

Words matter. They stick. They last a lifetime. They shape who we are and who we become.

# Stop, Breathe, Think, Speak

## Four steps when talking to children

Let's build children up,  
not knock them down

### Stop.

We all get overloaded sometimes. Stress and anger can build up until we're ready to snap. If you feel that happening in a situation with a child, stop for a moment and take a step back.

We often regret the words we say under stress, and they can have a lasting impact on the child.

### Breathe.

Slowing our breathing calms us down, physically, mentally and emotionally. We're able to think more clearly when we pause to breathe.

Try the 7/11 technique – breathe in through your nose to the count of 7, and out through your mouth for 11.

### Think.

Treat this pause for breath as a buffer between the incident that's upset you and the action you're going to take – the words you're going to say.

Take a moment to think about the impact your words might have and what you want to achieve by saying them.

### Speak.

After stopping to breathe and think, you'll be in a better place to speak to the child about what's happened. You can take action without using hurtful, demeaning words.

Respect the child and listen to them – acknowledge how they feel and talk it through. Focus on addressing the behaviour, not the person – there's a big difference between asking a child to pick up the clothes they've left on the floor and telling them they're lazy.

#### In an emergency

If things get too much for you, you may need to get out of your immediate environment and get urgent support. You can use **Shout's free 24/7 crisis text service** for mental health support on **85258** or [giveusashout.org](https://giveusashout.org), or, if you're worried about a child's safety, contact the **NSPCC** at [help@NSPCC.org.uk](mailto:help@NSPCC.org.uk) or on **0808 800 5000**.

If you're a child and need help, you can get confidential support from **Childline** - to find out more go to [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) you can also call free on **0800 1111**.