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## What is Your Child Really Saying? Translating “attitude”

Attitude is sarcastic anger. Sometimes, it's a snarky I-statement or You-statement. If you look underneath, often, it's a sign that your child is ready for more independence and feels thwarted in some way. Does she have reasonable choices? Can you give her more ability to make decisions? Or does she feel that she never has control over anything? Children want their needs and wants taken care of, just like adults do.

When looking at sass from your child, try to identify what they are really trying to communicate based on their need or feeling (NOF), stripped of the sarcasm, and then feed it back to them. “You are upset because I'm interrupting your game?” Share your feelings. “When I hear your tone, I feel disrespected. I would like to talk about this. Can we try this again? Here is how you can say what you are feeling. Instead of saying, ‘Whatevah!’ say ‘I'm feeling nagged. Please leave me alone.’ Then I will really hear you. Can you try that please?” Sometimes, you really have to give them the exact words to use, or they don't know the respectful way to assert their needs. It's a critical life skill to speak up respectfully so people can know what's bothering you but still not feel attacked. Or you could gently say, “Do you want a moment to rephrase that?” You could use humor in your response. You could also just walk away and your body language will reveal you don't want to be spoken to that way. Responding with anger or sarcasm doesn't teach them anything other than it's okay for them to continue that way.

Be sure to model assertive politeness instead of “attitude” yourself. It's a hard trap to not fall into especially when family sarcasm is portrayed all over the media as cool and desirable. It's a false representation. If you said, “whatever” to your boss when she asked you why your project was late, I

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would bet that she wouldn't laugh. You are the perfect person to teach your children the assertiveness skills they need in life. Start at home!

| Attitude Statements Your Child Might Use | Persuasive Statements that Adults Listen To (I-stmts) |
|--|---|
| <b>You're not my boss</b>                | <b>I'd like a choice</b>                              |
| <b>I hate you</b>                        | <b>I didn't like what you said</b>                    |
| <b>I'm not your slave</b>                | <b>I don't think that seems fair</b>                  |
| <b>I'll do what I want</b>               | <b>I need to try</b>                                  |
| <b>You don't love me</b>                 | <b>I need attention</b>                               |
| <b>You don't understand</b>              | <b>I need you to listen to my opinion</b>             |
| <b>It's not fair</b>                     | <b>I feel capable and responsible</b>                 |
| <b>This is dumb</b>                      | <b>I feel scared, worried, about failing</b>          |
| <b>I can't do it</b>                     | <b>I don't know how</b>                               |
| <b>I have rights!</b>                    | <b>I need help</b>                                    |
| <b>Fine!</b>                             | <b>I would like to have a choice</b>                  |
| <b>Whatever!</b>                         | <b>I'm feeling pushed</b>                             |
| <b>I don't care</b>                      | <b>I'm scared</b>                                     |

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