

Do you ever wish you could take back **something you said**? It's time to **get smart** about the way you **speak**.



How to Say What You Mean

SMART-SPEAK

by Marilyn Cram Donahue

Micah swung his backpack in place. "Come on," he told Joel.

Joel shook his head. "I can't. I've got things to do."

"Like what?"

"Like chores and stuff."

Micah scowled. "You promised you would write my essay for me. It's due tomorrow."

Joel didn't know what to say. He was tired of doing Micah's homework, but he didn't want to make him mad.

Samantha stuck a line of duct tape down the center of the bedroom floor. "This is my side," she yelled at her sister.

"You're hateful," Chris yelled back. "You're stupid. You smell." Then she began to chant, "Stupid, smelly Sam! Stupid, smelly Sam!"

"Shut up!" Samantha hollered. "You're such a baby." She picked up a stuffed animal and threw it. It knocked over Chris's bowling trophy—and dented it.

Micah and Joel, Samantha and Chris are talking to each other, but they are not communicating. Communication only happens when people say what they mean and take time to listen.

What Are You Afraid Of?

Sometimes we are afraid to say what we really mean. We think the person we're talking to might get angry, have hurt feelings, or not want to be friends any more.

Joel didn't feel good about doing Micah's homework. He knew it was cheating. But Micah was the most popular kid in the class. Joel liked being his friend, so he made excuses instead of telling him the truth.

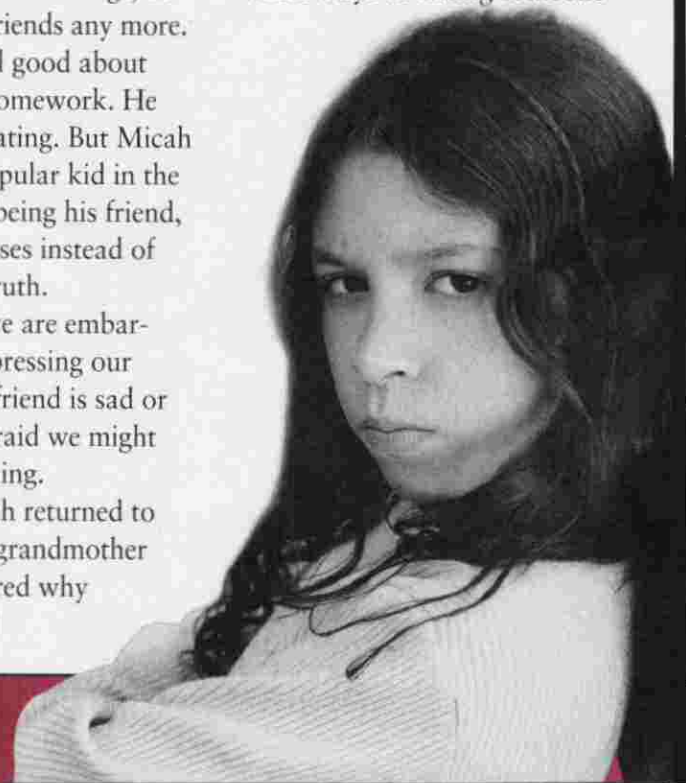
Other times we are embarrassed about expressing our feelings when a friend is sad or upset. We are afraid we might say the wrong thing.

When Thu Anh returned to school after her grandmother died, she wondered why her friends acted

uncomfortable around her. They didn't talk to her the same way they used to. She felt really good when Sara finally came up to her and said, "I'm sorry about your grandmother. How can I help?" By being honest and saying exactly what she meant, Sara showed her friend that she cared.

What's in a Name?

Name-calling is one of the worst ways of letting someone



know how you feel. Chris and Samantha didn't solve a thing by calling each other names. They only made matters worse.

Carolyn Mathers, a physical education specialist from San Bernardino, California, says that name-calling is negative and unproductive. "It doesn't help anyone play a better game or be a better person," she says. "Instead, I tell kids to say something encouraging and mean what they say. When a teammate makes a mistake, he or she feels better if someone says 'tough luck' instead of 'you dummy.'"

The Way You Say It

Speech experts say that it isn't only what you say, but how you say it that counts. If you want to make people pay attention, you need to be aware of your voice and your body language.

Do speak slowly and clearly.

Don't let your voice get high and squeaky.

Do relax. Sit or stand quietly.

Don't jiggle your knees, chew your lips, or tug at your clothes.

Getting It All Together

"When you are really frustrated," says Allison, from California, "you might feel like yelling at people, but that won't make them understand how you feel. It will probably make the problem harder to resolve."

Conflict resolution is a process in which people try to solve disagreements by working together peacefully. Each person is able to speak without being interrupted. And each person must listen carefully when the other speaks. Here are some conflict resolution strategies:

- Think about what you want to say before you say it.
- Keep your voice calm and clear.

- Make and keep good eye contact. Look at the person.
- Use assertive "I" statements, such as "I think" and "I believe," instead of aggressive "you" statements like "you should" or "you never."
- Listen to what the other person says. Then repeat it in your own words to make sure you heard it right.
- If things get out of control, stop and take a deep breath. Count to 10 before you speak again.
- If you can't solve your problem, ask a third person to listen and help you both follow the rules. Say what you mean in a positive way, then listen with an open mind to what the other person is trying to tell you. When you can do that, you will have learned smart-speak, the art of communication. □

Listening to Both Sides

Working with a partner, read aloud the following dialogue between Chris and Samantha. After you have read it once, switch parts and take the other side.

Now rewrite the scene, changing the negative "you" statements to positive "I" statements. Begin your sentences with phrases such as "I feel like," "I want to explain," "I like it when," and "I think," instead of "you should," "you always," "you didn't," or "you said."

Remember to (1) take turns speaking, (2) listen carefully, (3) repeat in your own words what you think the other person said, and (4) respond without getting excited.

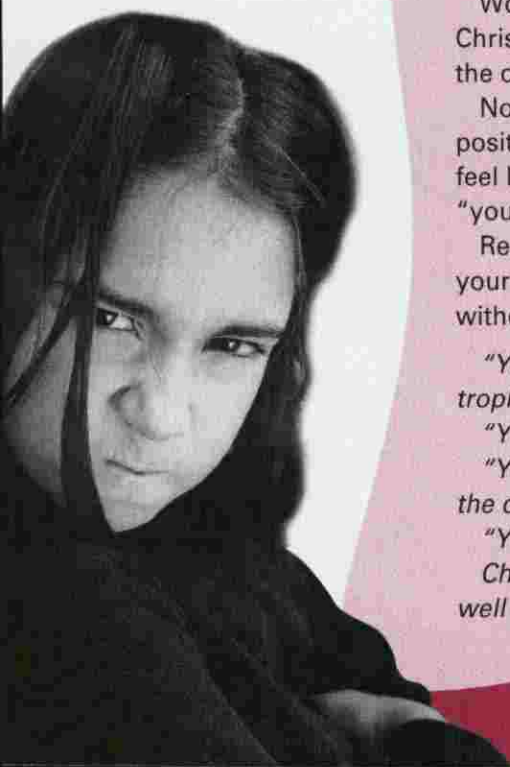
"You always lose your temper!" yelled Chris. She held up the dented trophy. "You're not even sorry, are you?"

"You didn't have to call me names," Samantha snapped.

"You started the whole thing," Chris retorted. "Just because you're the oldest, you think you can boss me around."

"You never respect my privacy!"

Chris stomped her foot. "We have to share a room, so you might as well get used to it!"



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