

## Saying "I Love You"

"I love you". Can any words possibly sound sweeter or offer greater comfort? Is any statement more natural—or necessary—between a parent and child? In many families, these words come easily. But if you grew up never hearing them, saying "I love you" may feel somewhat unnatural to you. Or if members of your family used loving statements to control or manipulate, you may be very uncomfortable using them with your own children.

Many families either don't communicate loving feelings very often or they communicate them in destructive ways. A counselor friend once told me she was appalled to discover that some of her clients had never heard the words, "I love you" from their parents: "I couldn't imagine parents who couldn't say 'I love you' to their children, probably because I grew up hearing it all the time. But in the middle of my shock and self-righteousness, I realized that in my family, that statement was always loaded with expectations for me to do something. Most of the time when my parents said 'I love you' they would stand there and wait for us to say 'I love you, too'. So that statement always came off as a solicitation, rather than an expression of how they really felt about us."

If either of these extremes describe your upbringing, chances are, you aren't using loving statements as often—or as "cleanly"—as you might. A few simple guidelines can help.

**Let's hear it!** We all need to hear loving statements from people we care about. It may be easy to assume that your kids know you love them. After all, you do love them and you probably do a lot of loving things for them. That's important.

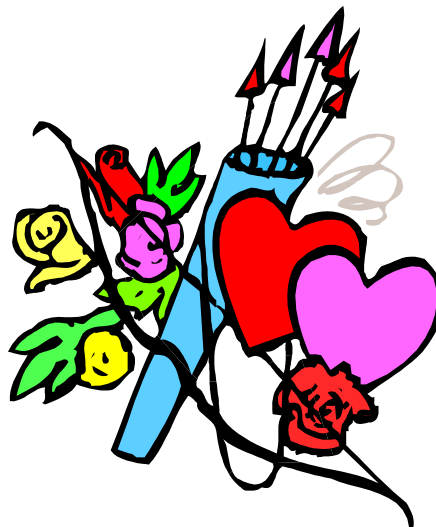
But feeling love for someone is not the same as expressing it. Nor is doing loving things. Loving feelings and loving behaviors are not loving words—and those are important, too.

**Let's hear it some more.** None of this "I-told-you-I-loved-you-in-1985" stuff, OK? This isn't like going to the dentist twice a year. So maybe it's still not easy to say, even with the practice and little successes. Say it anyhow. As a gift to yourself, communicate your love daily. At least.

**Keep it simple!** "I love you" is a complete sentence. We don't need to tie our feelings for a person to the person's behavior. "I love you when you make your bed", or "I love you when you make the honor roll", suggest that you love your child because of his behavior or accomplishment. It also sug-

gests that the love wouldn't be there—or be quite the same—if the child hadn't made the bed or the grades. (Don't you love your kid in either case?)

**"I love you".** Period.



**No "buts" about it!** By the same token, watch the tendency to use "I love you" as a lead-in to a confrontation about something your child has done that you find disturbing. If you need to address the child's behavior or set a boundary, by all means do so. But deal with the *behavior*—not the worth of the child, or your feelings for him or her.

Using "but" in the same sentence as "I love you" is confusing and manipulative. It suggests that person is only lovable conditionally. Cut to the chase. Avoid tying the feelings you express to the way the child is acting—good or bad.

**No expectations.** Say "I love you" because you want to say "I love you." Say it because you feel love toward the person you're talking to. Say it because it feels good to say it.

"I love you" is a powerful statement and lots of times it will evoke a loving response from the recipient. But attaching an expectation for a response to the statement is a set-up—both for you and the other person. If the expectation is there, your child will know it. If he does respond, it will probably be to avoid guilt or conflict rather than genuine, spontaneous caring. Is that what you really want?

If your children haven't learned how to say "I love you" yet, it's OK to tell them that you need to hear those three little words sometimes, too. Then give them some space to risk, practice and learn. By far their best lessons will come from your own unconditional modeling.

**Turn the love inward.** Next to unconditional love, the best gift you can give another person is the love you give yourself! In fact the ability to love, appreciate and care for yourself is essential to healthy, loving relationships with others.

So, look in the mirror. Look into your eyes. Say "I love you." No "buts." No qualifiers. Say it out loud. Say it often. Mean it. What better way to affirm how worthwhile and lovable you are. And what better way to practice a basic, precious and important skill.

— Jane Bluestein, Ph.D.



## PeopleSkills in Cyberspace: A Valuable Commodity for Conducting Business on the Net.

The power of e-mail is considerable. You can send electronic sales letters across three time zones with one click of the keyboard. You can respond to a prospect's inquiry or a customer's request in a matter of seconds. And you can do it all from the comfort of home or your office or the convenience of your car.

With all that power comes risk and responsibility. For e-mail users eager to reduce electronic risks and boost writing power, adherence to the basic rules of "netiquette" can alleviate problems while casting your organization in a favorable light. The ePolicy Institute offers tips to enhance electronic people skills:

- Beware of hidden readers. If confidentiality is an issue, don't use e-mail. It's not secure. You may intend to communicate with a single reader, but an inaccurate keystroke or the recipient's decision to forward your message could land your e-mail message on hundreds of screens.
- Write as though your mother were reading the message. People treat e-mail too casually, sending messages they would never read on paper. Don't write anything you would not be comfortable saying in an elevator crowded with colleagues, customers and competitors. If you are upset or angry, compose yourself before composing your message. Once you click "send," your e-mail is on the way through cyberspace and can't be retrieved.
- Forget the jokes. Hundreds of sexual harassment and racial discrimination lawsuits have resulted from improper e-mail messages that were intended as private jokes. There is no guarantee of privacy in cyberspace. Jokes, which too often are inappropriate, have no place in e-mail.
- Remain gender neutral. Avoid sexist language that could offend, irritate or rankle others.
- Copy with care. Sending carbon copies and blind carbon copies (Bcc) to people who don't need to read your message wastes everyone's time. If you inadvertently click "Cc" when you should have hit the "Bcc" key, you risk exposing yourself to complaints and possible lawsuits. Not only will readers be annoyed when they have to scroll through your Cc list, but the wholesale distribution of e-mail addresses could trigger a lawsuit on the grounds that confidentiality was breached or privacy violated.

— from *The Lion*, 2002

## Finally Going To Quit Smoking? Learn From Those Who've Successfully Kicked the Habit

Quitting smoking is hard, but it's not impossible. Each year more than 3 million Americans kick the smoking habit for good. If you're you one of the smokers who's finally decided to quit, the following advice can help.

### 1. Don't smoke any number or any kind of cigarettes

Smoking even a few cigarettes a day can hurt your health. If you try to smoke fewer cigarettes, but do not stop completely, soon you'll be smoking the same amount again.

Smoking "low-tar, low-nicotine" cigarettes usually does little good, either. Because nicotine is so addictive, if you switch to lower-nicotine brands you'll likely just puff harder, longer, and more often on each cigarette. The only safe choice is to quit completely.

### 2. Write down why you want to quit

Do you want to feel in control of you life? Have better health? Set a good example for your children? Protect your family from breathing other people's smoke? Being as clear as possible about why you want to quit smoking is very important to how much success you will have in quitting. Smokers who live after a heart attack are the most likely to quit for good as they're very motivated. Find a reason for quitting before you have no choice.

### 3. Know that it will take effort to quit smoking

Nicotine is habit forming. Half of the battle in quitting is knowing you need to quit. This knowledge will help you be more able to deal with the symptoms of withdrawal that can occur, such as bad moods and really wanting to smoke.

There are many ways smokers quit, including using nicotine replacement products (gum and patches), but there is no easy way. Nearly all smokers have some feelings of nicotine withdrawal when they try to quit. Give yourself a month to get over these feelings. Take quitting one day at a time, even one minute at a time; whatever you need to succeed.

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