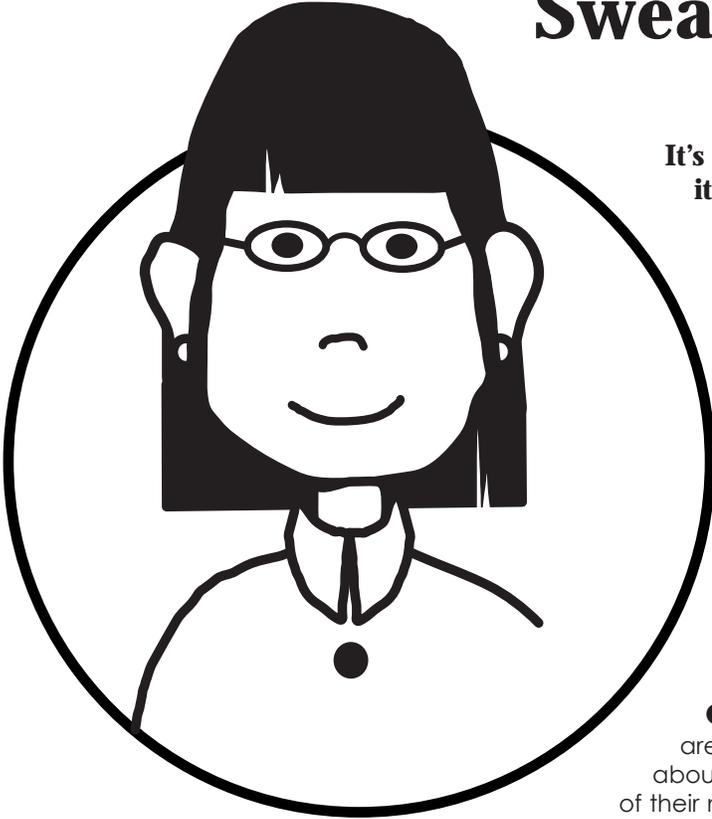


# Swearing



## It's shocking to hear your child swear, even worse when it's directed at you. How do you stop this behavior?

It helps to know where the swearing comes from. There are several possible reasons why kids swear:

- **To feel like a grown-up.** When kids hear adults swear it's always in an attention getting tone of voice. People react. Emotions are on high. The air crackles with static. Kids try out cuss words to see if they can create the same atmosphere and get the same kind of imagined respect. Younger kids are just playing mynah bird.

- **To get attention.** Once a child uses a bad word and gets a startled and immediate response from the adults around him, he realizes what a powerful tool it can be.

- **To prove independence.** Kids are trying to prove they are separate from you, and that you don't control everything about them. Since you can't possibly control what comes out of their mouths this is an area where they may rebel.

- **To gain peer acceptance.** Kids want to be accepted by their peers. Often, swearing is seen as "cool," so cursing is just a way for a kid to try to fit in with the crowd.

- **To mimic what they see on TV or in the movies.** Kids are easily affected by their environment. If they have a "role model" who curses, they will sure enough try it themselves.

## What's the solution?

The first step is to review the reasons kids swear and determine which one is the fuel for your child's fire. Once you understand where this is coming from you can use one or more of the following tools:

- **Set calm limits.** Often, a parent's shocked response will actually encourage a child to repeat foul language. A simple, calm approach works better. "Tom, that is not a word children use. You may say, 'oh drat' instead." If the child persists, choose a quiet time to express your feelings, and set specific limits. Discuss why people swear, define what swear words are, and explain why they aren't acceptable in your family. Outline the future consequences for bad language – and follow through next time it happens.

- **Teach acceptable alternatives.** Some kids have a hard time understanding and expressing their angry feelings. Their lack of wisdom leads them to believe they are the only ones that ever feel this way and that their feelings are bad or wrong. It helps kids when we allow them their angry feelings, even as we set limits on their behavior. As an example, when a kid is crying over a punishment, how many parents offer to "Give you something to cry for"? But the kid already has a good reason to be unhappy! A better response might be, "You're welcome to be angry with me – upstairs in your bedroom with the door closed." If the child then stomps off to his room, don't yell at him for doing so. It's a healthy way for him to express his feelings. When an angry child curses at you, immediately offer an alternative, "That language is unacceptable. You may say, 'I'm so mad at you' or 'I disagree with you.'"

- **Praise good behavior.** When your child responds to anger in an appropriate way make sure you acknowledge it.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of "Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting."

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