

Change Your Language

Change Your Life



SHONNIE LAVENDER

There are so many ways we can create more fun, peace, joy, ease, gratitude, and lightness in our family life. We can change big things. We can change small things. We can also change something that influences our relationships – with ourselves and others – each and every day in ways that we likely don't even realize. That thing? Our language.

The language that you use affects how you feel emotionally and how you function physically. It has an impact on those around you, just as their language influences you. If you've ever used an affirmation, received a heartfelt compliment, said a prayer, or been moved by a speech, you can personally testify to the tremendous power of words. The language we use in our homes sets an energetic tone for our relationships and helps bring us together or push us apart. When paired with our beliefs, language influences how we "see" the world and thus either expands our sense of possibility or closes it down. The language we use will become the language our children use – both outwardly and as internal self-talk – and thus its effect is far-reaching.

What follows is a list of language changes you can make that can transform your life and the lives of all your family members in positive and lasting ways.

Drop “Should”

“Should” is like a psychological choke chain (as are its relations ought to, “have to,” “must”). “Should” often functions like a punishment, put down, or threat. For instance, when you say, “I should make healthy meals for our family every night,” you’re setting yourself up for a guilt trip. Using should after the fact – “I shouldn’t have yelled at my daughter” – you make yourself wrong for making a mistake while also reinforcing negative beliefs such as, “I’m not a good mom.” Eliminating “should” (“ought to,” “have to,” and “must”) from your self-talk vocabulary can boost your self-confidence and self-esteem. Taking an attitude of “the should stops here” also helps lighten up your energy because you spend less time rebuking yourself.

The effects of “should” on other family members are similar to how “should”ing impacts us personally. “Should” can give our children the impression that there’s only one right way to behave – “You should say ‘thank you’ when Grandma gives you a gift.” While we may want to instill certain values, “should” adds an unnecessary level of demand. Instead simply state your preferences as such – “I would like it if you would say ‘thank you’ when you’re given a gift.” Parent-child relationships are already unequal due to the nature of the adult’s responsibility for the child and the child’s dependency on the adult. When our language contains “should,” it adds an additional level of separation between us and our child(ren) because it sets us up as all-knowing and our child(ren) as ignorant. Eliminating “should” can bring

us closer together by linguistically demonstrating that we are not superior to our child(ren).

Stop “Trying”

Trying cannot actually be physically accomplished. Case in point: try to open your mouth (close it first if it's open). If your mouth stayed shut, you didn't open it, right? If it opened, even the slightest amount, you did open it. So, while you could contort yourself, fight against opening wide, or open your mouth without resisting, you had only two possible outcomes – shut mouth, or open mouth. The same applies when you speak. If you're asked, for instance, whether or not you'll allow your daughter to have a friend over for a sleepover Friday, make a definitive answer. You can choose “yes,” “no,” or renegotiate for another time that will work for you. Don't fall into the “We'll try to make it work” trap. If you choose to say “yes,” you and your daughter (and her friend and her family) will know what to expect. If you instead decide that no, Friday doesn't really work for you given your busy schedule, you can talk with your daughter about alternatives. When your intention is clear (to you and others), you free up your energy. In addition, “trying” can make it easy for our children to not view us as dependable. Sometimes parents like “try” because it gives us wiggle room or the chance to change our minds. The problem is that our children then have difficulty knowing if they can count on us. Instead of “trying” therefore, use other, clearer language. For instance, “We'll

try to stop for ice cream on the way home after your game," can become, "If we leave the soccer complex by 3 and the baby is awake, we can stop by the ice cream parlor. If the baby is napping, I'll give you some money and you can go in and get a cone."

Just Say "Yes" Or "No"

Whether we behave like it or not, we are the ones who create the life we're living through our thoughts, words, and deeds. And this life is ours to live as we choose. So notice if being a "yes" dad (or mom) is helping you create the family life you want. Do you say, "yes" to please your children (or your spouse) or because you think you have to? Maybe you make up horror stories of what will happen if you say "no." Regardless of your rationale, if you say "yes" without really meaning it, you're giving up the power you have over your life, and may find yourself feeling resentful or believing you're a victim of those to whom you automatically say "yes." On the other hand "no" might be your automatic response. Perhaps you say "no" out of fear for your children's well-being or concern that "yes" would end up being too taxing for you. Maybe your "no" comes from a desire for things to be easy, neat, or predictable. A habitual "no" can make family life static and lead your child(ren) to feel restricted or believe that they're not trusted. Whether you tend to default to "yes" or "no," work to make your answers authentic to the situation and the moment rather than

simply choosing by habit. Bottom line, use the word that demonstrates what truly fits for you in that given situation.

Limit Your Use of “Always” and “Never”

Though these two words seem harmless, they can distort our view of reality. Sometimes, for instance, after a rough day at home, you might think, “My husband never shows appreciation for the hard work I do all day,” or “The kids are always especially clingy when I’m tired.” While these statements might be true some or even most of the time, chances are there has been at least one exception to them. Holding onto this “always” and “never” attitude simply keeps you from seeing the truth as it really is. Statements that include “all the time” and “none of the time” have a similar reality-altering effect because they imply the same absolutes as “always” and “never.” Other words that can have a warping effect on real life are “no one” and “everyone” and “nobody” and “everybody.” Your mind might spring these on you when you’re feeling discouraged or sad – “Nobody loves me” or “Everyone thinks I’m stupid.” Again, if there has ever been an exception to these statements, they are simply not true, and believing them doesn’t serve you.

Using these words of absolute-ness with our children leads them to have a wonky view of reality too. In exasperation, we might say to our teens: “Your room is always a mess,” or “I always have to come in and wake you up for school. You never get up on your own.” Our

younger children might be familiar with edicts like: "You forget to wash your hands whenever you go potty," or "Nobody around here ever takes out the trash." Hearing such absolutes can make it easy for our children to think we're criticizing them and generally this provokes resistance on their part rather than the understanding, empathy, or cooperation that we're likely hoping for. (This same rule of provoking resistance rather than partnership is true when we use absolutist language with our spouse.)

Say It Like You Mean It

When you speak, you're delivering a message. What you say, however, may not be what your children or spouse notice, because your words are only part of how you communicate. Your tone of voice and body language convey meaning to your family too. One study found that our words account for only about 14% of how people receive our message. Tone of voice accounted for 86% of the message in phone conversations. In face-to-face encounters, listeners receive our message from 7% words, 38% tone of voice, and 55% body language. Without realizing it, you might be delivering contradictory messages, and confusing the people you love. Especially if we're feeling conflicted internally, it's easy to "cross our wires" and send one message verbally and the opposite meaning with our tone of voice, facial expression, or other body language. For instance, saying, "I love you" with dispassion, averted eyes, and arms crossed over your chest

likely doesn't ring true to your daughter. The same three words spoken emphatically, accompanied by a twinkle-eyed smiling face, and followed by a hug are certain to assure your daughter that you do speak the truth.

Banish Negative Self-Talk

Breaking this habit is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves and our children. Whether you notice it or not, it's likely that you perpetuate lies about yourself, because they exist in your mind ready for "playback" at any moment. For instance, you trip on something and the words "I'm clumsy" spring lightning-like out of your mouth. Or, you get into a "clean your dinner plate battle" and later mentally berate yourself for not just letting your son eat whatever he wanted to. Or, you shrug off a compliment, saying, "Oh, I didn't really do much." These are all examples of ways we personally sabotage ourselves, and ultimately create struggle and suffering in our lives. Because our children are such good imitators, the chances are high that they'll talk to themselves critically if that's the model they witness from us. If you want to be the best you possible (and help your children develop greater self-love), stop making up, buying into, or continuing

to believe all lies about yourself. To reduce or eliminate the effects of this negative self-talk habit, install a new “tape” of what is true about you. Whenever one of these personal lies pops into your mind (or rushes from your mouth), say to yourself, “That is not true. I am not clumsy (whatever your accusation is).” Then, replace the lie: “I am graceful” or “I move easily and know how to avoid obstacles.” Make the choice today to let no more negative self-talk enter your mind without it be evicted and replaced by a helpful and faithful tenant of truth and self-acknowledgement.



The words we use reflect our beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world and help create the mental environment within which we raise our children. How we talk to ourselves and each other has a tremendous impact on the well-being of our entire family. Simple to understand and relatively easy to make, the language changes shared here have the potential to dramatically improve your family life. Making these linguistic shifts can fill you with more confidence, clarity, and peace of mind while helping you create greater connection, understanding, and compassion in your home. As authors Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson wrote: “The way you parent will affect not

only your child, but the lives of hundreds and perhaps thousands of people in your child's future. You don't have a choice about whether or not to affect this net of interdependence; however, you do have a choice about how you affect it."



Shonnie Lavender's calling is to foster the evolution of humanity by supporting mamas to evolve spiritually and to parent in a way that enables their children to retain their spiritual and emotional wholeness. She coaches, leads workshops, writes, and inspires families that want to heal their past, create a harmonious, authentic, and loving present with their family, and create a peaceful, fulfilling future for the wider world. Learn more at ShonnieLavender.com.