

## Positive Parenting of Primary Schoolers

# Swearing

**Children often learn words that their parents do not like, particularly swear words. Some swear words may not be a problem and parents may use them themselves. Parents need to decide which words are acceptable and which ones are not. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your child to use acceptable words.**

## What Is Swearing?

Swearing is using words that are rude and offensive. It can be a form of abuse directed at others or an outburst of anger or frustration.

## Why Do Children Swear?

It is unrealistic to expect children never to swear. Most primary schoolers will experiment with swear words they hear others use. Swearing is likely to continue if it gets a reaction from others such as laughter, or lots of attention such as long discussions about not swearing.

When children are with their friends they are more likely to swear. Children may swear to show they are 'tough', or to bully or threaten others. If swearing gets children what they want, it is likely to continue.

## How To Help Prevent Swearing

### Use Planned Ignoring

Planned ignoring is a good strategy to use the first time your child says a swear word. If your child swears, do not look at or talk to them. If swearing does not get a reaction, it may stop. However, if swearing occurs often and is becoming a problem, try the following suggestions.

### Decide Which Words Are Not Acceptable

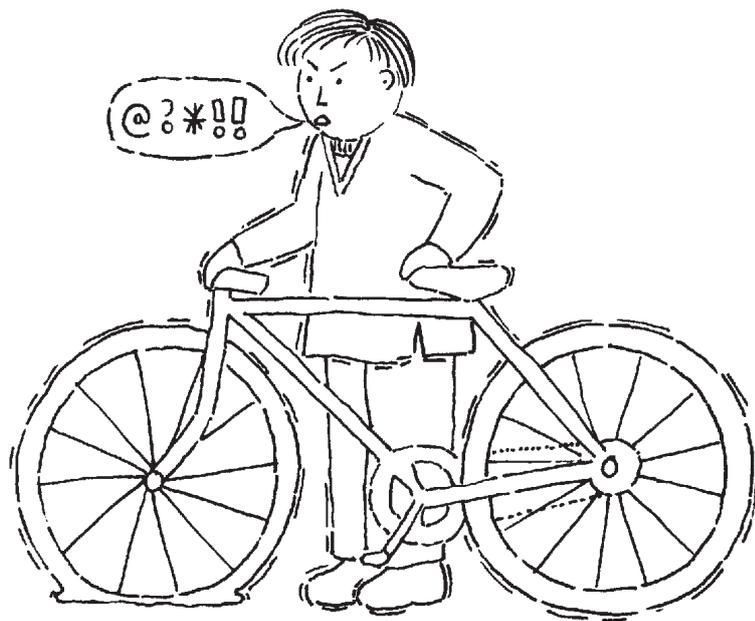
Identify a small number of swear words which you find offensive or that may be inappropriate at school or in the community. Do not allow your child to use these words.

### Set a Good Example

You cannot expect your child not to swear if you use swear words yourself. If you must swear, use words that you allow your child to say.

### Explain the Rules

At a time when everyone is calm, have a talk with your child about swearing. Describe the problem from your point of view—*Angus, I don't like it when you use swear*



*words.* List the words that you have decided are unacceptable and list some acceptable alternatives—*From now on these words are not allowed...* (list the unacceptable words)—*If you must use that sort of language, you may say...* (tell your child the acceptable words).

## Encourage Your Child To Follow the Rules

Praise your child if they go through the whole day without swearing—*Thank you for using acceptable words today.* You may also like to give your child a special treat such as their favourite dessert.

## How To Manage Swearing

### Tell Your Child What To Do

If you hear your child swear, tell them to stop swearing—*Georgia, stop using that word. We do not use that word in this house.* Tell your child what would have been more acceptable—*If you would like to borrow your sister's bike, ask her politely.*

### Use Logical Consequences

Tell your child the consequence. Say something like—*Because you swore, you cannot ride your sister's bike for 10 minutes. Come back then and try asking politely.* Try to use a consequence that fits the situation. If your child swears when playing with other children, tell them to go and play by themselves for a short period of time. Say something like—*Claudia, you are not speaking nicely around others, go and play outside by yourself for 10 minutes.* Ignore protests or complaints. Do not argue or debate the point.

You may need to repeat the logical consequence a number of times before your child stops swearing. For example, each time your child swears, add another 10 minutes to your chosen consequence. Some families use a system of fines where any family member who swears puts money into a jar. You can try this if your child has money of their own.

## Points To Remember

Your child may start telling you that another child has used a swear word. This can be as much of a problem as swearing. Try to act only on what you have seen or heard yourself. If telling tales continues, send the tale teller away from the other children for five minutes.

It is not helpful to punish your child in ways that may cause physical discomfort or harm. Although swearing may stop at the time, these consequences may make your child feel resentful towards you. Also, it is unlikely that this sort of punishment will stop your child swearing in the future.

### Key Steps

- Decide what words are acceptable.
- Set a good example.
- Explain the rules to your child.
- Praise and reward your child for using acceptable words.
- Act immediately when you hear swearing.
- Tell your child to stop swearing and what would be more acceptable.
- Tell your child the problem and the consequence.

## If Problems Persist

You may like to set up a behaviour chart if your child has developed a persistent habit of swearing.

- Explain to your child that they can earn points by not swearing. Choose a time of the day when swearing is a problem, such as between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., then break this time into smaller blocks. For example, your child can earn one point for every 30 minutes that they use acceptable words and no swear words.
- Set a goal for how many points need to be earned each day. Start with easy goals that your child can achieve. You might begin with a goal of two points.
- Tell your child that the points can be exchanged for a daily reward or a larger reward at the end of the week.

Decide what the reward will be.

- Tell your child what will happen if swearing occurs. A consequence may involve the loss of an enjoyable activity such as sports practice or watching television.
- Make a chart to keep a record of points earned (see below). Stick the chart somewhere that it is easy for you and your child to see, like on the refrigerator.

Nick's Chart

|  | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|
| 3 - 3.30pm  | 1      | 0       | 1         |
| 3.30 - 4 pm   | 1      | 1       | 1         |
| 4 - 4.30pm  | 0      | 1       | 1         |
| 4.30 - 5 pm   | 1      | 0       | 1         |
| 5 - 5.30pm  | 0      | 0       | 0         |
| Total   | 3      | 2       | 4         |
| Goal for the day  | 2      | 3       | 3         |
| Reward given  | yes    | no      | yes       |

- Each day your child follows the rules, put the points on their chart. Remember to praise your child for using acceptable words.
- At the end of the set time, add up the points your child has earned. If they have reached the goal, give them the reward.
- If your child swears, do not give them any points for that time period. Tell them the problem and the consequence. Try to choose a consequence that fits the situation as described earlier.
- If more serious problem behaviour occurs, you will need to use quiet time or time-out (see the *Positive Parenting* booklet).

**See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.**



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