you?
- What is your virtual world like?
- What makes _____ appealing?
- I have noticed that sometimes you have a hard time with (identify a behavior). What makes (name the behavior) hard for you?

3. Show empathy and respect: refrain from lecturing or judging.

Bringing up past mistakes will only set your child on guard. Listen with an empathetic and helpful ear to create an open atmosphere that enables sharing. You are likely to get more information, and your child is more likely to come to you next time she has a problem or concern. Listening is actually the best way to guarantee you can be the parent your child needs, because you have made her comfortable and she can guide you to what she needs.

4. Collaboratively talk about your child's behavior.

When your child is rude or lacks empathy, ask him to interpret how his behavior made you feel. Ask your child, “How do you think I feel when you correct me? What did you mean to do?” This also eliminates a lot of unnecessary friction. For example, rather than telling your child, “You need to stop arguing with your teachers,” think



about asking, “How do you think your teacher feels when you speak out of turn and are always arguing with her?” This coaching technique builds self-awareness. It allows the child to consider that his behavior can negatively or positively affect others.

5. Help your child hear her tone.

Some children with ADHD who struggle with social skills do not hear their tone. They do not realize that the way they are communicating is off-putting or rude. Collaborate at a time that will not cause her to overreact. Ask if there was a time she noticed a rude tone. What did it sound like? Share when you have found yourself struggling with tone and then ask your child if there are times she struggles.

Any social situation is just a problem to be solved. If you build those skills, the opportunity to improve social awareness, stop arguing, and develop better relationships will emerge.

You got this! **A**

Caroline Maguire, MEd, ACCG, PCC, earned her master's degree with a specialization in social emotional learning from Lesley University. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Why Will No One Play With Me?* and founder of a SEL training methodology #ConnectionMatters, both designed to teach emotional regulation, social and self-awareness, and responsible decision-making skills. She founded the only coach training program accredited by the ICF, ADDA's The Fundamentals of ADHD Coaching for Families. Follow her @AuthorCarolineM and download her free video, *How to Tell a Tigger Story*.

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