

“F— You, Mum!” How to Stop Your Child from Swearing in Your Home

By [James Lehman, MSW](#)

Swearing is everywhere in our culture. However, as parents, you get to decide the culture of your home, and I recommend to all parents to establish a culture of respect and no swearing.

Establish this culture for the sake of a peaceful and respectful home. Also, realize that children who know how to act respectfully and speak respectfully are better equipped to deal with the adult world than those who prefer to sound like thugs.

Also, make sure you understand the difference between swearing and verbal abuse. More about that below.

Know When to Stop the Show

The dialog below plays out in countless homes each night—we know because we hear from these parents all the time:

Parent: “Why didn’t you do your homework?”

Child: “I hate f— school. I hate my f— teacher.”

Parent: “Don’t talk to me like that!”

Child: “Why not? You swear, too.”

When this happens, you need to stop the show. In other words, end the conversation immediately. Your child is attempting to drag you into a fight—a power struggle—instead of doing his homework. Don’t get dragged into the power struggle. Instead, ignore the invitation to argue and just say:

“We’re not talking about me. Why didn’t you do your homework? That is my question. And you’re not going to use your mobile phone until your homework is done.”

Then turn around and walk away. Don’t debate it. Don’t argue.

If your child says, “I don’t care,” you can say:

“OK. If you don’t care, that’s all right. But you’re not using your phone until you get your homework done.”

Don’t argue further. Later, when your child calms down, give them a consequence

Make Sure Everyone Know the Swearing Rules

I believe that families should have clear rules about swearing. There shouldn’t be any discussion about it when it happens, kids need to know the rules.

Often kids swear because they are frustrated or angry about being asked to do something that is hard for them or that they find boring. On the other hand, maybe they would rather be playing video games or hanging out with their friends.

Swearing is their immature and ineffective way of dealing with frustration. In these instances, when things calm down, kids need to be taught that swearing does not solve the problem. In fact, it adds to the problem. When they swear, they still have their original problem, but now they have an extra consequence to deal with.

Keep in mind there is a big difference between kids cursing in general or cursing *at* you or another family member. Kids need to know the difference and understand that cursing at someone is verbal abuse, and will be dealt with much more harshly.

Swearing Versus Verbal Abuse

Parents need to establish a zero tolerance policy for verbal abuse in the home. Verbal abuse is differentiated from cursing because it is an attack on a person. Cursing is using an expletive when describing a situation or their own frustration.

Therefore, in the example above, the child is swearing: "I hate my f— teacher."

If the child had said, "F— you, Mum, it's none of your business," that is verbal abuse.

There is no excuse for abuse of any kind. When kids curse at their parents and siblings and call them names using highly offensive terms, it is a form of abuse; it is more than just obnoxious, it's damaging.

This behaviour needs to be dealt with very strongly. If your child is to be grounded for 24 hours as part of the consequence and he happens to be involved in sports, make him miss his practice or even his game as part of the consequence of his actions. Do not let anybody manipulate you by saying "they need to be there."

The most important thing here is that kids understand that *there is no excuse for abuse*. I promise you as a parent, missing one game is not the end of the world. Learning respect, protecting your other children, is more important than a practice or a game.

If your child is not involved in sports, then have him lose his electronics. You can say:

"You can't have your phone back until you don't call your sister those names for 24 hours."

If your child curses his sister again six hours later, it becomes 48 hours without the phone. In addition, he has to go to his room and write a letter of apology to make amends. When I say a letter, I mean a brief paragraph. In addition, the letter should say this:

"This is what I'll do differently the next time I want to call you a name."

It should include an apology, but also, more importantly, he should make a commitment not to do it again.

When Younger Children Swear

I will say the obvious: do not swear in front of your children if you expect your children not to swear in front of you. One thing we see very early on is that kids mimic parents by saying words they do not understand. In that case, the best thing a parent can do with their younger children is calmly correct them. Teach them that what they have said is a bad word. You can say:

"It's a bad word because people don't like that word."

If your child says, "But you use that word," you can say:

"You tell me 'no' when I say it. Tell Mum / Dad, too. Remind me that it's a bad word."

When they remind you, say you are sorry and thank them for reminding you.

Establish a “No Swearing” Rule—and Make Everyone Pay the Consequences

For children who are older, you can establish a “swearing jar.” If anyone in your family swears, they have to put a dollar into the jar. If money is not readily available, a checkmark can go next to your child’s name, and every check might equal 10 minutes of an extra task or chore.

Doing their regular chores shouldn’t be a consequence. The consequence should be *extra* things to do. Look at it this way: if you make your child do the dishes because he swore, and then you ask him to do them again the next night, he is going to ask “Why? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

They will feel like they are being punished when all you want is for them to do his normal chores around the house. Therefore, it is an *extra* chore you want to add on for swearing. I think the sooner you give them the consequence after they have sworn the better.

It’s also very effective to have an age-appropriate schedule and structure at night that lists how much time your kids can spend on video games, the computer, and other electronics. If your child completes his homework then he can have an hour of screen time. However, if he swears, the extra chore you give him is done during the video game hour and he loses part or all of that time. The key here is that the extra chore comes out of his free time, not his homework time.

This system should be in place ahead of time so that when your child calms down and wants her phone back, you can say:

“You know the consequences for swearing and name-calling.”

Kids Who Swear at You under Their Breath

Some kids swear under their breath. However, let’s face it, even if it is under their breath, it’s the same thing, and you should give your child consequences for it.

They may say, “I didn’t say anything. That’s not fair!” You can come back with:

“I’m sorry, but that’s what I heard you say. In the future, speak more loudly, or there will be consequences.”

In other words, do not let muttering swear words under his breath become a way for him to manipulate you so that he doesn’t have to develop self-control.

Be a Role Model

Parents have to work very diligently on watching their language and being role models for their children. If parents are not the role model, then our culture will be. Too much of our culture glamorizes swearing and disrespect.

About [James Lehman, MSW](#)

James Lehman, who dedicated his life to behaviourally troubled youth, created *The Total Transformation*[®], *The Complete Guide to Consequences*[™], *Getting Through To Your Child*[™], and *Two*

Parents One Plan™, from a place of professional and personal experience. Having had severe behavioural problems himself as a child, he was inspired to focus on behavioural management professionally. Together with his wife, Janet Lehman, he developed an approach to managing children and teens that challenges them to solve their own problems without hiding behind disrespectful, obnoxious or abusive behaviour. Empowering Parents now brings this insightful and impactful program directly to homes around the globe.