

Ten Powerful Things to Say to Your Kids



*Creating the relationship you want with
the most important people in your life*

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We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us, something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals human spirit.

—e. e. cummings, poet



*The art of reading is in great part that
of acquiring a better understanding of life
from one's encounter with it in a book.*

—André Maurois, French author



six

Let's read.



"Tigger is all right, really," said Pooh lazily.
"Of course he is," said Christopher Robin.
"Everybody is really," said Pooh.
"That's what I think," said Pooh.
"But I don't suppose I'm right," he said.
"Of course you are," said Christopher Robin.
—A. A. Milne, English author



Access to learning, to others, to the world

One of the ideas that has guided me for a long time is the notion of lifelong learning—that learning is something that spans the whole of life, from cradle to grave. In his book *Driven: How to Succeed in Business and in Life*, author Robert Herjavec talks about the need to always be learning and trying to master something new throughout your life. Peter Drucker, author of dozens of business management books, asked people in many different fields: *To what do you attribute your success?* The answers were consistent—they had each learned a series of things from experience, insights that stayed with them throughout their lives and helped lead to their success.

- So how do we instill in our kids a love of learning about life, help them see learning as part of mastering life, and teach them that learning is forever?
- How do we get them to remain curious, to appreciate wonder and the magic of *not* knowing?
- How do we encourage them to be interested in and great with other people?
- How do we teach them to be successful in the world?

I don't have all the answers here, but I do have two—*reading* and *playing*.

The Read-Aloud Handbook:

Ten Lessons of Many

These are just a few of the lessons I learned from Jim Trelease's *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. This is an exciting book in that it provides simple tools for helping your children, at home and in the classroom, to learn to enjoy reading and to become lifelong readers. It will also help you to better evaluate the reading environment in your child's classroom, at the library, and at home.

- There are reliable studies that confirm the importance of reading aloud and of sustained silent reading (SSR).
- As little as fifteen minutes a day in reading aloud to your children can have a significant effect on their becoming lifelong readers.
- When you read aloud to your children, they gain both background knowledge and a richer vocabulary.
- Your child's listening level is not the same as his or her reading level.
- It's important to read aloud to your children individually, as their interests and maturity levels may vary.
- Your children will benefit from your reading aloud to them from the time they are babies up into their teens.
- To help your children become readers, supply books and a book basket in the location where it is most likely to be used, and a bed lamp.
- Far more boys than girls end up in remedial reading; fathers play a key role in encouraging reading through reading for pleasure themselves and reading aloud to their children.
- Studies show children benefit from recreational "lite" reading of series and comic books.

—Elizabeth Kennedy, educator and journalist

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Let's read.

“Children ultimately learn to love books because they are sharing [reading] with someone they love,” says Professor Barry Zuckerman of the Boston University School of Medicine’s Department of Pediatrics. He led a study on the benefits of reading to young children. “You can imagine if someone...came up with a widget that would stimulate all aspects of a two-year-old’s development, everyone would want to buy it.” Reading does just that and more, Zuckerman concludes.

Reading gives kids access to being effective in life. Reading also teaches kids how to focus and pay attention in a way that’s quite different from being drawn in by the dazzle of television. Research shows reading to children early in life stimulates language and social development, which gives them a big head start when they get to school. Kids who are read to have a much larger vocabulary, and that is one of the best predictors of school success.

I’m reminded of a time when I lived in St. Louis, close to Forest Park. Often in the morning I would walk to the St. Louis Bread Company for coffee and a pastry. On several occasions, I saw a father reading to his ten-year-old son from the *Wall Street Journal*. Eventually, I had an opportunity to sit down beside them and ask about what they were reading. Why the *Wall Street Journal*? For several reasons, the father told me. It was something to do together before they went to school and work. He felt it was important that he read at a level just beyond the boy’s reach or ability to comprehend. He wanted to create situations where he needed to stop and explain what words meant. He wanted his son to learn that words had different meanings depending on the

context or how they were used. And he wanted to expose his son to as much of the world as possible—even if it wasn't through direct experience. I walked away thinking about reading in a whole new way—far beyond the notion that it's something you only do with small children.

A window to the world

Part of what is important for children to learn is to be interested in people, to be curious about the world, and to be comfortable being anywhere in the world. If Cindy and I could take all of our grandchildren around the world or even the United States, we would. If we could interest them in music, dance, opera, art museums, the outdoors—we would. One thing we can do is give them access to all of these things in one way—through books.

Reading provides exposure to the richness of the world. Most people don't have the time or resources or inclination to travel the world with their children. But we can all give them access to books, through which we expand their horizons by reading about different places, people, and ideas.

I'd love my grandkids to be thrilled about how much there is to learn about the world and the people in it, and reading is a way to get at that. When Cindy and I travel, we like to send postcards to the grandchildren. In part, it's because the kids love to get mail. But we also have an idea that each postcard expands their view of the world and where they might visit. It came back to us in a delightful way when Trey, who was six, said he couldn't wait until he could retire so he could travel. As Dr. Seuss said, "Oh, the places you'll go!"

Everyone has a story to tell.

Another great benefit of reading is being introduced, through the pages of books, to so many different people. When you read with your children, you have a wonderful opportunity to go beyond those introductions and look at what makes the characters tick, or ask your kids what about the stories moved them, or wonder what they would do in a similar situation. It's also a good way to introduce the idea that people matter—that, as Winnie the Pooh says, “Everybody’s really all right.”

It's easy to judge people based on appearance or what others say about them. Kids can grow up to be quick to judge others, scared of strangers, or just uncomfortable meeting new people. And usually what makes a difference is getting to know the other person—learning his or her story. Abraham Lincoln took that notion even further when he said, “I don't like that man. I'm going to have to get to know him.”

There are lots of ways to express the idea that people matter—that getting to know them is worthwhile. I like this one from a participant in one of my training programs: “Everyone has a story, and I don't know yours.” It was her way to remind herself to be more interested in other people.

And the world is getting smaller. We continually come into contact with people who have different backgrounds, different looks, and different ways of interacting with the world. By reading, we gain exposure to how others see themselves, how they feel about their lives, and how they think about the world we share. Part of this notion that people matter is about seeing the world

in a more inclusive way. More importantly, it's about seeing the people down the street as unique and interesting also.

Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* said it best as she embarked on her adventure over the rainbow: "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore!"

And let's play!

If you ask what matters more in life—academics or sports—the answer for me is academics. But when my kids were young and I came home from work at night, the first thing I said to them was, "Let's go play catch." So even though I think academics are more important, what I emphasized was something different.

Still, I don't want to discount the importance of playing with your children. One of the wonderful aspects of sports or reading or other activities is that they give you and your children things to do together forever. Play—whether it's sports, music, theatre, hiking, or even video games—provides tremendous opportunities for learning important life lessons at all ages.

One of my favorite books is *Letters to My Son* by Kent Nerburn, who makes a powerful point about how important it is to deal with the world in a way that leads people to respect you. The flip side, in my view, is dealing with the world in a way that shows your respect for others. I believe both of these life lessons are part of what can be learned through sports. For example, I love it when teams congratulate each other after the game or match is over. The exchanging of soccer jerseys in the World Cup is compelling to me. So is the shaking of hands among contestants after a golf match, or among team members after eliminations in

the Stanley Cup. It shows respect for one another, for the other's effort and skill and determination, despite the ultimate loss.

I was raised to win. My father didn't believe in letting kids win—you had to earn it. Looking back, wanting to win played into my being successful in life. It made me practice and prepare. It made me resilient and taught me to learn from losing.

But Cindy is now teaching me to allow my grandchildren to win sometimes. It's a much more nurturing approach, and I like it. This is a situation where we need to keep both things in mind: Winning and people both matter.

If I had a chance to do it over with my own children, I would have put the notion of playing to win into its proper place:

Trying to win matters—and so does having fun.

Be gracious when you lose—and even more so when you win.



When you are gracious in victory, you reveal your best self. You let your opponents know that they matter to you, that you respect them. And when you teach this to your children, or when you teach them to respect and get to know others, you unlock the whole world for them.

So think of your time with your children as a gift—whether reading or playing, listening or talking. It says to your children, *I like you. I like being with you. I enjoy doing things with you. There is no place I would rather be right now than here.* And that, too, is a gift. a

*Remember then that there is only one important time,
and that time is now. The most important one
is always the one you are with.*

—from *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth



Something to think about...

What have your children learned from you about the world so far?

What do you want your kids to know about winning?

A lesson about winning

For whatever reason (shrewd choice of competitions, I suppose), as a child I won a lot. Spelling bees, relay races, scholarships. It was awkward after a while. I remember my mother telling me, “Don’t you think you should give someone else a chance to win?”

So, when it was my turn to coach my fifth grade daughter’s Olympics of the Mind team, I made a point of making sure we were in it to learn something, have fun, and meet other people. One of the five wonderful girls on the team said to me, “If we promise to have fun, learn something, and meet people, is it okay if we win?” I reiterated my desire for them to enjoy the experience and not to worry too much about the winning part. “Yes, but is it okay if we win?” I looked into their faces; they were hanging on my reply. They wanted my permission to win.

“Yes,” I said. “If you want to win, let’s win.”

They were jubilant (fifth grade girls are good at being jubilant), and I was changed forever. They taught me how to focus on winning without being embarrassed by the ambition to win. They demonstrated hard work, grace, and pride in accomplishment. And they learned something, had fun, met other people, and supported each other throughout middle and high school on a team that just kept winning.

By the way, after the girls won third place at the World Finals, my mother asked, “Isn’t it time you let someone else win?” I replied, “No, Mom, they’ve earned it, and they’ve shared it with their school.”

So one parent’s reluctance to win is the counterpoint to many, many stories about parents’ over-eagerness to win: pushing hard on their child to excel at sports or at getting into a prestigious college or whatever reflects well on the parent. Both extremes deserve consideration.

—Peg Herring, science writer, Corvallis, Oregon

I hope you enjoyed this free chapter from my book Ten Powerful Things to say to your kids – Creating the relationship you want with the most important people in your life.

If you found this free chapter helpful, you can get updates and more insights from me for free when you join my mailing list.