

# How **adults** can build children up, not knock them down

This short guide for adults who spend time with children is part of a set of supportive resources we've developed with Dr Fiona Pienaar to help us all talk to children in a way that will build them up, not knock them down.

## Five practical tips for communicating with children

### 1 Role model

As adults, we're role models for children and have a major influence on their development, and how they communicate. Encouraging words can build up their confidence and develop their self-esteem and help them feel valued and connected. Abusive, dismissive, or belittling words or attitudes are likely to do the opposite.

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*Talk to children in a calm, kind, respectful tone. You may have been hurt yourself, but you can break the cycle. If we respect children, they respect themselves and others.*

*Give a child your full attention and try not to interrupt when they are talking.*

### 2 Set expectations

Whenever you spend time with children and want them to do something, give them really clear, instructions and set specific expectations in language they can understand and that's right for their age and stage of development. Children want to do the best they can. Compassionate and reassuring language – and recognising and appreciating that everyone's different – will help them feel safe and supported, accepted and loved.

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*Avoid shouting, insults, put-downs or name-calling, and language that will intimidate or belittle a child.*

### 3 Focus on positives

We all want to know when we have done well, and to understand why. Give children compliments and praise whenever you can, and explain in detail why you're impressed with them. This shows them that you really see them and value what they have achieved.

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*It is important not to criticise them as a person. When you're addressing a problem, explain that it's the behaviour you don't like, not them as an individual.*

### 4 Stop and think

We all get overloaded and stressed sometimes. Try to pause and think about what you're going to say. If you're feeling angry and agitated, or experiencing challenging emotions yourself, stop, breathe, step away if you need to, and think before you speak.

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*Be aware of your body language too. For example, avoid standing over a child, as this can intimidate them, so get down to their level to communicate eye to eye.*

### 5 Repair

It's never too late to put things right. When you recognise that you've said something that could be hurtful to a child, take time to have a chat with them and say sorry and let them know you mean it. Encourage them to talk about how they're feeling, and make a fresh start together.

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*Try not to be too hard on yourself when things go wrong. When we get angry or say something we regret, it's usually because we're under pressure, and there's too much going on. It's important that you have support too, and have ways to take pressure off yourself.*

### 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**.