

8 things all kids must hear their parents to say

1. SAY: *It's okay to cry.* **INSTEAD OF:** *Only girls cry. Only babies cry. Tough it out.*

2. SAY: *You understand math in a different way than I did. I'm excited to learn alongside you.* **INSTEAD OF:** *I was always awful at math. I'm better at reading and writing. Ask your father for help.*

3. SAY: *Strong is beautiful.* **INSTEAD OF:** *Look at that her perfectly slim body. She's gorgeous.*

4. SAY: *These jeans just don't work for me. I need to find something I feel more confident wearing.* **INSTEAD OF:** *Ugh. I look so fat in these jeans. My thighs are huge, and I am total whale.*

5. SAY: *I'm feeling stressed and angry because the house is a mess and I had a tough day at work.* **INSTEAD OF:** *I'm fine. It's fine. Don't worry about it.*

6. SAY: *I'm upset with your choices.*

INSTEAD of: *I'm upset with you.*

7. SAY: *Let's work through this together.*

INSTEAD of: *You're fine. It will all be better tomorrow. It's not a big deal.*

OR, if he or she doesn't want your help. . .

8. SAY: *I'm always here for you. You are loved. I'm interested to see how you figure this out. You know you can come to me if you want other ideas.* **INTEAD OF:** *You're a smart kid. You'll figure it out.*

Helpful hints:

1. **Listen first.** Really, our children must feel as though we're listening to them before anything. As Oprah says, everyone in the world has the same basic need: to be heard. Everyone wants validation, and they want to be seen, heard, and that what they're saying matters.
2. **Unplug.** Nothing says 'you don't matter' like talking to a person while they're texting, surfing through Instagram, or liking Facebook photos. So unplug.
3. **Be busy with your hands.** A good friend and expert in family dynamics once told me that the best way to communicate with tweens and teens was to be busy--that kids are more likely to open up while a parent was driving, making dinner, or folding laundry rather than during a quiet face-to-face. I've tried it. And it works.

