Module 3: How to Talk to Children

Building Trust Through Honest, Respectful Communication

Overview

The way we speak to children becomes the voice in their heads. This module is about dropping control-based language and discovering how to talk with children in ways that build trust, invite cooperation, and nurture connection.

Recommended Reading:

- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish
- *It's OK Not to Share* by Heather Shumaker

🧠 Talk to Children Like People

Children are not "less than." They're whole humans with less experience—like travelers from another culture learning how this world works. Treating them with genuine respect unlocks something magical:

- More joy in your relationship
- More cooperation
- More emotional honesty from both sides

Speak to them the same way you'd speak to a thoughtful adult friend—one who deserves your honesty, warmth, and attention.

🗣️ Replacing Old Habits with Respectful Communication

In this section, we'll revisit some of the behaviors we covered in **Module 1**—but now focus on what to *say and do instead*.

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1. Long Explanations → Keep It Short (Unless Invited to Go On)

Children usually just want a clear, age-appropriate answer. If they want more, they'll ask.

💡 *Watch their eyes and body language—they'll tell you when they've heard enough.*

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2. Correcting → Step Back & Let Them Think

When we over-correct, we send the message: *I need you to get it right.* But problem-solving builds confidence.

If you *do* correct something, do it lightly and naturally:

> Child: "I love that red car!" (pointing at a green car)
> You: "Which one? I only see a green car."
> No pressure. No shame. Just real-life exposure.

If your child wants to call red "green" for a while—so be it. They'll sort it out when it matters to them. Trust in their wisdom: They might know that the car is green and call it red on purpose for reasons neither you or they know. However, their innate ability to learn is most likely in action and doing exactly what they need to do to learn on the highest level. Simply observe your feelings about her making a 'mistake' or observe the wonder of your child doing what they want to do without harming anybody.

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3. Teaching → Keep It Casual, Open, and Child-Led

If your child asks to learn something:

- Discover their preferred learning style (listening, watching, doing, moving…)
- Allow movement while they listen. Bouncing, pacing, or rolling around doesn't mean they're not listening.
- If they lose interest, don't take it personally. Just adjust and ask next time: *"What would make this more fun or interesting for you?"*

Let teaching be a dialogue, not a download.

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4. Punishment & Threats → Be Honest About Consequences

Punishment creates fear and resentment. Threats break trust. If your child is doing something problematic, try this:

1. **Pause. Breathe. Observe.**
2. **Get curious:** Why is this behavior happening?
3. **Explain calmly, clearly, and truthfully.**

Example:

> *"When you walk around eating, crumbs get everywhere. Then I have to clean for longer, which takes time away from being with you or relaxing. And if we miss crumbs, we could get ants or cockroaches. I don't want that. Do you?"*

Real reasons connect far more than "Because I said so."

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5. Reward → Let Recognition Be Natural, Not Performed

Instead of praise or bribes, let your reaction be sincere and minimal:

- A smile
- A high five
- A quiet "Wow" if you're truly impressed

If praise feels automatic, notice that—it's likely a leftover reflex from your own conditioning. Children develop true confidence when they do things *for themselves*, not for applause.

The best compliment and confidence-boost you can give a child is to treat them as an equal.

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6. Testing → Only When They Ask

If your child says, "Test me!"—go for it! Make it fun, and follow their lead.

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7. Handling Big Emotions

Instead of trying to "fix" or distract them, **acknowledge what's real**. Research shows that simply naming the feeling can calm the brain.

“You’re sad.”
“You’re really angry right now.”
“That scared you.”

Offer a hug, a back rub, your presence.
If they don’t want touch, stay close and speak gently.
If they tell you to go away—move toward the door slowly. Most kids will ask you to stay when they feel like it again.

If not, leave with love:

“I’m nearby when you need me.”

Then wait. Let the emotion pass through. Your calm teaches self-regulation far better than words.

🧰 Supporting Children During Meltdowns, Conflict & Resistance

When your child is “acting out,” they’re not being bad—they’re **trying to reconnect** or express something they can’t say.

Here’s what helps:

- **Don’t ask them to calm down**—you calm down.
- **Don’t ask them what’s wrong with them**—get curious instead.
- **Don’t distract them**—stay with the moment.

Even kids you’re with all day can feel disconnected. Small moments of **undivided attention**—cuddling, playing, exploring—can prevent many emotional outbursts. Let them know:

“We’ll have time together after I finish X. I’m looking forward to it.”

🔄 After the Storm: Debrief Gently

Once everyone is calm, talk about what happened—without shame or blame.

Example for smaller children:

> *“Lima was playing with your toy, Bo. You grabbed it. Lima screamed and scratched you, and now you are crying. We don’t grab or scratch. We use our words, girls, ok?.”*

Then pause. Most of the time, they’ll reflect or even apologize on their own.

Use age-appropriate language. For older kids, you could involve them in brainstorming solutions but the older my daughters became, the less I interfered and let them work it out amongst them, also conflicts with other kids. Nowadays, they’re 8 and 5 and I rarely step it.

👂 When Conflict Is Rooted in Fear

If your child resists sharing or lashes out, get curious:

> *“You don’t want Lima to play with your toy. What are you worried might happen?”*
> *“She will break it or throw it away!”*
> *“Lima, will you break it or throw it away?”*
> *“No.”*
> *“Okay then.”*

Helping them name and face their fears turns conflict into cooperation.

You can also use this approach to protect objects:

> *“I’m a bit worried that water might spill on my laptop. Move the glass, please?”*

Again: Calm, honesty, and respect go a long way.

💬 Final Thoughts

As you can see, most of the time words are unnecessary and your simple presence and love resolve issues. Letting them solve their problems and conflicts with others is the best way for them to learn.