

The Power of Words:
Using Strength-Based Language to Communicate with Diverse Families

Presented by: Dr. El Brown
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Wednesday, March 3, 2021







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IMPLICIT BIASES

- Attitudes, stereotypes, and beliefs that can affect how we view and treat others.
- Colored by our exposure and lived experience.
- Everyone has them.
- Acknowledge them.
- So, they don't manifest in your conversation and treatment of families.



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WHAT IS CULTURE?

- "A second skin."
- The air we breathe.
- The way we do things.
- The toolbox we use to navigate life.



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CULTURAL HUMILITY

- Consider cultural differences.
- You have never and will never walked 24/7 in the shoes of another person.
- A continuous process.



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WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

- An exchange of information.
- A bilateral exchange between people, who are different.
- A verbal, non-verbal, or written exchange.



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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Use good listening skills.
- Communicate regularly.
- Highlight strengths.
- Share resources.
- Provide concrete examples.
- Follow up with the family.



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LISTENING

- Use good listening skills to best understand the needs and goals of your families.
- We must listen to families not just with our ears, but also with open hearts and minds.
- Recognize family members as experts on their culture, family, and children.
- Listen to learn.



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COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

- Small daily interactions
 - Reports on progress.
 - Follow up on a previous discussion.
- Ongoing communication
 - Class newsletter.
 - Progress reports.
 - Phone calls.
 - Emails.
 - Conferences.



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AN ONGOING CONVERSATION

- Back and forth communication all year.
- You are familiar and your intent is explicit.
- The messenger matters.
- The message falls better on the ears, when it comes from a trusted partner.



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THE DELIVERY MATTERS

- Tact is the ability to tell the truth in a way that considers other people's feelings and reactions.
- Allows you to communicate sensitive information in a manner that preserves relationships.
- Requires thought and practice.

••• **Tactful**

Definition: (adj) having or showing a sense of what is fitting or appropriate

Synonym: polite, diplomatic, careful

Antonym: rude, careless, insensitive

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HIGHLIGHT STRENGTHS

- Strength based language is derived from a Strength-Based Approach
- A Strength-Based Approach essentially focuses on the strengths of individuals.



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SAY "NO" TO DEFICIT LANGUAGE

- Anything a child or family isn't doing yet, presents an opportunity for growth.

Deficit Words

- Difficulty
- Struggle
- Deficit
- Can't
- Doesn't
- Failing
- At-risk
- Behind
- Weakness
- Lack



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SHIFT THE PERSPECTIVE

- Think "Strengths and Needs" instead of "Strengths and Weaknesses"

Strength-Based Statements

- ...would benefit from additional support in/with...
- ...has an opportunity to develop in...
- ...requires additional assistance to master/obtain/gain/demonstrate...
- ...is (here) and we would like to get (here).



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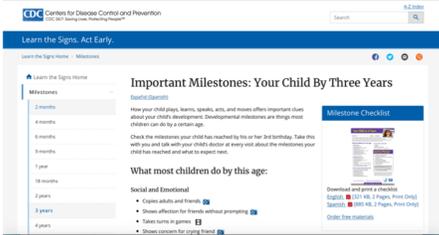
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INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF FAMILIES

- Families are the experts on their children; you are the expert on the content knowledge.
- Collaborate with families.
- Be a content knowledge resource.



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Source: <https://www.cdc.gov>

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PROVIDE CONCRETE REFERENCES

- Provide documentation to help families know that you are basing your comments and information on facts and not just feelings and opinions.



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FOLLOW UP WITH FAMILY

- Keep the conversation going.
- Send a quick "Checking in on you" email or text.
- Ask if there are any additional questions, observations, or concerns.



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HOW TO SAY IT

I think Jason is behind in his development. He can't do things other children can do at his age.

Try

I wanted to take a minute to talk with you about how well Jason is developing. I like to use a checklist for developmental milestones from CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics. It's good for helping us understand his development and which milestones he's met, along with which ones he's still working on.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov> © 2021 Dr. El Brown | KinderJam

HOW TO SAY IT

Jason doesn't know what to do with a toy phone or even a spoon, and there are lot of other things I've notice he can't do either.

Try

Jason has made some real progress in his developmental milestones lately. I noticed he really likes to play alongside other children, and he is good at following simple instructions. There are other milestones he's met, and some he's still working on. Let's take a look at this list, and you can fill me in on whether you've seen some of these at home, too.

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HOW TO SAY IT

Jason is all over the place, all day, everyday. We can't control him. My nerves are shot. Is he like this at home?

Try

Jason is excited about school and is an extremely energetic child. There are times in the day, such as circle time, when it best to have a calmer energy to ensure his safety and opportunity to grasp the concepts being introduced and reinforce in class. I've tried several strategies to assist him. Do you have any suggestions? Is there a strategy that you use at home that works well with Jason, when you are attempting to calm him?

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TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION

- Think before you speak.
- Start with a positive comment.
- Choose your words carefully.
- Choose your timing carefully.
- Be mindful of body language.
- Be an active listener.
- Consider cultural differences.
- Consider the family's viewpoint and acknowledge it.
- Be discreet.
- Be gracious, even when you're irritated.
- Be respectful.

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Words have so much power.
They have the power to build up or tear down.
They have the power spread love or to spread hate.
They have the power to comfort or to wound.
They have the power to motivate or discourage.
They have the power to edify or to damage.
Words have so much power.

Therefore, it is essential that we are thoughtful and intentional about the words we choose to use when speaking with our families. -Dr. El

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