



50 Of The Worst Things Parents Say To Their Children (And Better Alternatives)

Ever said something to your child and then thought “Oops, maybe there was a better way to say that?”

We’ve all done it. It just comes out.

But with a little practice, it doesn’t have to. Here’s a list of the most common phrases that could be damaging, why they have a bad effect, and an alternative you might try. Some are obviously horrible. You probably wouldn’t say anything like those. But we’ll include them anyways. Others may not be so obvious but do have an unexpected negative effect. You’ll want to watch out for those.

Let’s go.

1. "You're always getting into trouble!" This phrase can make a child feel like they are constantly being judged and criticized. An alternative phrase could be "I know you're capable of making better choices." This phrase acknowledges the child's abilities and encourages them to make better choices.
2. "You're worthless!" Uh yeah, obviously a bad one right? This phrase is extremely damaging to a child's self-esteem and can create long-term emotional issues. An alternative phrase could be "I love and value you, but I disagree with your actions/choices." This phrase communicates love and support while also addressing the behavior in question. Or even "I believe in you and your abilities". This phrase is more encouraging and supportive and shows the child that their parents are confident in their abilities.
3. "I wish you were more like your brother/sister!" This phrase can create feelings of inferiority, implies that the child is not good enough as they are, and puts them in competition with their sibling. An alternative phrase could be "I appreciate your unique strengths and qualities." This phrase recognizes and values the child's individuality and their individual strengths.
4. "I'm disappointed in you!" This phrase can make a child feel like they have let their parent down and can cause feelings of guilt and shame. An alternative phrase could be

"I understand that you made a mistake, let's work together to figure out how to fix it." or "What can we do together to help you succeed next time?" This phrase emphasizes the importance of problem-solving and growth rather than disappointment.

5. "I'll give you something to cry about!" Another bad one right? This phrase can be dismissive and invalidating of the child's feelings. An alternative phrase could be "I understand that you're feeling upset, let's talk about what's bothering you." This phrase acknowledges and validates the child's feelings and encourages communication.
6. "You can't do it!" - This statement implies that the child is not capable of achieving success and can lead to a lack of self-confidence and self-doubt. A better alternative would be to encourage the child by saying something like "It might be difficult, but I'm sure you can figure it out". This encourages the child to try their best and gives them the support and confidence to do so.
7. "Why can't you be more like ____!" - Comparing a child to someone else can lead to feelings of inadequacy, as it implies that they are not good enough as they are. A better alternative would be to focus on the positive things the child has already done and to encourage them to keep trying.
8. "That's not how it's done!" - This statement implies that the child's ideas and efforts are not valid, which can lead to feelings of frustration and discouragement. A better alternative would be to explain why the child's idea may not work and then offer suggestions on how to improve it.
9. "You're too young to understand!" - This phrase undermines the child's intelligence and can make them feel like their opinions and thoughts don't matter. Better alternative phrase: "Let's talk more about this when you're a little older". This phrase is more respectful and acknowledges the child's ability to learn and understand new concepts.
10. "You're just like your father/mother!" - This phrase implies that the child has no autonomy and will be bound to the same fate as their parent. Better alternative phrase: "You have the potential to achieve great things". This phrase is more empowering and encourages the child to strive for their own success.
11. "Stop crying, it's not that bad!" - This phrase invalidates the child's emotions and can make them feel like they are not entitled to feel their own feelings. Better alternative phrase: "I understand how you're feeling, it's okay to be upset" or "It's okay to feel sad sometimes". This phrase is more understanding and allows the child to express their emotions without feeling judged.
12. "You'll never amount to anything!" - This phrase is extremely damaging to a child's self-esteem and can create long-term emotional issues. Better alternative phrase: "I have faith in your potential and believe in your capabilities". This phrase is more encouraging and supportive and shows the child that their parents trust in their abilities. Or you can say "I believe in you, let's figure out how to reach your goals"

13. "You're so dumb!" - This phrase can cause a child to develop a negative self-image and can lead to low self-esteem. Better alternative phrase: "Let's try to figure out the solution together". This phrase is more collaborative and encourages the child to think critically and problem solve.
14. "You're too lazy!" - This phrase implies that the child is not trying hard enough and can lead to a fixed mindset. Better alternative phrase: "I know you can do better if you work hard" or "I know it takes effort to do things, what's preventing you from completing the task?". This phrase is more encouraging and reinforces the idea that effort is key to success.
15. "You should be ashamed of yourself!" - This phrase can cause a child to become ashamed of who they are and can lead to long-term feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Better alternative phrase: "I know this was a mistake, let's talk about how to improve next time.
16. "You're such a disappointment!" - This phrase can be very damaging and can cause the child to feel like they are never good enough. Better alternative phrase: "I know you can do better if you try hard". This phrase is more encouraging and reinforces the idea that effort and hard work are key to success.

It's important to speak in ways that praise effort. This builds a growth mindset. It puts the value of hard work and effort at the forefront. Hard work and effort are within your child's control. So this empowers them rather than disempowering them by talking about an attribute like how smart they are or how pretty they are.

Since you're probably getting the gist of this now let's go through the rest of the phrases a little quicker.

17. "I wish you weren't born!" - Instead you could say "I'm glad you are here"
18. "You're not trying hard enough!" - Instead you could say "Let's talk about what you can do to improve" or "Let's talk about what's preventing you from trying your best."
19. "You're so careless!" - Instead you could say "Let's focus on being more mindful"
20. "You're being ridiculous!" - Instead you could say "Let's talk about your feelings in a respectful way"
21. "You're too sensitive!" - Instead you could say "It's okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes"
22. "It's your fault!" - Instead you could say "Let's talk about how we can solve this together"

23. "You're too fat!" - Instead you could say "I'm here to support your health and wellbeing"
24. "You're always making mistakes!" - Instead you could say "Let's work on improving your accuracy"
25. "You're not listening!" - Instead you could say "Let's talk about what I just said"
26. "It's too complicated for you!" - Instead you could say "Let's break it down and work on it step by step" 30.
27. "Why can't you be more like me!" - Instead you could say "We're different and that's okay"
28. "You don't care!" - Instead you could say "I know this is important to you, let's talk about how we can make it work"
29. "You're not special!" - Instead you could say "I'm proud of the way you're unique"
30. "You'll never make it!" - Instead you could say "I'm here to support you and help you reach your goals"
31. "It's my way or the highway!" - Instead you could say "Let's discuss the options and see what works best for everyone"
32. "You'll never get it right!" - Instead you could say "I believe in you, let's figure out how to do this together"
33. "You're too noisy!" - Instead you could say "Let's find a quieter activity"
34. "You're not smart enough!" - Instead you could say "I believe in you, let's work on improving your skills"
35. "You're so clumsy!" - Instead you could say "Let's practice to improve your coordination"
36. "You're so lazy!" - Instead you could say "I'd like to see you work harder"
37. "You're just like your father/mother!" - Instead you could say "You have certain traits that remind me of your father/mother"
38. "You're going to get in trouble!" - Instead you could say "I'm worried this might lead to an undesirable outcome"
39. "You're so stupid!" - Instead you could say "Let's work on improving your skills"
40. "It's too late now!" - Instead you could say "Let's figure out how to move forward"
41. "You're not doing enough!" - Instead you could say "Let's talk about what you can do to improve"
42. "You're not good enough!" - Instead you could say "I believe in you, let's work on improving your skills"
43. "You'll never succeed!" - Instead you could say "I know you can do it, let's figure out how to reach your goals"
44. "You're not good at anything!" Instead, you could say "You have strong skills, what can you do to help you be successful in this?"
45. "You're not special!" ⇨ "You have so many unique qualities, tell me about one of them."

46. "You're a bad kid!" Instead, you could say "We all make mistakes, what can you do to make it right this time?"
47. "Why can't you be more organized!" Instead, you could say "Let's talk about strategies to help you better manage your time and resources."
48. "You can do better!" ⇨ "Tell me about what you can do to achieve the best possible outcome."
49. "You should be ashamed!" ⇨ "What can you learn from this experience to help you next time?"

And the all-time favorite #50

"Go to your room!" - Instead you could say "Let's take a break and come back to this conversation later."

How did you do? Are you a perfect parent? Never used any damaging phrases?

Or maybe, just maybe, you've had a few Oops moments. If so, congratulations, you're human.

If you'd like a printable list of these, just in case you want to practice. I put a link to one you can download in the description.

And also congratulations on being an awesome parent. How do I know?

Because you made it through this whole list. That's how.

Is your child struggling in school? Looking to get them back on track to fantastic grades? Do what thousands of other parents have done and start them on a [free trial of the Learning Success System](#)