



# The Value of Other Voices

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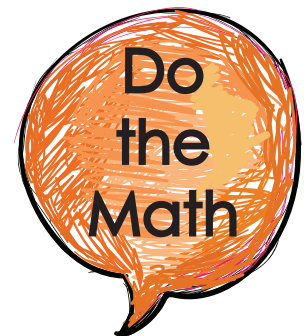
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## The Value of Other Voices

It happens every weekend in the lobbies of our churches. It also happens at a wedding reception. And I've heard it in the corridors of my local mall. The constant chatter of hundreds of people all talking at the same time. There are dozens of unique conversations happening at one time, and the sound can often resemble a swarm of bees or a room full of chainsaws, depending on the crowd.

The world our kids live in is very much the same kind of noisy place, except all the voices are aimed directly at them. There are mean voices, kind voices, disinterested voices, and compassionate voices. And those are just the ones they hear at school! Think of all the coaches, next-door neighbors, church friends, substitute teachers, aunts and uncles, and anonymous, unintentional people out there speaking to our children.

This world is full of well-intentioned people that love our kids, but there are also plenty of people with voices that speak anger and frustration to our kids.

**Let's be honest:** There are things we want our kids to hear, but there are other things we'd rather they not hear.

The challenge for us as parents isn't to lock our kids away in a place where they never hear other voices. The real call to us as parents is to look for the right voices, add the missing voices, and invest the necessary time to leverage the existing voices that give our kids the best chance to grow into followers of Jesus Christ.





I've heard it said that the first step to solving any problem is to admit you have one. In the case of parenting, the first step involves looking at the environment our kids live in.

Who are they hearing from?

Who are the people that speak life into their life?

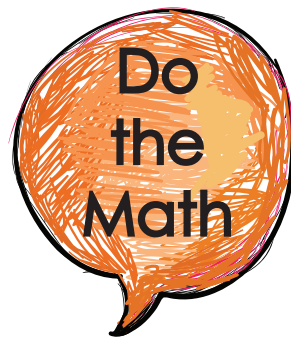
Who are the ones that have the greatest potential to harm our child's spirit?

First, you should look at where your children spend most of their time. If it's at school, then get to know the teachers at their school and the parents that volunteer around them. Maybe they spend hours at the football field after school; then you should spend a little time bending your ears toward the voices they hear there. It should be obvious that the loudest voices in your kid's life, as they get older, will be their friends, and getting to know them and their families is a great starting point for hearing what is said in those arenas.

Knowing where the voices are gives us a great starting place as parents. When we take the time to look at our kid's life from this perspective, it helps us interact better with these voices. **Let me be clear: We can't force people to be kind to our children; however, we can come alongside these already existing voices and spot the mistakes and bring correction when necessary.** There will be teachers that get frustrated a little too easily, and there will be coaches that raise a voice when they shouldn't; these are realities for your children. As the parent, you need to be listening for those voices, too, so that you can come alongside your child and bring direction during a difficult season.

Finding these voices can give you the lead to know when you need to affirm, encourage, and even repeat the greatness that they may have heard from others. One great side effect of simply paying attention is that your children will begin to watch your responses to the words of others. I've had my children shoot me a glance when someone around us uses foul language or if another child reacts disrespectfully to their parent. They are watching me, because I'm listening to the same things they are.

**Don't miss your chance to hear the voices.** It might mean you will have to eat lunch with your kids at school, listen to the coach talk to the team after the game, or sit in the front yard and watch the neighbor kids play together. **But be intentional about putting yourself in a position of knowledge when it comes to the voices your children hear.**



You've listened to and observed what's happening in your child's world, so now what? Now you take off the researcher hat and get out your parental calculator. You know the device, right? This is the tool that you use to begin to subtract and add certain people from their lives. This is hard to do, and you have to be intentional and consistent with it. If you wait until your children are teenagers, it becomes almost impossible, so begin when they're young so that you can teach your children to use the **relationship calculator** on their own later in life.

Begin with subtracting the relationships that need to go away. I'm not advocating the employment of a hit man or secretly packing up your belongings and making a run for the border. However, there are things you can do about the damaging voices in your kid's life. If it's another child that is causing the problem, then there are a few things you can do. Start with limiting the interactions your child has with them. For our family, there are a few neighborhood kids that our children are not allowed to play with, unless they are in *our* home. We don't take away the relationship, but we bring it under our roof so that we can listen and observe.

For some relationships, you may need to follow up with your children and help them process what they hear. This is especially true of their teachers and coaches at school, because you are not there to hear what is being said all of the time. Tell your children that everyone in the world has the right to a bad day occasionally and encourage them to offer forgiveness for hurtful words. But at the same time, **encourage them to filter what they hear through the truth that you've established in your home.**

Here may be the most important part of using the relationship calculator: **adding new relationships.**

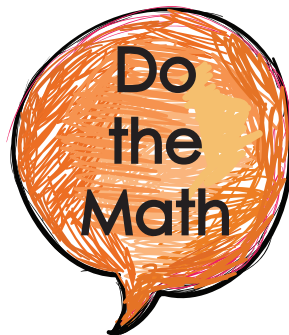
Look at the following questions:

What does my child need to hear from others?

In whom can I trust to encourage my child's natural gifts?

What voice is currently missing from my child's life?

Who are the good influences in their life right now?



Every child is different and responds to voices in different ways. I've got a son that loves words of affirmation, and I will do nearly anything to bring him along with me so that he can hear words of affirmation from others. I've got another son that wants to put himself to work alongside anyone needing help, so I will bring him along with me for projects where others are all working together. The words they both hear from these experiences are additional voices they need from someone other than their father.

There is great value in my kids hearing words from others that are the same words they hear from their mother and me. Many times these same words from others seem to carry an additional power in the psyche of my kids.

When I find a good friend that brings out the good qualities in my children, I will go out of my way to bring them into my home and take them with us on family trips. I purposely seek out great friendships for my children and then encourage them. The addition of these good relationships can help to subtract the less healthy ones over time.

One great place to find the right voices is at a church that values small group relationships. If I'm looking for voices that will spiritually encourage my kid's growth, then there is no better place than church! I'm working hard as a parent to be intentional about what my children discover about having a relationship with Christ, and so we make these Christ-following adults' voices a priority in our home.

It is an intelligent parent that takes advantage of the church when it comes to the right kind of relationships. Our children have had the advantage of patient, grandparent-ly voices at church. They have listened to the passionate voices of college students that think they can conquer the world. And they have heard the parents of their friends encourage them in their pursuits.

Before you go much further as a parent today, take some time to think through who your child should be listening to. Is it a friend that they share likes with? Is it an adult that has inspired you? Is it somebody older, wiser, and more educated than you? Is it someone younger and more ambitious than you? Is it a business entrepreneur, a devoted follower of Christ, a retired schoolteacher, or all three?

**Do the math and begin today by adding the right voices to your child's life.**





After you've looked for the voices and people in your child's life and have invested the time to add and subtract as necessary, then you are at a place to really flex your parental muscles. It's time to show off how powerful you can really be and begin the heavy lifting of parenting. The good news is that you don't have to be all-powerful; you just have to learn the schematics of leverage.

There is great power in leverage. For example, I'm not a large person, but this has its advantages. I'm not usually asked to help people move, and rarely have I had to move a refrigerator up a flight of stairs. It's not that I'm a weakling (I've moved my share of large items in my life.); I've just learned that the real key to moving big things is leverage. A 100-pound teenager can move a fridge much faster by using a dolly with big rubber wheels than a 300-pound grown man can by trying to carry it by himself.

The words our kids hear from those around them do indeed have power, but what we choose to do with those words can make them ultimately life-changing. We've already covered one of the most strategic things we can do as parents, and that's doing some relationship math with our kids. The next step, after adding new voices, is to leverage the voices they hear, for their benefit. I can't follow up on every single conversation my child has with a friend, nor can I filter every word they ever hear from an adult. I can, however, pick and choose when I take the time to leverage what they hear.

“Recently my son, who is in middle school, began to volunteer at our church in the preschool department. He has been assigned to the 3-year-olds room and has proven to be a real all-star in that environment. This son of mine is entering a stage of life where he is looking for affirmation, and he needs to feel that he is accepted for who he is. As he has served the 3-year-olds at our church, he has also been surrounded by adults that marvel at his heart for these little ones. They've said things to him like, “You are so great with these kids; I wish there were more middle schoolers like you!” and “Have you seen the way these kids look at you? You are their hero just by coming and playing with them!”

Those words, on their own, are powerful, but I have also leveraged them in a few distinct ways. First, I knew my son would succeed in that area. I'm his father, and I know his strengths. Helping him find a place to serve 3-year-olds was much better than if I had asked him to go work with 3rd graders. I also set him up for success by choosing an environment that would bring out the best in him and, therefore,



bring out the words of affirmation from others. Then I made sure that he fully understood what those people were telling him. I helped him see that those friends were sharing what they saw in his life, and they weren't making it up. I reminded him that his mother and I have been seeing these same things in his life and have said these same words to him, as well. There is power in re-emphasis!

Experiences like this are what support me in saying what I've always said to my son: "You are special and unique, and God is going to use you to do great things for the world all around you!" These experiences also aid in putting those words into the mouths of others. With your child, you have the ability to find areas where they can thrive consistently and then leverage the situation to promote saying what you've been saying to them all along.

There are plenty of arenas in which you can encourage your child's strengths and talents. Maybe it's an art class at the community center or working alongside others at a local food bank or volunteering at your church. Maybe it's allowing them to play a sport at which they excel a little more than the other kids or spending some time after school with a club that will help draw out some of these other talents they have inside of them.

So much of leveraging the words of others in the lives of our children has to do with us being intentional as parents. [When we leverage the words they hear, we are helping to shape them into the individuals God wants them to be.](#) However, this doesn't happen by accident. This happens when we *listen* for the voices and surround our children with the *right* voices.

Don't take offense when your teenage daughter says, "Amanda's mother was telling me that if I study every day for just 30 minutes, it would help me feel more prepared for these tests that are so hard." Of course, you've been telling your daughter this for years! It really does seem crazy that somehow hearing from another mother makes all the difference. Just accept that you aren't the only voice your kids hear. And go buy Amanda's mother a cup of coffee as a thank-you!





It's been said that when it comes to parenting, the days are long, but the years are short. It's true, isn't it? Eighteen years feels like such a long time, and then suddenly we have a 9-year-old that is halfway finished with his time in our home! If you have young children, then know that it's a whirlwind coming to get you, and those babies will be up and around in no time. If you are the parent of teenagers, then I'm sure it's already hit you full in the face.

In the grand scheme of your child's life, the quantity of time they spend in your home is a drop in the bucket. However, the quality of that time they have is entirely up to you. **Parenting intentionally means that we recognize the brevity of what we have to work with, while also acknowledging the seriousness of what we have to accomplish in that short amount of time.**

Could I challenge you to paint a picture of what you'd like that 18-year-old birthday party to look like? Take a moment to imagine a huge send-off party for your daughter or son. Imagine that you gathered together everyone that has ever influenced your child in a positive way. Imagine that the room is full of all the voices they've heard over the years . . . family, friends, small group leaders, baseball coaches, gymnastics instructors, schoolteachers, and neighborhood buddies. They are all gathered together to celebrate the future of your son or daughter, and they've all had a role in helping make them who they are.

Got the picture in your mind's eye? Now ponder these questions:

Are any of these people in your child's life now?

Who is missing from their life right now that you would want at this celebration?

Are there some people at the party that you'd rather not be there?

Begin to imagine the end of your child's time at home with you and consider which voices you want to be the most prominent to them during that time.

Whether you realize it or not, you've been granted the role of influencing these young children in your home. God has given you the responsibility of managing their time in your home, and while they will eventually make their own decisions and choose their own path in life, it is your influence right now that helps make those decisions and paths more clear for them.



In closing, let's look at the single most valuable voice in the life of your child. *As their parent, you have the greatest potential to influence your child's heart and life.* You are the strongest of all voices, and you are the best person to show compassion, forgiveness, and affirmation to them. Even when your children begin to age and seek out other voices, *your voice* should and always will remain the one they most need to hear.

It's important to find valuable voices all around your children. It's important to leverage what they hear from others to help them as they mature. And it's important that you are picky with whom you let influence your children. But all of that is diminished if your voice isn't the one speaking grace and truth in equal measure to them.

You are the champion of all voices, and as you seek God's will for how to lead your family, I'm certain that you will be given opportunities to say what needs to be said when it most needs to be heard.

### **I believe**

... that you are equipped to be the voice of **forgiveness** for your children when they need forgiveness the most, because no one else knows them like their parents do.

... that you have the potential to direct your children in the way of wisdom when they need **wisdom** the most, because no one else knows them like their parents do.

... that you are the voice of **love** that your children need to hear more than anyone else, because no one else knows them like their parents do.

Value the voices in your child's life, but see your own voice as the most valuable of all. When the full weight of that sets in on us as parents, it draws us to seek out wisdom for ourselves as we continue on the journey of being a parent. And what a great journey it is!