



## Handling Swearing & Cursing: A Guide for Parents

### **Why Do Kids Swear?**

“Kids say the darnedest things” is a saying that we’ve all heard. And if you’re a parent, you know just how true it is. But when they utter expletives, it can be rather shocking.

When very young children swear, it’s usually a matter of repeating things they’ve heard. They are just learning to use language to communicate, so they mimic any word they can. They are not trying to hurt or offend anyone, they’re just developing verbal skills.

Older children swear for a number of reasons. If it’s a word they don’t hear often, they may be using it because they do not realize that it is offensive. They might just think it’s a cool new word to try. When adults say swear words they tend to emphasize them, which makes them all the more appealing to youngsters.

Kids may also use swear words in an effort to get attention. As a parent, it usually takes us by surprise when our children use such language. It’s not easy to ignore it, especially when it comes out of the blue. So we get upset, or perhaps we laugh. Either way, the child receives attention. Our kids pick up on this, and the next time they’re craving attention, they remember the word that got them attention before.

Unfortunately, this often happens at the most inopportune times, such as when waiting in a busy checkout line at the grocery store.

When kids get a little older, they often begin to realize that curse words are viewed as offensive. This is why many children who swear when they are young quit swearing during the preschool or early elementary years. But some keep those swear words filed away for future use. They bring them out when they are feeling frustrated or want to hurt others. And there are some kids who use curse words just to show off in front of their peers.

### **Where Do They Learn Swear Words?**

Kids learn swear words from a variety of sources. And as much as we might not want to admit it, one of the main places they hear these words is at home. Even parents who do their best not to swear in public often swear at home. Even if it just happens when you stub your toe, your child is likely to pick up on it. Children may also hear swear words on TV and in movies. Many cartoons even contain language that we wouldn’t want our children using, if not outright curse words. This is yet another reason why it’s important to monitor the things our children watch.

Even the most sheltered child is bound to hear a swear word at some point. If you’re lucky, he will never repeat it. But the fact is that most children do use a curse word at some point. If you take it in stride, you may never hear it again. And if you do, a calm explanation of why it is inappropriate could nip your child’s swearing in the bud.

### **What to Do When Kids Start Cursing**

Some parents carefully watch every word that comes out of their mouths. Others let a curse word slip from time to time. But no matter which category you fall into, hearing your child curse isn’t a pleasant



experience.

Whether you find it amusing or appalling, the last thing you want is for your child to say a swear-word at the wrong time. And most parents agree that swearing is a horrible and offensive habit that they don't want their kids to develop. So what do you do when your child starts cursing? Here are a few tips.

1. Don't overreact. If you make a big scene when your child utters a dirty word, there's a good chance that it will reinforce the behavior. He could use the word again when he craves attention, or he might decide that it's a good word to use when he wants to get under your skin.
2. Do your best not to laugh. Whether you truly find it amusing or just giggle nervously, this could also cause a repeat occurrence. Your child will see that he made you laugh, and he might use the same word again when he wants to be funny.
3. Avoid confronting your child about swearing when he does it when angry or upset. This will only add fuel to the fire in most cases. Work through the problem at hand, and discuss the bad language at a calmer time.
4. Watch your own language a little more closely. Kids often pick up curse words at home, and if you use them frequently, they are more likely to think it's acceptable to do so themselves.
5. Take your child's age into consideration. Children who are just learning to talk usually do not realize that swear words are bad. So scolding them when they use them serves little purpose. In many cases, if you just ignore it, they won't say it again.
6. If your child has more developed language skills, a calm and simple explanation of why they shouldn't swear will often solve the problem. If you tell them that a word is not nice, there's a good chance that they will cease to use it.
7. Older children who know that swear-words are bad may need to be disciplined when they use them. Depending on their age and the circumstances, time out, suspension of certain privileges or grounding may be appropriate.
8. Consider the context of the swear-word. Calling someone a bad name is much more hurtful than swearing because you tripped and fell. Both should be discouraged, but make sure the punishment fits the crime.
9. When you slip and say a curse word, apologize. Doing so will set a good example for your child.
10. Offer more acceptable alternatives to swearing. There are plenty of words in the English language that are not so offensive. You could even encourage your child to make up his own silly expressions to use instead of curse words.

These days, few kids get through childhood without saying a single curse word. When your child swears, don't take it too hard. As long as you make it clear that such words are unacceptable, the chances of your little angel developing an incurable potty mouth are very slim.