

## Talking Less, But Say More Calm, Quick, Key Phrases

“Do not teach your children never to be angry; teach them how to be angry.”

We should all be careful about how we speak with children when they face anger triggers or when their anger is emerging. Our tone often is too necessarily negative and too loud. Be very careful talking too much. We say the same things over and over; falsely thinking that if our children don't accept or respond it must be because they don't understand. If I say it one more time then that will do the trick. We revisit conversations that we have had many times before. We find ourselves in negative loops and unproductive tangents that tend to inflame anger instead of calm things. Since an angry child tends to have difficulty processing language and thinking clearly, we should “talk less and say more.” Why use sentences when a few words will do (e.g., “enough”, “done”, “never mind”)?

When we are talking with angry children we want to engage the thinking brain to keep the anger at bay. If you are thoughtful about your language you will be more effect in the heat of the moment. We can also convey a more a positive message and a more encouraging tone. When we reassuringly say to a child “we can work this out” or “hey buddy, don't let anger get in your way” we are conveying a more optimistic message and engaging the thinking brain.

Other phrases can promote disengagement. When we say “never mind”, “good luck with that”, “you're making a mistake” or “I am not going to fight to get you to do what is right” we are breaking the anger interaction escalation cycle. Other key phrases such as “sorry to interrupt” or “let's think this through” promote more positive reactions to potential anger triggers.

There are times when firmer phrasing is important. Again, we want to do our best to use such phrases early enough to inhibit meltdowns and not inflame them. When we say to a child that they are “not in trouble yet, but they will be in big trouble if they don't use a calm down” children often have more regard and concern for what will happen if they don't cooperate. “Are you going to it once now or five times later” send a stern message a threat. Sometimes parents can effectively a stern voice to effectively short circuit potentially aggressive or disruptive behavior. When a parent says “don't you dare” or “I am done” or “ will be sorry” they are sending a firm message that may put out the fire before it spreads. Remember that the stern voice is slower and deeper, not necessarily louder.

**FIRED UP** offers a list of key phrases that can be used to address different triggers/reactions. When used properly, the cue a calm down process. With imagery, role-play and practice, parents can learn to use their favorite phrases habitually. Key phrases make it easier to stay calm and allow parents to be more consistent. Effective phrases can be shared and used by teachers or coaches. Many children have actually adopted the phrases for use with siblings, classmates and teammates. We have developed a handout of possible phrases you can use or you can create your own.

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### **In response to early stages of anger:**

Losing your temper will not get you what you want.  
Think for a minute.  
How will it work out if . . .  
What do you think will happen?  
Have you thought this through?  
Whoa, whoa, whoa!  
Do you realize?  
Think for a second.  
We know where this is headed.  
Is this your best approach?  
This will not end well.  
Please don't let anger cost you.  
It will work out, please just go calm down.  
You're not in trouble yet, but you will be if you don't leave the scene.  
Your anger has taken over, so I am taking over.

### **Interruptions - Transitions**

I'm sorry to interrupt.  
Sorry buddy, but you are at the stopping point.  
Are you going to keep your word/promise/agreement or not?  
The sooner you stop, the sooner you will be able to start

### **Expectations/Task Resistance**

Good luck with that.  
I'll let it go for now, but there will be a lesson learned later.  
Do it now so you don't forget later.  
You won't get your way if you don't do what I say.  
If you don't understand "why" you should write down the reasons.  
Don't worry we can practice this later (at a more strategic time for the parent).  
I'm not going to fight to get you to do what's right.  
Is this your final answer?  
We are at the fork in the road, time to take it.  
Are you going to listen or not?  
If its that hard to do, we can practice later.  
Homework or housework?  
"Can you keep your promises or not?"  
I will not fight with a 9-year-old.  
This is a matter of being (Kind, Helpful, Responsible, Respectful)  
Are you going to do the right thing or not?  
If you don't do it now, you are telling me no.

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I am not going to fight to have you do what is right.  
Is this your final answer?  
Have you really thought this through?  
Think for a minute.  
What do you think will happen?  
This is your responsibility, are you going to take care of it or not?  
I'm expecting your help, are you going to be helpful or not?  
This is the kind thing to do, are you going to share with your brother or not?  
It's now or "no."  
Never mind.  
I've said it once; I am not going to say it a third time.

### **Navigating Requests and Other Disappointments**

We can work this out; let's come up with a plan.  
How would this work?  
Tell me what you are thinking?  
If you're willing to put in some effort we make this work.  
You can get what you are asking for if you are willing to wait.  
Please, please, please don't let anger turn this yes into a no.  
I see where you are coming from.  
I'm trying to be the brick path, not the brick wall.  
You scratch my back; I will scratch yours.

### **Addressing Unfairness**

It might be unfair, but why does this matter?  
What's not fair about it?  
It's not unfair; it's just not what you want.  
It does seem unfair; let's figure it out.  
It's not unfair, it's just uneven.  
Don't need to treat all the same, just right.  
It just impossible to treat everyone the same.

### **Easing Frustration**

Let's push the pause button.  
It worked; I did it.  
Just wait; deal with it later.  
It isn't as bad as I think.  
It's not that big of a deal.  
It's not there yet; but it's getting better.  
It's just a game.  
It only seems hard because it will take a while.

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It is hard for now, but it gets easier with practice.  
It's a big deal now, but it won't always be.  
Never mind.  
You're not in trouble now, but you will be if you don't calm down.  
Help me understand.  
Why does it matter?  
Stop now and later comes sooner.

### **Handling Teasing and Other Provocations**

That makes no sense at all.  
Why should I care what you so?  
Oh, that's a good one; that's the best you can do?  
I don't care what you have to say.  
So?

## **Talking Less, But Saying More, Calm Quick Key Phrases Summary**

- Angry children have difficulty processing language, we should talk less and say more.
- Try to engage the “thinking brain” to keep anger at bay.
- Be a cheerleader, use a positive, encouraging tone.
- Many of the phrases are about disengagement before the anger escalates.
- When using firmer phrasing do it early enough to inhibit meltdowns.
- A stern voice is slower and deeper, not necessarily louder.
- When used properly, key phrases can cue a calm down.
- Use imagery, role-play, and practice to use phrases habitually.

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