

From silence to strength: Why speaking up matters

Children are taught to be polite, respectful and well-behaved. Along with these values, children also need to learn that their thoughts, feelings and concerns deserve to be heard. Speaking up is not about being rude or argumentative; it is about expressing oneself respectfully, asking for help and communicating when something does not feel right. Some children express themselves easily, while others hesitate because they fear getting into trouble, being judged or making a situation worse. A child who comes home unusually quiet and simply says, “*I’m fine,*” may be carrying a worry that they do not yet know how to express.



Small moments build confidence

Speaking up begins with everyday situations. A child may say -

- When a friend is bothering them: “I don’t like that. Please stop.”
- When they do not understand a lesson: “Could you explain that again?”
- When something feels difficult: “I need some help.”

This is why open communication is so vital. Consider a child who is repeatedly teased by classmates about the way they speak. At first, the child might laugh along, pretend not to hear, or quickly change the subject to mask their hurt. Gradually, they may become quieter or start avoiding school. When children know that they can approach a trusted adult, they are more likely to share what is happening and receive appropriate support.

The goal is not for children to solve every problem themselves. It is to help them recognise when they need support and know whom to approach.

Creating a safe circle of adults & what they can do:

Children should know which adults they can approach when they need support—parents, teachers, the school counsellor, grandparents or another trusted adult. If one person is unable to help, they should feel comfortable approaching another.

Listen before giving advice. When children share something difficult, we may immediately want to solve it. Instead, begin with, “*That sounds difficult. Tell me what happened.*”

Take their feelings seriously. What seems small to an adult may feel important to a child. Instead of “*Don’t worry, it’s nothing,*” try, “*I can understand why that upset you. What happened next?*”

Teach assertiveness, not aggression. Children can learn to communicate firmly and respectfully: *“Please stop. I don't like that,”* rather than shouting or pushing.

Practice through role-play. Ask, *“What would you say if someone took your pencil without asking?”* or *“What would you do if you didn't understand the teacher?”* Practising at home makes it easier to respond confidently in real situations.

Create regular opportunities to talk. Conversations do not always have to begin with *“How was school?”* Try asking, *“What made you smile today?”*, *“Was anything difficult?”* or *“Is there anything you want to tell me?”*

It is also important to notice changes such as unusual withdrawal, school avoidance, frequent irritability or loss of interest in activities. These changes do not always indicate a serious concern, but if they persist or affect daily life, a gentle conversation and appropriate support can help.

Conclusion:

Children may face disagreements, mistakes, pressure and disappointment. Children can be equipped with the confidence and skills they need to navigate challenges, make thoughtful choices and move forward with resilience. Let us educate children that saying “I need help,” “I don't understand,” “I don't feel comfortable,” or “Please stop” is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of self-awareness, courage and growing strength. Sometimes, the journey from silence to strength begins simply with knowing, “There is someone who might listen.”

With best wishes,

Health & Wellness Department

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