

For Ages  
4-7

# Words Are Not for Hurting

Elizabeth Verdick

Illustrated by Marieka Heinlen



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For my children, Olivia and Zachary.  
Every day, you teach me more  
about love and patience,  
and you always make me smile.  
—E.V.

For my mother and father,  
whose words of encouragement  
helped me believe in myself.  
—M.H.

## *Dear Parents and Caregivers,*

Children are known for saying whatever comes to mind. Their words—so often funny, surprising, and insightful—are a window into their feelings.

I'll never forget when my own daughter, at age four, was eating her first ice-cream sundae and announced with excitement, "Every day should be hot-fudge sundae—even Saturday!" This little nugget of wisdom still makes me laugh. There are times, though, when we hear children saying something mean or hurtful. They might tease another child, for example, or make unkind comments about someone's appearance. They might shout, or even swear. What's behind these words? Often feelings of anger, sadness, rejection, confusion, or fear. Just like adults, children may lash out with a raised voice or hurtful words.

All of us—young and old alike—can learn to choose our words wisely. We can think before we speak and make an effort to use words that convey kindness and respect.

Most important, we can apologize when something we've said has hurt someone else. Those two little words, "I'm sorry," are sometimes so hard for us to say. But the more we practice, the better we get at it. And those two little words can make all the difference!



*Elizabeth*

P.S. On pages 28–32, you'll find activities, discussion starters, and other resources that reinforce the message of using helpful, not hurtful, words.



Did you know it takes only 26 letters to make *millions* of words?

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz



Some words are  
super short:

"Hi!"

"No"

"Bye"

"Yes!"

Don't forget D-O-G.



Some words are really *loooong*:

"Thingamajig"

"Mississippi"

"Abracadabra!"



And some are just  
plain silly:

"Wiggly Giggly"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"



# Activities and Discussion Starters

## How We Use Words

### Communication Explanation

Talk to children about what communication means. When we communicate, we use our words to say something to someone else. Every day we use words in so many ways, both spoken and written. Talk about how we use words to greet others, tell stories, sing songs, ask questions, and much more.

### Fun with Words

Have children use words in creative ways. If some of the children speak a second language, ask them to teach a few new words to the other kids. Count to 10 (or higher) in another language. Or, talk about words that rhyme, words that are silly, or words that are very short or long. Have the children imagine a world without words—what would it be like if we couldn't communicate with each other verbally?

### Signs and Symbols

Talk about ways we use special signs, symbols, and gestures to communicate. For example, there are signs for “hello” (a wave), “peace” (a peace sign formed with two fingers or written as a symbol), and “love” (blowing a kiss, or writing x's and o's).

American Sign Language (ASL) is the fourth most used language in the United States today. Talk with children about how this language of gestures and hand symbols can express words and concepts. Learn the gesture for “I love you” and practice it together. For a sign language resource, see page 32.



## “Talking” Without Words

### What Your Face Says

Help children understand that we “talk” with more than our mouth—our face also sends messages about what we are thinking or feeling. Invite children to make faces that match the feelings you introduce: happy, sad, mad, scared, or excited. Using a hand mirror, give each child a chance to look at himself or herself making an expressive face. Ask others in the group how the child is feeling, and how his or her face shows it. To connect this activity to *Words Are Not for Hurting*, discuss how facial expressions can be hurtful or helpful. Ask children how they would feel if someone scowled at them and said, “You can't play with us.” Next, talk about ways they could help someone who's wearing a sad or scared expression. Try to notice whenever children are doing a good job of “reading others.”

### What Your Body Says

Introduce the idea of body language by explaining how our actions and gestures may do the talking for us. Demonstrate some body language yourself: lower your head to show that you're feeling sad or shy; stomp your foot to show anger; shrug your shoulders to suggest that you're unsure; take a step backward and hold your arms inward to show fear. Next, point out that “reading” someone's body language and facial expression can let you know how the person is feeling. If you wish, turn to pages 4–5 or 12–13 in *Words Are Not for Hurting*, which show children and adults using different body language. Ask what each person might be thinking or feeling. Invite volunteers to show how they might respond to these feelings in helpful ways.

### What Your Mind Says

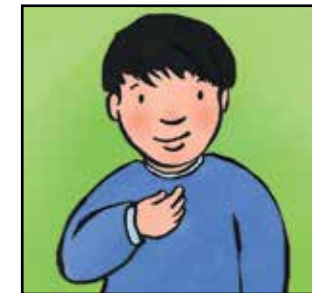
Ask children to think about how they talk to themselves inside their head. Is there a voice saying kind and positive

things like, “You can do it” and “That was a good try”? Or is there a voice saying negative things like, “You always do things wrong”? Talk about how the words inside our own head can be hurtful or helpful. When we tell ourselves something positive (“I will try my hardest”), we feel stronger and we're more likely to succeed than if we tell ourselves, “I better not try since I might fail.” Help each child think of one positive message to use throughout the day such as, “I can do it” or “I can give it a try.”

## Positive Ways to Use Words

### “Feelings” Words

Children can learn to recognize their feelings and put their emotions into words. Once they have words for their own feelings, children are better able to recognize and respond to the feelings of others. Talk about words that describe how we feel: happy, sad, cranky, mad, worried, lonely, surprised, nervous, excited, sleepy, energetic, and so on. To reinforce the lessons in “What Your Face Says” and “What Your Body Says,” act out some of the emotions using clear facial expressions and body language. Have the children act out telling someone else how they feel: “I am sad,” “I feel so excited!” or “I am angry.”



### Polite Words

Good manners help children treat others with kindness and respect. Point out that “please” and “thank you” are among the most helpful words that people use. To help children understand the importance of polite words, give them examples of not using them: “Get off the swings!” vs. “May I please have a turn on the swings?” Talk about how it feels to do something nice for someone else but not hear the words “thank you” afterward. Or, ask children how it would feel if someone bumped into them hard but never said, “Excuse me” or “Sorry.” Practice saying polite words; compliment children whenever you overhear them using good manners.

## Tone of Voice

Many children already know the difference between “indoor” and “outdoor” voices, and have learned to use a quieter voice while inside. Yet, they may need help understanding the subtler lesson of how our tone of voice can make a difference in how others interpret and respond to our words. To give children an example of how this works, you might use a loud, demanding tone of voice and say, “It's MY turn to go first! You always go first and it's not FAIR!” Talk about how someone who hears words like these might feel. Next, say the words in a slightly different way and in a gentler tone of voice: “It's my turn to go first now. You went first last time, and it's only fair that I get a chance to, too.” Ask the children how they feel when they hear the words spoken in this way. Explain that how we sound plays a big part in what we actually communicate to others.

## Talk About It

You may want to discuss some of the concepts introduced in *Words Are Not for Hurting*: Your words belong to you and think before you speak. Ask children what they think these concepts mean. Talk about how our words come from our head and our heart; we use words to express how we think and feel, and this is why our words are ours.

Each one of us chooses what to say and how to say it. Yet, it isn't uncommon for children to try to blame someone else for something hurtful they've said. For example, you might hear an excuse like, “Andre told me to say it!” or “She said it first!” Talk about how each person must take responsibility for what he or she says. Discuss why shifting blame on someone else doesn't help.

Ask children if they're familiar with the phrase, “Hold your tongue” (it makes for a good visual). See if they can connect it to the idea of “Think before you speak.” To help children put this idea into practice, suggest that the next time they're about to say something cruel or hurtful to somebody else they take a deep breath instead and count to 5 in their head. After thinking about it, can they come up with a better, kinder way to say what they feel? Or, can they decide to say nothing at all?