

Wonderful One-Liners

An effective way to diffuse escalating emotions and manage continual questions, triangulations or grasps at “control” is to **SAY LESS**. This goes against what many of us (especially women) are used to. We want to explain everything and engage in each argument but doing this usually allows our kids to (a) bait us into disputes we shouldn’t have in the first place (we’re the parents); (b) respond to questions they already know the answers to; or (c) speak beyond their ability to listen and process. And all three are EXHAUSTING.

So how can we help our children feel seen, heard, and safe while retaining our sanity and de-escalating potentially emotional wildfires? By responding with a few simple “one-liners.” Below are a few of the phrases we have picked up from camps, therapists, and friends, and found most helpful for our home.

Note: Each phrase should be said with gentleness – never sarcasm.

“Asked and answered.” When we’ve already answered the question. They are either trying to change our minds about it or don’t feel like racking their brain to remember.

“I’ll let you know.” When they want to know the schedule, or something in the future we haven’t decided yet, or something we know will be too much for them to handle knowing early. (One therapist uses “Life is full of surprises” in this scenario).

“Aren’t you glad that’s not true.” When they say untrue facts about themselves or others, such as “you love her better than me,” “no one in this family cares about me,” or “I hate everyone!”

“Thanks for being honest.” When they blurt out a feeling, however strong or negative. (Can also use “Thanks for letting me know.”)

“Think it, don’t speak it.” When they blurt out whatever they notice about other people or situations or call attention to something that needs to remain private or unspoken in the moment. (An example would be when they notice someone doing something in public that is very different from what they are used to.)

“Would you rather _____ or _____?” When I need to give a command that could potentially be received badly, especially for kids who need to sense some control to feel safe or in situations where transitioning to a new activity could be difficult. For example, “Would you rather brush your teeth before we read the book or after?” or “Would you rather hop on one foot to your bedroom for some solo time, or tiptoe on both feet?”

“Interesting.” or “Hmmm...” Because sometimes they just want us to react, lose our cool, or rise to their level of emotional intensity. Surprise them with a simple eyes-raised, calm response that doesn’t agree, disagree, or even validate what they’ve said. De-escalation is the goal.

“I’ll love you either way.” So many scenarios in which to utilize this one. When discussing the “better choice” they could make next time. When allowing them to decide between having their meltdown in their room with the door closed or taking a few deep breaths to calm themselves where they are. When giving a chore and suggesting “You can whine and take longer, or do it fast and snappy with a helpful attitude. I’ll love you either way.”