

Most helpful and hurtful words for children

We asked over 1,000 children what are the most helpful and encouraging words and what are the most hurtful and upsetting words – and their thoughts and feelings about hearing them.

The findings show the huge power of positive words on a child's beliefs about themselves and the real value of positive reinforcement, reassurance, and acceptance.

“Words, they stick with you forever...bruises will go away.” – Girl aged 12

Top 5 most helpful and encouraging words and phrases for children

1. 'I am proud of you'
2. 'You can do it'
3. 'I believe in you'
4. 'I'm here for you'
5. 'It's OK to make mistakes, you can learn from them'

Hearing these make them feel...

Encouraged, happy, good about themselves, loved/liked, confident, proud of themselves, believing in themselves, calm.

The most hurtful and upsetting words and phrases for children

1. 'You're useless'
2. 'You're stupid'
3. 'You can't do anything right'
4. 'You're worthless'
5. 'I'm ashamed of you'

Hearing these make them feel...

Sad, low in confidence, depressed, humiliated, doubting themselves, anxious, ashamed, embarrassed, isolated, frightened.

Let's build children up,
not knock them down