

# *The Chit-Chat*



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# *The Chit-Chat*

Dedicated to all the people who have helped me learn about the power of words.

# *The Chit-Chat*

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# *The Chit-Chat*

## Introduction

In our family, the word “chit-chat” is code for “we are going to have a conversation that may be uncomfortable or difficult on some level for one or both of us.” The word is part of our family culture and we all use it. No matter the topic, the goal of the chit-chat is to gain a greater understanding of one another and increase closeness.

The chit-chat is a general communication strategy for people of all ages, in any type of relationship. The examples used here will be for children, but the steps and method remain the same, whether it is between spouses, co-workers, relatives, or friends. The steps also remain the same whether they are being facilitated by a parent, grandparent, teacher, or therapist.

A chit-chat can be a planned event or a spontaneous occurrence. It has specific goals, steps, and unique elements that set it apart from a regular conversation. Chit-chats are effective with people aged 5 or 6 and up. With younger children, all of the the elements of chit-chat communication are very helpful. You just might not follow the steps exactly, and the child’s interaction will be significantly different.

By learning how to have successful chit-chats, you do the following:

- You keep communication open.
- You show the person you are talking with that you care by having the courage to have conversations that may put one or both of you outside your comfort zone. If you are a parent, you are showing your child that you are making conscientious effort on their behalf, the same way you would put effort and energy into a difficult conversation you might need to have with a spouse, friend, co-worker, or boss. They see that it matters to you, even if you aren’t perfect at it.
- You remove shame and guilt. The chit-chat leaves the person intact. They do not come away feeling like they have been lectured, put down, shamed, humiliated, or shut out. A chit-chat elevates everyone involved.
- You get the opportunity, once again, to remind the person you are talking with that you expect greatness out of them. You believe in them. You’re never going to give up on them. And you’re always going to help them--even when they are off track or make poor or questionable choices.
- As a parent or grandparent, you do not over-react, or even create a false over-reaction to prove a point. You stay present and calm. You show your child it is safe for them to learn and grow as your child. You have been your best self, the best parent you can be, in this moment. You took your one chance, and made the most of it. This leads to more excellent parenting.
- As a teacher or therapist, you have created a safe space for someone, one that he may or may not enjoy elsewhere. You provide actual tools for tangible movement and growth.

# The Chit-Chat

## Why this was written

In some languages, the word “love” directly translates to the word “to understand.” Indeed, when we feel understood, we feel loved. Alternatively, when we feel misunderstood, we feel frustrated and disconnected from others.

Communication is the key to creating a safe space for children. It is the single most important skill you can have as a parent, teacher, or therapist. In fact, no amount of love or concern will make up for the ability to communicate effectively with a child. You can have all the love in the world, but if it comes out in a counterproductive or toxic way--or doesn't come out at all--it won't count for much. Through my coaching practice and the Happy Kids classes I teach, I have been able to guide parents and couples to gain skills around sharing the love that is inside them, as well as communicating their conflicts, needs, wishes, and fears in ways that inspire, empower, and expand their relationships.

Through my practice I noticed how often the communication style of the person I was working with was at the core of the issues they were experiencing. Their heart and intentions were on track, but their ability to communicate showed up as a major detriment. While helping people and simultaneously experiencing my own communication growth as a parent and as a person, I created simple steps that became the *chit-chat*. When followed, this method yields much better results than going into communication blindly, or worse--avoiding the communication altogether. I find that people typically fall into one of three categories in terms of how they communicate both as parents and in their life in general.

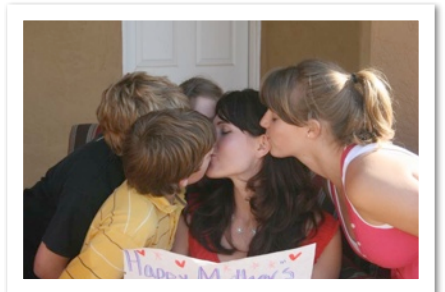
Those who:

1. Avoid communication altogether in order to avoid discomfort or more potential problems.
2. Communicate, but do not listen well. They do and say things during communication that limit its quality or shut it down completely.
3. Over-react to most issues, communicate in an overbearing or aggressive way, have all the answers, and generally shut people out. They show up as dominant over others, but not close.

I started teaching the chit-chat formally over ten years ago. Whether implemented step-by-step, or by simply weaving bits of this and parts of that into daily communication, people who use it have been able to become more approachable and effective with their children, students, and clients. For therapists, it offers a systematic, tried and true method of moving through an issue with an individual, couple, or family.

With my own children, doing my best as a parent has always been one of my most highly cherished values. This means putting the same time and attention to my parenting skills as I do to my professional and social life. In this way, my kids have a knowing that even when I'm unknowingly doing something “wrong” as their parent, it is being done with the intention of doing it right. My kids have a knowing that I am always engaged and working toward being my best self as their parent.

The chit-chat is one part of this.



# *The Chit-Chat*

## When to have a chit-chat

You might want to have a “chit-chat” with someone if:

- They have a specific behavior or habit you would like them to release or modify.
- They are making a decision, large or small, and you want to be part of the process.
- You notice a change in them that is concerning to you.
- They are bringing down the energy of others with a choice they are making.
- They are a child who has done something to get “in trouble” at home, school, or somewhere else.
- They are annoying others with a choice they are making.
- They are doing something that is counterproductive for them that is concerning.
- Something happened that you want to talk through with them in a more in-depth way. It could be one where they acted appropriately at all times, and you want to take the time to talk it through with them thoroughly to help solidify the choices they made in the situation. Or, it could be one where they were out of integrity and caused themselves and/or others a lot of problems. You will be talking about things that have already happened, but the steps remain the same.



2012: Annelise and Cara Day hiking while on vacation in Washington state. Many mini-chit-chats accomplished here.

Things to consider about when and where to have the chit-chat:

- Avoid having the chit-chat when the person is tired or hungry, or otherwise out-of-sorts. Sometimes this is unavoidable because of the circumstances, in which case you can just acknowledge their “less than” state and explain you still need to talk at this time.
- Talk in a place where other people will not interrupt you. This could be at your home or office, outside, or on a slow walk. A public place where either one of you might feel uncomfortable expressing emotions is not a good choice for the chit-chat. A natural protective wall will automatically go up in these situations, diminishing the opportunity for open sharing of both information and emotions.

# The Chit-Chat

## Overview

### Overview

The steps:

1. Initiate
2. Describe
3. Gather the Facts
4. Brainstorm
5. Make New Agreements
6. Check-In Later



You can take a picture of this overview or write the steps down on the notepad in your phone if it feels helpful to keep it handy.

A word before we jump into the steps:

Before taking the first step, *Initiate*, it's a great idea to center yourself. At the most basic level, centering is relaxing yourself. Centering involves going to a quiet space, sitting down, and taking a few cleansing breaths while visualizing a positive outcome for your chit-chat. That's all. The purpose of centering is creating a relaxation response that can help you stay calm and focused during the chit-chat, or any situation where calm is needed.

You may create a relaxation response in any number of ways, such as by exercising, reading, playing video games for a bit, or watching a show that makes you laugh and gives you a break from thinking. Perhaps you want to call an objective, open-minded friend, or enjoy a meal. Or, you may just tell yourself to "relax" if you are good at doing that.

*How* you center is less important than the fact *that* you center. The potential intensity of the upcoming chat will determine how formal and in-depth the centering process should be. You can center for just a few moments or minutes before the chit chat, or a bit longer if needed or desired. Centering can also take place the night before.

If you already have a regular centering practice, you may be used to centering yourself throughout the day. The basics of this life-giving process are described in depth in Appendix A. It's important to note that there is no one way, or "right" way to center, this is just my way.

# The Chit-Chat

## Step 1: Initiate

The first step is to let the other person know you want to have a chit-chat. This can be done by asking them or telling them, depending on your relationship with the person as well as the subject of the chit-chat. It can be done face-to-face or through writing in some way, such as a note or email. This is an important step because it sets the tone of your discussion. Since you will be centered before this step, the other person will feel your intention and you will be setting yourselves up for a greater outcome.

By giving the other person a heads up, whether by asking them to talk, or letting them know that you will be talking, they may have a higher level of engagement around coming up with creative solutions and making new agreements throughout the chit-chat, than if you jump in without giving them the time and space to process what is about to happen. Even when a chit-chat is about a relatively simple topic, it is still beneficial to give the person a moment to take a breath and mentally prepare for something other than usual conversation or small-talk.

Note: You can come up with your own word for this type of conversation, other than chit-chat. However, it is important to have and use a special name for this type of conversation when you are using it with someone you will have an on-going relationship with. The reason for this will become more clear as you read on.

Here are some possible words for asking someone to have a chit-chat:

- I want to have a chit-chat with you about something I think is important to both of us.
- I want to feel closer to you and think we could benefit from a chit-chat.
- I'd like to have a chit-chat so we can talk about what's been going on, what's happened, etc.
- There's something that has been causing a lot of dissonance for me and I'd like to have a chit-chat with you about it.
- I think we should have a chit-chat because this isn't working.

If the topic is emotionally-charged, or too recent, it may be that the person you are wanting to talk with may not be ready to have a chit-chat. If that is the case and waiting is an option, let the person know you are ready and that you will still be ready when they are. Ask them if you can check in with them in a few hours, or days, or whatever is appropriate in the given situation. Be sure to check back in. If you are having one with your child or employee, or a similar situation, and it's not up to them, you can just let them know when and where you're going to have it.

If the person does not yet know what a chit-chat is, after you have asked them to have it, you can add:

A chit-chat (or whatever you are calling it) is a conversation in which we work together to come to a new level of awareness and understanding of one another. The purpose of it is to help us \_\_\_\_\_ (to be closer, mend our relationship, understand one another, get to a better place, or whatever fits for your situation). It would be great if we can have it when we will not have time constraints. How does this sound to you?

Summary: You are initiating a chit-chat with another person.



# The Chit-Chat

## Step 2: Describe

The next step is to describe the situation from your perspective in objective terms. This is a critical step in the chit-chat because it sets the tone for the rest of the conversation.

Here's how to do it and some helpful things to know.

General guidelines:

- Use a calm, even voice. Keep your body relaxed. Keep your eyes open and expansive. Use your affirmation from the centering as needed. (See Appendix A).
- When preparing for this part of the discussion, as well as all of the remaining steps, you will want to review the *Winning Ways to Speak with Children*, Appendix B in this e-book. Just reading these can be very inspiring, as well as centering. Coming from this space will help you show up as your very best self in the chit-chat. Even though the winning ways to speak were written specifically for children, indeed, they are effective for all communication.
- Describe your experience of the situation with observational language. Avoid using words that evaluate or judge. One way to develop this skill is to pretend you have a clipboard in your hand. Like a scientist, you are making observations and writing down what you see. Tap into your five senses, observe with them and describe what you have taken in. This makes situations more concrete and less emotional. This is often a more productive basis from which to begin problem-solving. Depending on the depth and emotional charge of the chit-chat, you may want to write down your objective description in bullet points so you can stay on topic. You can have these with you on a piece of paper, or make a notepad in your smart phone. You can list the chit-chat steps and the relevant notes for each step, if needed.
- Avoid saying anything that will cause the person you are talking to to want to put up their walls. This includes slight insults or subtle commentary that the person would be unlikely to recover from. If the walls go up, the conversation will likely end. If the conversation continues, it will likely be less productive or even counter-productive.
- Avoid using extreme words such as always, never, everyone, no one, all, none. Extremes are rarely true and often stem from an emotionally-charged viewpoint. Use language that describes the degree or frequency in concrete terms, rather than in emotional extremes.
- Problem-solving begins at Step 4. Avoid jumping into any solution-oriented discussion at this point. If the person you are talking with starts to do that, you can say, "Let's keep all of the problem-solving stuff for later. Right now, I really want to give you a clear picture of what I am seeing and experiencing."

# The Chit-Chat

## Step 2: Describe

Here are some examples of ways to describe the situation in a chit-chat. They are categorized as ineffective and effective.

| INEFFECTIVE DESCRIPTION  | EFFECTIVE DESCRIPTION   |
|--|---|
| Parent: You're a slob! I can't believe you can live in that mess.              | Both your dirty and your clean clothes are on the ground. There are food plates and cups in your room. You can't find things you look for because so many things are out of place. When I see your things on the ground and not being taken care of, it makes me feel like I don't want to buy things for you.  |
| Teacher: You don't care about school. You have terrible work habits.           | Teacher: You have been off-task in class. I see you doing other things when you are supposed to be getting started on assignments. Sometimes you are talking with other students or moving around the room. Your grades are already being affected. If you continue with these choices, you may get so far behind that it could be difficult to rectify and you may even end up failing this class or getting a grade that will bring your GPA down significantly. This could keep you from achieving the bigger goals you have set for yourself. |
| Therapist: You are a liar.   | From what you've described and what your parents shared with me, it sounds like you've been having some trouble lately with telling the truth. You have said things that are not true, or are only partly true, and the rest is more of a story. A couple of times you have told lies that have helped you get to do things you probably should not have been able to do.   |
| Grandparent: What's wrong with you? You don't have anything to be upset about. | You seem to be sad or upset about something. You are usually cheerful and helpful. You are not talking very much or helping out with things. You're just not your usual happy self.   |

Summary: You are describing your experience of the situation to the other person.

## *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

Pre-Requisite Skill

**REQUIRED**

for chit-chat success!

An essential skill required for an effective chit-chat is the ability to acknowledge and validate the other person as they speak. You will use this skill *while* you are completing all of the remaining steps. If you acknowledge and validate the other person as you complete Step 3, *Gather the Facts*, you will get a LOT more facts! In this case, the facts also include the person's emotions about the situation. Acknowledging and validating is also a wonderful way to listen and speak in every day conversations, as appropriate. In the chit-chat, this skill is your ticket to much greater and richer sharing from anyone you are communicating with. It keeps walls down and information flowing.

After you have described the situation from your perspective in step 2, it's the other person's chance to share their perspective. Before they start, you can say a general acknowledgement by stating, "Thank you for sharing with me. I know it can take a lot of courage to talk about this and I want you to know I recognize the courage you are showing right now."

Practicing this skill with your spouse, colleagues, and others in regular conversation is a great way to build it in unheated, unemotional situations, and can also be a lot of fun for all.

**An important reminder:** The time for brainstorming and reaching new agreements comes later in the chit-chat. That's when you get to fix things. Step 3, *Gather the Facts*, is not the time to share your feelings or values. It's not a time to evaluate or come up with solutions. Hold off. Participate in this **critical** process. If you are a parent, your values will be instilled much more deeply into your children than they would be otherwise. Teachers and therapists will also yield a much greater outcome when this skill is implemented.

When my daughter, Mackenzie, proofed this book she said I should elaborate on this aspect for parents, so here goes. She said that this skill is *the reason* my children share everything with me. When I use that big word everything, it means *everything*. We talk openly about any and every topic. This isn't to say I know every thought they ever have, but you understand my meaning. They usually come to me before decisions. Sometimes they come to me after decisions, whether they turned out well or not. At all times, they know they are going to be acknowledged and validated.

Establishing good communication with my future children was very important to me, long before my children were born. I was not a "seen" or "heard" child growing up because my brother caused so much grief for my single mother that I made a decision to stay on the straight and narrow and keep to myself. This had some positive and some negative outcomes for me, naturally. I wanted something different with my kids and created that from the beginning. I knew that it meant that sometimes I would get information and be privy to things that are not pleasing, but the alternative of being left out of their loop was just not an option for me.

# The Chit-Chat

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

A simple illustration of this occurred when my oldest daughter was 13-years-old. She had three girlfriends over to swim and at one point they came up to me and asked me about the meaning of a sexual term they had heard at school. Because of what it was, I said, "Um, I don't think I want to answer that right now." While I was fine talking about it with my daughter, I was uncertain about sharing the answer with the other girls.

One of the girls said, "Ok, well, then we will just go look it up on Urban Dictionary!" So, I immediately said with a smile, "Ok, girls, have a seat!" and proceeded to tell them the meaning of the term. It was a sexual act, so I explained it. They then questioned as to why anyone would do it and about whether I had ever done it! Again, if we were alone I would have answered that question for my daughter, but I drew the line in this setting because that is private information. I also did not want to influence them in any direction by placing judgment on the act. They understood that, and were happy I took the time to explain the term to them.

I let each of the girls' mothers know before they went home what had taken place so they would be prepared, and to know what the girls had been exposed to at school, in regard to the term. The mothers know me well and were glad to have the heads up. And, they said they were glad they weren't the ones who had to do the explaining, hehe!

Since she was my oldest daughter, it was one of the first times I had to explain something like that. (Now that my children are 14, 16, 18, and 20, the conversation is constant and they mostly lead it amongst themselves, with me chiming in or answering their specific questions that come up.) Even though we had talked about sex and babies and all of that good stuff throughout the years, this was in a new league. It was uncomfortable for me at first, but I didn't let the girls see that. My voice was matter-of-fact and I just said it like I was talking about the weather or something else. When you do this, kids see that you can handle it. They will then be more likely to ask you about something else in the future. They will know you are an open and valuable resource as they navigate the road to independence.



I am safe to learn and grow.

The communication I share with my children goes far beyond discussions about sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Perhaps even more importantly, we talk about what it means to be alive, emotions, goals, and everyday experiences they have, both in the world and with other people. They share their fears and insecurities with me. We discuss social skills, interpersonal skills, manners, how to do all kinds of things academically and professionally, morality, and everything spiritual.

# *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

We discuss all things regarding their bodies and sex as well. I share a lot with them on this topic, whatever they want to know. And, I ask them critical questions that empower them to make choices that will work well for them. Who else do I want to form their beliefs around sexuality? Also, being a sexual being is an important part of a healthy marriage or intimate relationship, the same as any other element. To me, there is no reason someone else, or some other source, should do this important teaching. It's my job.

Regardless of the topic, they want my insight, feel safe to bounce theirs off of me, and I love hearing how they view and experience the world. How does this relate to acknowledging and validating? It's the regular application of this skill on a day-in, day-out basis that creates the safe space in the relationship for the questions and conversations to occur in the first place.

I understand that not every parent may want this level of closeness or communication with their children. Or, they may not feel skilled to do so. Baby steps can go a long way to increasing the quantity and quality of your communication with your child. Just start! It doesn't have to be perfect. Also, we all have different goals and comfort levels as parents, and as people. And that is ok. But, I can say, especially in the current day, it is a wonderful thing to be your child's compass. It can be very easy for children to get lost these days. There is a lot of stimuli and distraction. There's a weakening of many core values and our global society now brings that right into our homes and schools.



Annelise Day, on 3-month explore in Peru, 2013.

At the same time, there are also new and wonderful opportunities that have never existed before. Life can be an incredible, limitless adventure. Love can be felt and shared at new levels as our world gradually awakens. Having a strong relationship with your child helps ensure that you will not only be in their lives when they are grown, but also that your role in it will be significant.

It's important to remain keenly aware that once your children are grown, having a relationship with you becomes a choice for them. The depth and breadth of that relationship will largely be determined by the quality of your communication with them throughout their childhood. For me, the best and most satisfying part of being a parent (actually, of being alive) is the communication I have with my children and what we are able to experience and accomplish together because of it.



# The Chit-Chat

## Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

At this point in the chit-chat, you have initiated the chit-chat and shared your experience of the situation. Now, it's time for the other person to share their perspective, which is Step 3, *Gather the Facts*. This is when you will start acknowledging and validating the other person. You will do this throughout the time they are sharing their perspective. Below are some phrases for acknowledging someone after they share a piece of information and especially after they share their emotions. Acknowledging and Validating is actually a 3-step process. The following pages describe each step in detail. The pages after that give specific examples, showing how each step will look for each example. With a little practice, it becomes second nature.

### 1. Acknowledge:

Immediately after the person shares a piece of information, you will first acknowledge what they said. This lets the person know you heard what they said and confirms that you heard it right. It gives them a chance to correct you if you have gotten it wrong. There is no judgment or fixing or helping at this time. You are simply saying back what the child has said, and asking them if you got it right.

#### Words for acknowledging

I'm hearing you say...  
So, what you're saying is...  
So, when you \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ happens?  
Let me see if I get this...  
What you're telling me is that...  
Let me give that back to you to make sure I got it...  
In other words...  
Let me share what I heard and you can tell me where I'm wrong...

### 2. Identify the value:

The next step is to identify a value that the person holds that is either being crossed or left unfulfilled because of the situation at hand. This step is done silently within yourself. To identify the value, quietly think about the person you are talking with and the current discussion. This is not a time to think about *your* values, or what *you* would do or want. What value of *THEIRS* is showing up in this situation? Remember, you are looking to identify a value that is being crossed or unfulfilled because of the circumstances at hand. Use the list of common values on page 12 as a place to start. See if you can look at the situation and identify 2 or 3 key values that relate to what is happening. Even if you can only identify one value, that is enough. In general, the more values that are being crossed or unfulfilled, the more emotionally charged or difficult the situation may be. That is why identifying these will help you greatly in the last two steps of the chit-chat. This step will make more sense once you read the examples that follow.

# The Chit-Chat

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

**3. Validate:** After you acknowledge the person and silently identify the values being crossed, it's equally important to validate their feelings. Validation of feelings does not mean you agree with their feelings, or that you would have the same feelings in a similar situation. It does not mean you condone their feelings or actions. At the same time, it does not place any judgment on feelings or actions. It simply lets the person know that the way they felt or acted is understandable *given their values or the situation as it was*.

This is very important. We all have a fundamental need to feel normal, regardless of what we are experiencing in life. When people are validated, they share more. They feel more whole. They remain open and emotionally alive. With children, this helps ensure that maturation does not have to be a deadening process. When you validate someone, you become approachable. With a spouse, this deepens connection because you can remain vulnerable and authentic. By doing this with children, you are teaching them that they are safe to learn and grow with you as their guide.

## Words for validating

It is understandable that you feel that way...

No one could blame you for feeling...

I can see that you feel \_\_\_\_\_ and that makes sense...

That's perfectly normal. It can be very upsetting when something like that happens.

Based on your values (or beliefs, or the way you saw that), it's no wonder that you feel that way.

It's ok to feel that way. Just feel it and don't judge yourself.

You will likely notice as you read through this that validating someone is different than how most of us communicate on a regular basis. It is our natural tendency to evaluate and solve things. When we refrain from judgment and the need to fix things right away, we allow a space for the person to just sit with their reality for a few moments. This has the effect of de-escalating any emotions that are associated with the issue. With emotions in check, the first step of effective problem-solving can commence in Step 4, *Brainstorm*. If you start problem-solving in Step 3, *Gather the Facts*, you will miss out on some golden nuggets of information and sharing. Resist the urge to jump into fixing it or, worse, telling the other person your opinions or ideas right away. It's worth repeating: **RESIST!**

# The Chit-Chat

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

Partial list of common values:

Accomplishment  
Acceptance  
Achievement  
Adventure  
Affection  
Belonging  
Communication  
Competition  
Creativity  
Excitement  
Family  
Fitness/Sports  
Food/nutrition  
Freedom  
Friendship  
Fun  
Generosity  
Hygiene  
Honesty  
Independence  
Integrity  
Leadership  
Learning  
Love  
Organization  
Power  
Punctuality  
Recreation  
Respect  
Safety  
Security  
Self-care  
Service  
Silence  
Sleep  
Spirituality  
Tranquility  
Trust

## Integrity

My working definition of integrity is being integrated with the true self. The opposite of integration, is, of course, disintegration. When we are out of alignment with our true selves, we put ourselves at risk of increased stress, problems, turmoil, and chaos.

One of the purposes of identifying the value being crossed or unfulfilled is to be able to discern where the person's stated values are not lining up in their reality. For all of us, dissonance is created when our stated values are out of alignment with how we are actually living our lives. By identifying these areas of misalignment, one of two things can happen:

1. You can decide the value is not something you want to hold as a value anymore. You can release the value and be free of it.
2. You can recommit to the value and identify the action steps you would need to take to get yourself into alignment with the value and begin taking those steps.

Either one of these outcomes is a step toward greater integrity in life. As the facilitator of a chit-chat, you are always looking for areas of misalignment of stated values and actions. During steps 4 and 5, you can come up with creative solutions and new agreements that can help bring the person you are talking with into greater integrity through alignment of stated values and actions.



# *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

Here are some examples of what it sounds like to acknowledge, identify the value, and validate. The examples in this book are with a child, but the format is the same for a person of any age or circumstance.

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## **Example 1: Parent**

Parent: Both your dirty and your clean clothes are on the ground. There are food plates and cups in your room. You can't find things you look for because so many things are out of place. When I see your things on the ground and not being taken care of, it makes me feel like I don't want to buy things for you.

Child: I want my room to be clean, it's always a mess and I can't stand it that way. But, it's a waste of time for me to clean it because it just gets messy again. Besides, I'd rather be doing other things.

Acknowledge: Parent: I'm hearing you say you want your room to be clean, but you are having trouble keeping up with it because you'd rather be doing other things. And, it's frustrating that it always seems to get messy again. Did I get that right?

Child: Yes, that's right.

Parent silently identifies a possible value or two that is being crossed or unfulfilled.

Values identified: Organization, cleanliness, cooperation, fun

Validate: Parent: It's understandable that you might have difficulty keeping up with it because you are more excited about your other activities than you are about cleaning. Most of us are like that! It can seem like a waste of time to complete chores that you have to do over and over again.

---

### Explanation of values identified:

Organization: The child likes to have her things and surroundings organized.

Cleanliness: The child likes to keep her things and her surroundings clean.

Cooperation: The child likes to please her parents by being a cooperative member of the family, which includes keeping her own room clean.

Fun: The child likes to do things that are fun.

If you feel like you just accomplished nothing because nothing has been solved, think again!  
And, remember, you get to start fixing things in Steps 4 and 5!

# *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

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## **Example 2: Teacher**

Teacher: You have been off-task in class. I see you doing other things when you are supposed to be getting started on assignments. Sometimes you are talking with other students or moving around the room. Your grades are already being affected. If you continue with these choices, you may get so far behind that it could be difficult to rectify and you may even end up failing this class or getting a grade that will bring your GPA down significantly. This could keep you from achieving the bigger goals you have set for yourself.

Child: I have to get up at 6:30 every morning and I don't get home until 7:30 at night because of soccer practice, then I have 2 hours of homework most nights. It's too much. I don't like school anymore and sometimes I think what we are learning is useless. So, sometimes in class I just want to take a break.

Acknowledge: Teacher: Let me see if I get this. You have a 12- to 15-hour day every school day and that feels very overwhelming to you. It's making you not like school and also causing you to 'check-out' sometimes while you're in class.

Child: Yes, that's it.

Teacher silently identifies a possible value or two that is being crossed or unfulfilled.

Values identified: Self-care, tranquility, recreation, fun, learning

Validate: Teacher: Since you have to get up at 6:30 a.m. and don't get home after soccer until 7:30 at night and then have homework to do, it's perfectly understandable that you would be feeling very overwhelmed. Anyone in your shoes would feel the same way. It also makes sense that if something seems uninteresting to you and you don't see how it's going to benefit you, or how it lines up with your bigger goals, that you would have a hard time focusing on it.

---

### Explanation of values identified:

Self-care: The child requires 10 hours of sleep to feel rested and to support healthy growth.

Tranquility: The child requires downtime to be happy and relaxed.

Recreation and fun: The child requires time to just have fun in order to increase engagement when its time to work

Learning: The child is curious and likes learning about things he feels he can apply to real things in his life or that he is interested in.

# *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

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## **Example 3: Therapist**

Therapist: From what you've described and what your parents shared with me, it sounds like you've been having some trouble lately with telling the truth. You have said things that are not true, or are only partly true, and the rest is more of a story. A couple of times you have told lies that have helped you get to do things you probably should not have been able to do. What are your thoughts about this?

Child: I don't know why I lie. It just comes out. Sometimes it feels easier to lie or I want someone to think something about me.

Acknowledge: Therapist: Ok, let me give that back to you and you can tell me where I'm wrong. You are not always aware when you are lying, or sure of why you are doing it. Sometimes you lie to make things easier or so that other people will see you in a certain way. Did I get that right?

Child: Yes, that's it.

Therapist silently identifies a possible value or two that is being crossed or unfulfilled.

Values identified: Honesty, attention, harmony, cooperation

Validate: Therapist: Well, I know that you like things to go smoothly and you are very cooperative. That's one of your strengths! It's understandable to me that you might think lying could be easier sometimes in terms of keeping the peace. It's also natural to want attention from others and to think that lying might be a way of getting that. It makes sense.

---

### Explanation of values identified:

Honesty: The child wants to be honest.

Attention: The child wants to be noticed.

Harmony: The child wants the people and situations around her to be harmonious.

Cooperation: The child likes to be a cooperative person which includes being honest with others.

# *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Acknowledge and Validate

The examples

## **Example 4: Grandparent**

Grandparent: You seem to be sad or upset about something. You are usually cheerful and helpful. You are not talking very much or helping out with things. You're just not your usual happy self.

Child: My brother never gets in trouble. I'm the only one who ever gets in trouble. He does things and everyone just ignores it or blames me. I'm always in trouble.

Acknowledge: Grandparent: Let me see if I understood everything you said. You feel that your brother never gets in trouble, only you. Even though he is doing things that are against the rules, or he is doing something you would get in trouble for, he doesn't. You feel you get in trouble more than he does and he never does.

Child: Yes, he never gets in trouble.

Grandparent silently identifies a possible value or two that are being crossed or unfulfilled because of this situation.

Values identified: Honesty, integrity, fairness, cooperation, tranquility, competition

Validate: Grandparent: You have been getting more penalties lately when you two have been interacting. It's understandable to me that you could feel that you are the only one who is receiving a consequence. I know that you care about being a helpful member of the family, and that you want things to be fair, too. It's no wonder this feels so frustrating and unfair to you.

### Explanation of values identified:

Honesty and integrity: The child feels her honesty and integrity are being called into question when she is accused of things she feels she didn't do.

Fairness: The child likes things to feel fair.

Cooperation: The child likes to please her parents by being a cooperative member of the family, which includes getting along with her brother.

Tranquility: The child likes the home to be quiet and stress-free.

Competition: The child feels competitive with her brother.

Remember, sometimes we hold values that work against us at times, such as competition. In the next two steps, the child is given an opportunity to release this value as it relates to her brother.

# The Chit-Chat

## Step 3: Gather the Facts

Now that you have the basics of acknowledging, identifying the value, and validating, you will want to gather information from the other person. While gathering, it is important to acknowledge and validate what is being shared. At the end of Step 3, *Gather the Facts*, you may want to do a more overarching, general acknowledgement and validation. Depending on the topic, you may need to gather a little or a lot of information. Gather as much information as you need to proceed. Ask open-ended and direct questions to get this information. Most people talk too much. They shut communication down because they cannot resist dominating the conversation and being right.

Here are some words for beginning the gathering process:

- In order for us to talk about this, I'd like to know...
- Tell me what's going on from your perspective.
- I'd like you to explain it to me from your view.

Don't do this. Silence yourself and really hear the person you are talking with. Once you ask a question, be quiet. People sometimes take 20 - 60 seconds to *begin* responding. Give them this space to both think about how they feel and how they want to express it, without any interference from you.

Use *Winning Ways to Speak with Children*, Appendix B, as a reference for how to effectively formulate questions throughout the gathering process that will yield the richest responses.

Note to parents: If you are having a chit-chat with your child, you may *require* them to respond to your questions. For example, if they have gotten into trouble for something, they don't really have a choice about participating in a chit-chat. If it's something else, they may have more of a say in the situation. You will have to determine which type of scenario it is, and proceed in that manner. It also depends on the age of the child. My adult children are independent and we have shifted into adult-adult relationships that have different boundaries than a child who is completely dependent upon me and for whom I am still responsible.

It is incredibly important that anytime your child is sharing with you, that you are calm and un-reactive. Even if you are cringing, screaming, or jumping up and down on the inside, it is critical that you keep yourself outwardly unresponsive and stay focused on your bigger objective. Acknowledge your child and continue with calm, open-ended questions. Often times when kids are reluctant to share in my coaching practice, I will say, "It's unlikely you could share something with me that I haven't done or felt myself. You need to be gentle with yourself. You are safe to share and you will feel a lot better after you do." This usually comes up with issues that create feelings of guilt or shame.

If you ask a child a question and they say, "I don't know," gently respond, "What would it be if you did know?" Then, be quiet. Nine times out of ten, this question will yield a response even if the initial response was, "I don't know."



What would you do if you did have a heart?

# The Chit-Chat

## Step 4: Brainstorm

The next step is to brainstorm the options for moving forward. Brainstorming involves generating as many ideas as possible in a quick manner. With this technique, you allow any and all ideas to come forth without evaluation of their worthiness. It's a time to get outside of norms and boxes and truly come up with as many options or solutions possible. Each person shares as many ideas as they can and no commentary is given from either side. Collaborative brainstorming increases buy-in from both parties, and potentially yields greater outcomes. When both parties contribute to the process, they feel more valued and vested.



However, it is important to note that sometimes the brainstorming step is more of a presentation of options, rather than a true brainstorm. Collaboration is not required when the chit-chat is with a child who has lost trust or privilege due to a choice they have made. Or, collaboration can be avoided when the child simply will not participate in the brainstorm. In that scenario, you can say, "You can brainstorm with me and we can work as a team, or I will be telling you how we will move forward without any input from you. What would you like to do?" In this case, you may decide to present the options for moving forward. They may have choices *among* options you are presenting to them in this scenario. Or, they may not. You will have to think about the situation in its entirety, as well as its place in history, to make this decision.

Before brainstorming begins, you may have an idea of the solution you want to get to, but don't let the other person know this. Instead, say, "Let's think of some possible solutions. I have some ideas, and I'd like to hear yours." You can write these ideas down, or just say them aloud, depending on the depth of this chit-chat. Or, if the other person is willing, have him or her write them down to increase ownership and buy-in. I prefer having the ideas written down, even for a simple situation, because seeing things in print helps to bring them into perspective, in addition to making it more "concrete." It's easy to write them onto a smart phone as well. The results of the brainstorm will be utilized in Step 5, *Making New Agreements*.

### Sample brainstorms based on the previous examples:

**Example 1:** (Parent) Child with messy room who wants a clean room, but feels uninspired about the monotonous, never-ending chore of keeping a room clean:

- Don't eat in my room.
- Do a 2-minute-transition-tidy each time I go out of my room after I've been in it for a while.
- Take 1 hour each Saturday to organize my room.
- Clean out my closet and get organizer bins for what is left.
- Donate stuff I don't want anymore or sell some of my things on ebay (this is fun).
- Concentrate on new habit of putting clothes in only one of three places: hamper, drawer, or hung up.
- Get a "keep" box I can throw all my extra papers in that I don't want to throw away.
- Ask someone to help me clean when I feel overwhelmed.
- Clean my room without arguing when I am asked. Go to sushi with Dad after 1 month of this new habit.
- Reward myself with xyz after 30 days of a cleaner room.



# *The Chit-Chat*

## Step 4: Brainstorm

**Example 2:** (Teacher) Overwhelmed child who is off-task in class.

- Meet with teacher for 15 minutes one day each week after class to check-in and get insights on upcoming assignments and tests and to review current grade.
- Count the number of days left in the soccer season. [Explanation: School sports usually last 6 - 8 weeks, or a total of 40 days, plus some weekend games. I like to use numbers to help keep things in perspective. So you could use a calendar, count up the days, and say, "there are just 23 days left in the season." Sometimes hearing the actual number of hours or days required for something helps to put it into perspective. Numbers are a very powerful reality-tester in coaching and therapy. Depending on the situation, the numbers might reveal that some kind of a bigger change does need to be made, such as a schedule adjustment or a new plan for the next semester.]
- Ask all teachers to provide upcoming assignments and homework to get ahead on the weekend.
- Go to bed as early as possible.
- No screen time Sunday through Thursday.
- Do some homework at lunch or before practice starts.
- Write a list of short-term, long-term, and lifetime goals to help connect my current work with my bigger goals.
- Get a tutor to move me through the work faster and with higher quality.
- Remove data plan from phone. (Sometimes children do not realize how often they self-distract with their smart phones).
- Reward of xyz when the desired grades are earned.

**Example 3:** (Therapist) Child who is lying.

- Keep a log of my lies. Write down the lie and the reason I think I lied.
- Right my lies. As soon as I realize I've lied, fix it right away, even if time has passed.
- Write an apology letter to someone I have lied to when my lie has affected them also.
- Use affirmations (see Appendix A) throughout the day to remind myself that I am good enough, just the way I am. I don't have to try to be something else.
- Remember to press my pause button before I speak. Ask myself, "Is it true?" before I speak.
- Put notes on my bathroom mirror, phone face, and binder to remind me "I am a truthful person."
- Reward of xyz when I have 30 days of no lies.

**Example 4:** (Grandparent) Child who seems down and out.

- Talk with parents about my perceptions about my brother never getting into trouble.
- Use an affirmation (see Appendix A) to remind myself that things will not always be or seem fair, but I am still safe in the world.
- Think of and ask my brother to do one fun thing with me each day.
- Think of how I can be a more cooperative member of the family.
- Take space for myself and communicate with my parents more quickly when I start to get annoyed by my brother.

Summary: You are brainstorming ways to move forward.

# The Chit-Chat

## Step 5: Make New Agreements

Step 5, *Make New Agreements*, is when you finalize the outcomes you came up with during Step 4, *Brainstorm*. You and the other person make agreements about what is going to take place going forward and discuss the first action steps for each agreement. There may be things you will be doing, or it may just be the other person taking action steps. Also, the agreements may involve communication or action that involves someone else, such as a teacher, another family member, or a therapist. Or, you may have agreed to think about it for a week and come back to it. Again, each situation is so unique, the conclusion will look different depending on the scenario. You may decide to put your agreements in writing, or just sharing them out loud may be sufficient.

Here are new agreements and the first action step for Example 2 with the teacher and the overwhelmed child.

### Our agreements (and first action step toward each agreement):

- Meet with teacher for 15 minutes one day each week after class to check-in and get insights on upcoming assignments and tests and to review current grade. (Set day and time to meet with teacher).
- Count the number of days left in the soccer season. (Mark last day of soccer in my planner).
- Ask all teachers to provide upcoming assignments and homework to get ahead on the weekend. (Meet with or email each teacher).
- Go to bed as early as possible. (Set phone alarm for 10 p.m. to remind me it is bedtime).
- No screen time Sunday through Thursday. (Ask Mom and Dad to remind me about no screen time).
- Do some homework at lunch or before practice starts.
- Write a list of short-term, long-term, and lifetime goals to help connect my current work with my bigger goals.
- Get a tutor to move me through the work faster and with higher quality. (Ask mom and dad to find tutor).
- Remove data plan from phone. (Call AT&T).
- Reward of xyz when the desired grades are earned. (Set reward with Mom and Dad).

The child would leave the chit-chat with this list of agreements and action steps. If it is a more formal situation, this could also be put in the child's file and/or shared with the parents or school counselor. Consider the level of support that is needed in order to ensure the person's greatest chance for success.

If you had the chit-chat with your spouse, you may post your new agreements somewhere you both can see them.

Summary: You are making new agreements based on your brainstorm.



# *The Chit-Chat*

## Step 6: Check-in Later

It's important to follow-up with the chit-chat as appropriate. You don't want to lose integrity around important issues with the other person by not following through. The person you have communicated with needs to see that you are putting forth the effort in this way in order for their level of engagement to become and remain strong.

Checking-in will be different depending on who you are checking in with. If you are checking in with an employee, it may be a formal meeting, including another person from HR. If it is with your child, it may be just asking them how it is going or how they are feeling about it since the time of the chit-chat and if they need any support. If it is with a therapy client, it may be going through each step to see where they have followed through and where they need to be held accountable. If it is with your spouse, you may check-in regularly, or set a date to revisit your chit-chat. The nature of the chit-chat determines the nature of the check-in.

Summary: You are checking in regarding the new agreements at a later date.

### Summary

The steps:

1. Initiate
2. Describe
3. Gather the Facts
4. Brainstorm
5. Make New Agreements
6. Check-In Later

# *The Chit-Chat*

## Appendix

- A. A Way to Center
- B. Winning Ways to Speak with Children
- C. Practice: Acknowledge and Validate

# The Chit-Chat

## Skill: A Way to Center

I suggest centering yourself before you have the chit-chat. The potential intensity of the upcoming chat will determine how in-depth the centering process should be. You can center for just a few moments or minutes before the chit chat, or a bit longer if needed or desired. Centering can also take place the night before, if desired.

The steps involve going to a quiet space, sitting down, and taking a few cleansing breaths while visualizing a positive outcome for your chit-chat. That's all. The details are below for those who would like to explore centering more thoroughly.

"To learn to see--to accustom the eye to calmness, to patience, and to allow things to come up to it; to defer judgment, and to acquire the habit of approaching and grasping an individual case from all sides. This is the first preparatory schooling of intellectuality. One must not respond immediately to a stimulus; one must acquire a command of the obstructing and isolating instincts."

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*,  
Or, How to Philosophize With the Hammer

The main purpose of centering is to create a relaxation response within yourself that will allow you to be more effective while you are doing something that may cause emotions or frustration to set in during the chit-chat.

You may create this in any number of ways, such as by exercising, playing video

games for an hour, reading, or watching a show that makes you laugh and gives you a break from thinking. *How* you center is less important than the fact *that* you center.

As a teacher or therapist, you are having the chit-chat with a student or client while serving as a professional in your given field. As professionals, we strive to consistently maintain a healthy emotional detachment from our students and clients that allows us to serve them in the best possible way. While we have great compassion and care for them, our work does not and should not carry the same emotional charge as it does when interacting with our own child. This objective viewpoint is what allows us to best serve a student or client.

If teachers and therapists did not operate in this way, we may have significant emotional distress from being too enmeshed with the issues of our many, many students and clients. This does not mean that a teacher or therapist does not need to center. It just means that it may occur more as part of their regular self-care, rather than as something they do specifically before a chit-chat, since they could have many per day, in some form or another.

Of course, parents also should also strive for this level of objectivity and clear-headedness when talking with their children. It can sometimes just be a little harder to maintain when we are interacting with our own children because of our significant emotional investment and extensive shared history.

## *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Center

If you already have a regular centering practice, you may be used to centering yourself throughout the day. If centering is a new concept for you, this step provides the basics of this life-giving process. There is no one way, or “right” way to center, this is just my way. Here are the steps to center yourself:

1. If possible, go to a quiet space that is peaceful to you. If you cannot go to a different space, center where you are.
2. If possible, reduce stimuli. This might mean putting on an eye mask and putting in ear plugs. I am highly sensitive to noise and light, so this is most helpful to me for centering and especially for deep meditation. I recommend the blue Hearos earplugs available at grocery and drug stores, and the Sleep Master sleep mask, available on Amazon or their website. You can also purchase decibel reducers commonly used by musicians. These are a bit more expensive, but are less noticeable and work well. If you cannot reduce stimuli, just center in the current conditions.
3. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
4. Take a deep cleansing breath. This means the air goes in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Try to breathe in for a full 4 seconds, deeply from the diaphragm, and out for 8 full seconds. Most people do not exhale deeply enough, which leads to more shallow breathing. You should feel your diaphragm expanding as you breathe in, as well as pushing the air out toward the end of the exhale. Only do this 2 or 3 times, or you may become light-headed. Once you are adept at taking cleansing breaths, hold the air at the top of the inhale for up to 4 seconds before the exhale. This will further increase your capacity and mindfulness when practiced over time.

That is the basic center. However, adding the next steps to centering will increase the effects. Additionally, when steps 5 - 8 are practiced regularly, it has been my experience that, in time, just completing steps 1 - 4 leads to an automatic relaxation response similar to the effect of completing all 8 steps.

The source and center of all man's creative power is his power of making images, the power of imagination.

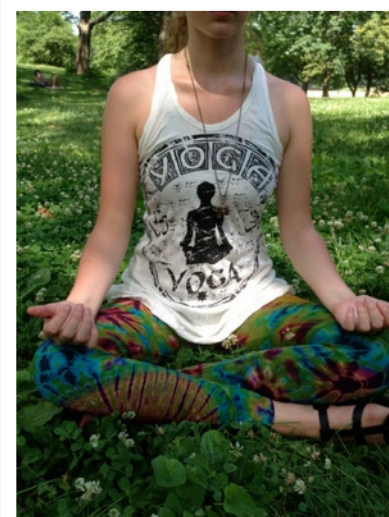
--Robert Collier

5. Breathe peacefully. Focus on your center. The center of gravity is a couple of inches below the navel. Keep your eyes closed, keep breathing steadily, and imagine an amber light warming your center. Visualize negative energy leaving your body, as your center warms and brightens your form. If a thought comes into your mind, bubble it and let it float away. Do this for as long as you want to or are able in the given situation.
6. In this relaxed state, create an affirmation for use during your chit-chat. An affirmation is a simple phrase that affirms something. An affirmation for a chit-chat should be something that helps you step into a place of peace, non-judgment, and openness. The one I use most often is, “There is room for this, too,” the meaning of which will be explained below. Pages 26 and 27 contain a list of affirmations I created to use at different times and what they mean to me. Use one of these or let them inspire one for your situation.
7. Lock in this affirmation by writing it down on paper or in your phone. You can also write it on a small paper and tape it to the front of your phone or other place you often look. I do this with any new thing I am wanting to incorporate into my life, whether it is a thought process or way of being. It is very helpful.
8. Silently use the affirmation as needed throughout the chit-chat.

# *The Chit-Chat*

Skill: Center

Mackenzie Day centers  
in Central Park



## **Affirmations**

An affirmation is a simple phrase that affirms something. Things that are affirmed expand and repeat. By creating affirmations around daily life, you can begin to create more of your world, and reduce the number of experiences in which you are simply having to react to what is happening.

I create affirmations based on these things:

- **Goals and visions of the desired outcome**

Goals and visions for what you want to have show up in the current situation or in your life can be used to create powerful affirmations. It is wonderful to create a vision of how you want it to look and feel between you and the other person at the end of the chit-chat before you have the chit-chat. This means to literally imagine the end of the chit-chat in your mind. See it. Feel the primary emotions you want to have created: calmness, love, peacefulness, harmony. Perhaps you see yourself hugging the person or placing your hand on their shoulder. Perhaps you see a smile on their face, a look of a relief. Create a full-color picture in your mind of how you want it to look and feel when the chit-chat is over. Hold that mental picture throughout the chit-chat and tie it to your affirmation.

- **Painbodies**

Painbodies are emotional triggers that are created when we have a troubling or traumatic experience. After a negative or traumatic experience, we sometimes still carry mental and physical memories of the trauma, whether it was emotional, physical, or both. Painbodies can become activated at a later time in life when something similar happens, or something that reminds us of the trauma occurs, even if it is in a very small way.

Often times, this occurs at a subconscious level. A person may have a reaction and not even know why they are reacting so strongly to something. You may be aware of some of your painbodies, while others may still be subconscious. If you are aware of a sensitivity, or painbody, you can quietly acknowledge it and not let it affect you as much, or at all. If you are not aware of it, you may have a strong reaction and not quite be sure why.

Strong emotions are windows to painbodies in therapy. Creating awareness around painbodies can help practitioners lead clients to great healing. You can also do this healing with yourself and your loved ones, including children. When a painbody is triggered, situations generally turn out in a less positive way because of the emotional charge that occurs, typically clouding judgment and reason.

Bringing light to painbodies helps to heal and release them. Look for my upcoming e-book that will teach you how to identify, heal, and release your painbodies, titled, "Healing the Core." Similar to your own painbodies, think about the painbodies you may be aware of in your loved ones and create affirmations that will help you to be the space for them during the chit-chat.

# The Chit-Chat

Skill: Center

| AFFIRMATION                  | MEANING / PURPOSE   |
|------------------------------|---|
| There's room for this, too.  | In this affirmation, the word "room" means "space." The space that is being created is symbolic within me. The word "this" means something that is unexpected or annoying. This affirmation helps me create a spaciousness within myself for something I do not necessarily want to have showing up in my life at the given time, or at all. For example, you may be coming home from work and want to come into a quiet house. When you get home, your kids are making all kinds of noise. By taking in a deep breath and quietly saying the affirmation, "There's room for this, too," you can center yourself and avoid feeling annoyed, or as annoyed as you might have been. It can be used with something as small as a child making an unnecessary noise, to a time when someone gives you devastating news, or something similar. |
| May I be the space for this. | A variation on the previous, serving the same purpose.  |
| One chance.                  | This reminds me that I have only this one chance to respond to the situation. There are no true do-overs in life and the quality of life is determined in large part by how we handle its most difficult moments. This affirmation helps put me in that space in a potentially difficult or escalating situation.   |



"With the right words, you can change the world."

~Charlotte A. Cavatica, *Charlottes' Web*

# The Chit-Chat

Skill: Center

## Affirmations: Continued

| AFFIRMATION                                | MEANING / PURPOSE   |
|--|---|
| First, last, only.                         | A variation on the previous. Affirming that this is potentially the first, last, and only time for this interaction.  |
| I am love.                                 | This affirmation helps me operate from love, rather than fear. I believe we come from a source of love and that therefore we <i>are</i> that love. Love is our true essence.  |
| I am light.                                | A variation on the previous. I imagine my light (love) shining out through me.  |
| I am a flute and love plays through me.    | A variation on I am love, with a visual that I like.  |
| I have enough, I give enough, I am enough. | This puts me in a space of being whole, complete, and perfect, just as I am. It reminds me that I am enough, at this very moment. There is <i>nothing</i> more that is needed.  |
| I am safe.                                 | This affirmation helps me remember that, existentially, I am safe in the world, that all things are as they should be, even this experience, and that fear is an illusion of the ego when it's threatened. Unless someone is sticking me with a pin, I am not in pain, and all suffering is a creation of the mind.           |
| No big moment.                             | This affirmation grounds me in presence as a reminder that there is no future, big moment that is going to happen that brings meaning to life. The only meaning is in this moment, a gift that has been given to us. Happiness is created on a moment to moment basis and I want to experience each little one of them fully. |
| Play full out.                             | A variation on the previous, serving the same purpose. (This is also our family motto.)   |

# *Winning Ways to Speak with Children*

By Cara Day, M.A., C.E.C.

**DAYCHILD.ORG**



## *Winning Ways to Speak with Children*

Dedicated to Annelise, Mackenzie, Thomas, and Addison Day for  
always creating opportunities for me to find just the right words to love you best.

# *Winning Ways to Speak with Children*

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# Winning Ways to Speak with Children

## Introduction

The words you use, how they are put together, combined with the open, expansiveness of your eyes, your tone of voice, and the warmth of your body language help determine the quality of your communication with your children. This is what they are going to remember. They are not going to remember whether the floor was clean, or what kind of car you chose to drive them around in. They are going to remember how your face looked throughout their childhood, how easy your smile came, and how you handled yourself at life's most challenging moments. I wrote these lists because a couple who attended a Happy Kids class I presented said to me during the class, "But what are the actual words you say?" This had also come up frequently in coaching sessions with parents. It was then that I realized that many parents struggle with finding the right words, even if they are already adept at staying calm and centered. I spent the next year writing down everything I said that help creates our family culture. This mini-e-book is the result.

The questions and phrases in this e-book are grouped into sections, although many overlap. The lists can also be used as a tool for centering. This means you can quietly read one or more of the lists to yourself as a way to get into a space of being ready to listen, empathize, empower, and guide your loved one. Post the pages you are concentrating on in your closet, by your desk, or anywhere you regularly look. Read through the questions, take a cleansing breath, and begin your day. Use it as often as necessary to recenter. Put some of your favorites on sticky notes in key places, or on the notepad in your phone. Sometimes I print a question or phrase out very small, in 6 or 8 pitch, and tape it to my smart phone as a reminder about something I'm working on at the time or with a particular child or person in my life.

## General Do's and Don'ts of the Winning Ways to Speak

### Things to do:

- Ask open-ended questions. This means the question cannot be answered with only a yes or a no.
- Make eye contact. Take cleansing breaths as needed while you speak with your loved one.
- Most of the questions in this mini-e-book can be followed up with, "Tell me more about that." Sometimes, several times. Get as much as you can from the questions.
- When the person you are talking to says, "I don't know." Say, "What would it be if you did know?"
- When a child is afraid of punishment or judgment, say "There's probably not a lot you could say to me that I have not done or felt myself. I can almost guarantee that. I'll help you no matter what."
- Telling children regularly, "You are safe. I'm not going to give up on you. This is a safe space for you. I will always help you." will help them start and keep sharing.
- Center and re-center on creating connection, as needed, throughout any discussion.
- Only say things that are true, kind, and needed.

### Things to not do:

- Explain how you are older and/or wiser and know more.
- Look at your phone or take a call during a conversation.
- Express exasperation that you are having the conversation again, if it is a repeat topic.
- Talk about yourself or your own experiences without asking permission first.
- Ask your child, "When will you ever learn?" or similar language.
- Use put-downs or zingers.
- Hold the need to be right.
- End the conversation before they do, without good reason.

Following these guidelines will help you avoid common pitfalls that stifle communication and cause children to get out the brick and mortar.

# Winning Ways to Speak with Children

## Rejoining

Words for when:

- You see your child after you have not seen them for a little or long while.
- You want to give your child an open-ended chance to share.
- You want to ask your loved one how their day was without saying, "How was your day?"

Tell me something new.

Tell me something I don't know about you today.

What's new with you today?

What's the best thing that happened today?

What great thing happened today?

Tell me a funny story from today.

Tell me something you think might surprise me about today.

Tell me about you.

What wonderful thing happened today?

What could have been better about today?

What would you have done differently today, if you had a little time machine?

What are you going to take away from today?

What are you going to do differently tomorrow because of today?

Who or what challenged you today?

What's a goal you have for tomorrow as a result of today?

## Praising

Words for when:

- You want to give your child specific feedback about choices they are making.
- You want your child to know that you notice him or her.
- You want your child to feel your love verbally.

Important note: Instead of saying, "Good job," or a similar phrase when your child is on track, describe what they did and the specific or likely outcome of the choice they made. This is the type of praise that will have meaning for your child, will likely lead to more effective choices, and will help them learn how to give this same type of praise to others.

You got everything you had to get done first, and now you can enjoy playing.

You helped clear and wash the dishes, everything is cleaned up, and we are ready for tomorrow.

Your room is tidy. You know where everything is and you are taking good care of your belongings.

You chose not to argue back with him. You avoided escalating the situation and that is helping our whole family.

You showed courage in talking with her. No matter the outcome, you can know you did your best.

You are full of good choices. The choices you are making are helping everyone to get along and do better. Thank you.

# Winning Ways to Speak with Children

## Loving

Words for when:

- You want to show your child how excited you are to be their parent.
- You want to increase the loving feeling in your home.
- You want to express love and gratitude to your spouse or partner in front of your children.

I love you  
 Thank you...  
 I love it when you...  
 You make me smile so much!  
 You make my heart go pitter-pat when you...  
 You are so great!  
 You are a magical part of our family--thank you!  
 I'm so lucky to have you in my life.  
 You are so great--I can't believe you're mine!  
 That was super. I think you're wonderful.  
 Wow. Look what you did!  
 Thanks for loving me.  
 Thanks for loving me through this.  
 I love the way you love me.  
 You give the best love.  
 We have such a great family.  
 This is so much fun.  
 I can't wait to snuggle you when I get home.  
 Thank you for helping our family.  
 I can't believe what a lucky duck I am.  
 You're making our family great.  
 You are such a fun person.  
 You are the BEST. (Men especially like to be told this.)  
 I can't believe I get to live with all these great people.

Look at us, having so much fun.  
 I looked forward to seeing you all day.  
 You're a GGT. (Guaranteed Good Time)  
 You crack me up.  
 You are my gift.  
 Look at us! We are so awesome.  
 I feel so happy inside.  
 Look at you! You're shining.  
 We are such a great team.  
 Oh my goodness, you'd better hug me.  
 Wow, now we're on a roll.  
 I love being with you.  
 Who wants to give me a squeeze hug?  
 This is such a special day.  
 I love our family. I'm so glad you're in it.  
 Wow, look at all this love.

# Winning Ways to Speak with Children

## Words for Connecting

Words for when:

- Your child is wanting to share information or a story
- You are wanting your child to share information or a story
- You are in a potentially emotional discussion with your child, or you are discussing an issue or problem
- You are wanting to create a safe space for your child to share openly
- You want your child to be gentle with him or herself and not judge the way they are feeling or what they are experiencing

Tell me more.

I'm curious about that. What else can you tell me?

Can you dig a little deeper? I want to know more.

I'm not going to give up on you. I believe in you.

I want to know more about you. Tell me something else.

I can see you are struggling, be gentle with yourself.

Why do you think you're going through this right now?

What gifts do you think might come from this experience?

How can I best love you right now?

In what ways are you settling or selling yourself short?

What will it take for you to take the next step?

What would it look like if you removed all judgment?

What would the highest version of you say about this?

Let's write down everything on your mind so it can be more clear.

Let's talk about the worst thing that could happen. Chances are it won't be that bad.

On a scale of 1 - 10, how \_\_\_\_\_ are you? (upset, engaged, anxious, hopeful, etc.)

Let's brainstorm options for the possible outcomes.

Tell me what's going on for you right now.

You seem frustrated and I want to get your thoughts.

What's in front of you right now?

You seem weighed down. What's causing that weight?

Tell me about something that's important to you right now.

Why are you feeling so happy?

You seem angry and I want you to feel understood.

If you feel unsure about something, I can help you think of ideas or make a decision.

I can help you solve a problem if you want me to.

You seem sad and if you want I can help you figure out why.

You seem overwhelmed and I'd like to help you get a handle on things.

I know you haven't done this before. In what ways does it feel a little scary for you?

What is one thing you can tell me so I will understand you?

What kind of love do you need right now?

I'm going to love you through this. What's the first thing I can do to love you right now?

How do you feel about tomorrow?

At what other time have you felt this way?

Why do you think this is happening?

What's holding you back?

How can you be the space for this?

How could you allow room for this, too?

What can you do about that?

What's going on in there?

# Winning Ways to Speak with Children

## Empowering

Words for when:

- You want to help the people you love move past limiting beliefs they may hold about themselves, others, or the world.
- You want to help the people you love move past habitual thought patterns that may be keeping them from greatness.
- You want to show your family that you are willing to dig deep with them, not just stay at the surface with things that are important to them or are affecting them.

What can you do about this situation?

What is something you could do that might seem like the opposite of what you've been thinking?

What would you do if you had no fears around this situation?

If your best friend was in this situation, what would you say to him or her?

Can I describe it to you from my perspective?

Would you like to hear my thoughts on this?

Can I challenge you a little bit on this?

If it's ok with you, I'd like to share my feelings on this with you.

Can we explore that a little more?

What are you really trying to say here?

What's holding you back?

What really bothers you about doing that?

What would it take to get over that obstacle?

Let's think about your values and see how this lines up with them.

What would it mean for you if you overcame this?

What could you do differently?

How have you overcome a similar challenge in the past?

Let me ask you about that idea. Where did it come from?

How is your idea working for or against you?

How emotional are you in this situation?

If this situation comes up again, how do you think you will handle it?

What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?

Talk to me about what it means to \_\_\_\_\_?

How true is that belief, really?

How has holding that belief affected you?

How might you let that belief go?

How can you put that into action, right away?

What's your first action step going to be?

What's another way to look at that?

What might be the completely opposite point of view about this situation?

What might a good friend say to you right now?

Think of a few other possible ways to look at this.

What would someone else you know that you respect say about what happened?

What do you really want to come out of this?

# Winning Ways to Speak with Children

## Shifting

Words for when:

- Your child is at a point where a situation is likely to escalate and they may get “in trouble”
- You notice you are escalating and want to help yourself maintain your emotions
- You want to empower your child to make a change in their words or actions, right in the moment
- You want to offer your child an opportunity for your child to avoid receiving a penalty (see Choice Chart, page 7).

Your mind is very powerful. Think of something positive right now and see if you can shift yourself. Check in with yourself. What do you need right now?

Get control of yourself. Take a breath and know you are safe.

Please listen so you can understand.

Please stand in the focus position.

Look at me, please.

Please give me your full body attention.

Please keep your body still and listen to what I am saying to you.

Think about what is going to happen if you cannot shift yourself right now.

If you want, we can have a do-over. Let's start over right now.

Ask yourself how this is going to work out for you.

If you continue with this, you will be \_\_\_\_\_, and we will all be \_\_\_\_\_.

(for example, “in your room” and “out here playing the game.”)

Think about what it is like right now for all of us who are interacting with you.

What is your contribution to this situation going to be?

How do you want to show up right now?

What can you do to be your best self right now?

Press your pause button and let me know when you are ready.

Take a moment for yourself please. Let me know when you feel better.

Get ahold of yourself and make a choice that is going to make you feel better.

Shift yourself so you can feel good.

Shift yourself so you can make a good choice.

You can make a new choice, right now, right away.

Are you helping our family to be strong right now?

Please think about the choice you are making.

Please come up with a choice that is going to make you feel great.

Please decide where you are going to go to be able to make good choices right now.

Please decide who you will be near in order to be able to make good choices right now.

Please think about a boundary you can put on right now that will help you be your best self.

Take some time for some silence right now please.

Please remember you can make a new choice right away and start having fun again.

Remember it is a choice to feel good.

Remember it is a choice to be your best self.

Remember your choices will determine how this is going to work out for you.

I am here to help you. I am not going to give up on you.

How can I help right now?



# Practice: Acknowledge and Validate

Directions: Write what someone said or what you think they might say and the value(s) you believe it may represent. Write your acknowledgement and validation.

What they said:

Value(s) represented:

Acknowledge:

Validate:

What they said:

Value(s) represented:

Acknowledge:

Validate:

What they said:

Value(s) represented:

Acknowledge:

Validate:

# *The Chit-Chat*

## What's next?

The Chit-Chat is just one part of a series of information about effective communication with children and between adults. Visit [www.Daychild.org](http://www.Daychild.org) each week as more information will become available as we grow the video and e-book library on our site.

### Upcoming topics:

The Choice Chart: A behavior management system that WORKS

Winning Ways to Speak with Babies and Toddlers

Executive Functions and Communication

Why Children Should Not Have to Take Turns

Healing the Core

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