

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL

PRESENTS:

PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC

Special Thoughts on Raising Kids

Swearing and Bad Language

It hits us like a ton of bricks. That sweet and innocent child we're raising walks through the door one day spewing forth a string of expletives that knocks our socks off.

Sometimes kids use bad language because they want to be like their schoolmates. Sometimes they use it merely to test, or enjoy, our reaction.

In many cases, it is a mere rite of passage, a phase children go through. They hear older kids swearing and, wanting to be big like them, they develop a new vocabulary.

We could respond with demands, "You're not going to talk like that in this household! How many times have we told you to clean up that mouth?" Or, we could wash their mouths out with soap. But then they'd only resolve all the more to exert their independence, and that is seldom fun for us.

Solving this problem is a matter of taking small steps. The first step is to discuss where such language is acceptable, and second is to establish whether it is really necessary at all.

Step One

"You kind of like that word, don't you? You know, some kids like those words because when they use them their parents' mouths drop open. But the people who really know how to use those words are the kind of people who know where and when to use them. I'm curious about how much you know about that? What would you guess—when grandma's here for Sunday dinner? Would

that be a good time to use those words? Or in your classroom? I'll be able to know how grown up you are by how well you can figure that out."

One place where they cannot use these words is around us. When the bad language comes out, we say, "Is this the right place for that language?" We repeat that question until we get results.

Step Two

The time to discuss this problem is when both the child and the parents are happy. One approach is to address the child's sense of worth: "You know, Leon, a lot of people who use that sort of language are people who don't feel that good about themselves."

Or we may want to take an intellectual tack: "People who use that sort of language are people with a very limited vocabulary, Leon. They don't know many words, so they pull out those boring old swear words and use them. Nobody will ever have to look them up in the dictionary. They're really easy words. You know, I can sort of understand people using them, Leon. So, if there's ever a day when you feel especially dim-witted and you come out with a couple of corks, I'll try to understand that it's a time when you're feeling really crummy about your ability to use the English language."

Then we should drop the issue, the language our children use will, in the long run, be the language they want to use. White-hot anger on our part will only delay their realization that swearing is usually inappropriate.

Discuss where swearing is acceptable and whether it is really necessary