

Our Words Affect Others: Learning the T-H-I-N-K Strategy to Communicate

The middle school years can present challenges to young people and their parents. It is a transition period that can leave some adolescents more vulnerable to risky behaviors and unhealthy choices. Building skills of resilience in children helps to prepare them to navigate through difficult situations so they are able to reach a more positive conclusion.

One resiliency skill that is particularly important to master is that of effective communication. Research shows that resilient people have the ability to elicit positive responses from others, to have empathy, and to care about others. However, middle school students are at a developmental stage that causes them to be much more focused on their own needs than on the needs or feelings of others. Learning effective communication strategies can help them develop the skills that will elicit positive responses from others. By reinforcing the idea that their words affect others, they can learn to demonstrate empathy and show others that they care.

Communication is a powerful tool. It can be used to encourage someone and make them feel good. Our words have great power to influence others' feelings. Everyone remembers a time when someone's words hurt them in some way. Most often, hurtful words are said in haste or when we are feeling emotional. One way to make our communication more effective and more likely to elicit a positive response is to take time and T-H-I-N-K before we communicate. It's important to help our children remember, that communication includes spoken words, texts, emails, Instagram, snapchat and so much more.

This month's Parenting Power Tips provide a strategy to remind our children to T-H-I-N-K about what they are going to say BEFORE they say it. This strategy will help them to avoid gossip, rumors and hurtful words and begin to make them more aware of how their words have the power to affect others.

Parenting Power Tips:

When you find yourself in a situation where your words could influence someone else, ask yourself these questions before you speak, text, tweet, Instagram or snapchat:

- ♦ **T--Is it TRUE?** Do I know that what I am sharing is factual and correct? Gossip and rumors begin when people pass along information that they "heard" from others but may not be completely truthful. This misinformation is often harmful to someone else.
- ♦ **H--Is it HELPFUL?** Even if what I am sharing is correct and factual, sometimes it's not helpful to share. What is my goal in sharing the information? I should only share information that I know is helpful to someone else. If it could harm someone, it is best to keep it to myself or share with an adult who might be able to help.
- ♦ **I--Is it INSPIRING?** My words have the power to inspire others and make them feel better about themselves. Am I using that power? What could I say today that might encourage someone?
- ♦ **N--Is it NECESSARY?** Do I really need to say anything about the situation? Sometimes being silent is the best communication of all.
- ♦ **K--Is it KIND?** What I say to others shows what type of person I am. Will my words show others that I am a caring person?

Think about the answers to these questions. Is this what I really want to say? If not, then perhaps it is best to not speak or text. Sometimes you can make the most powerful statement by staying quiet.

Families can use this month's [PowerTalk activity](#) to talk about different types of speakers and learn that the way you say something can affect how your message is communicated.

Conversations that Count

Different types of speakers can affect others simply by the way that they say things. By speaking in different ways, we can influence the listener's understanding of what we say. Use this month's [PowerTalk](#) to review the attributes of different types of speakers and learn how [Word Power](#) can influence the effectiveness of our communication skills.