

My Kid Hates Me... Now What?

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Surviving the three little words no parent wants to hear

by Jarrod Thalheimer

You finally did it. You screwed up your courage, took a big sip of moral authority, and bathed in the golden spring of outrage to once and for all lay it on the line for your mouthy malcontent. The busted TV, the dented car, or the massive ringtone bill has finally tipped the scale. Your child did something so royally stupid that you let fly the full weight of your disappointment and anger at their behavior. Spent, you stand there, breathing in a slightly labored fashion as you wait for your well-chosen words to sink gracefully into that thick piece of granite Dick or Jane claim to use for a head. Then you hear it.

"I hate you."

Like a knife slid jaggedly across your arm and then plunged deep inside your chest, the first time you hear those three words makes you want to curl up and die. "Hate me? Hate me? How can she hate me? I love her. I love her so much that I would say and do anything for her. Don't say you hate me. Say you love me."

Experienced parents appear to take such assaults in stride. Their kids always seem to be tossing around verbal spears like "I hate you" or "You hate me" or a perennial favorite, "I wish you were dead." The words may seem to bounce off them like they have Kevlar underwear but, even still, it hurts.

Do they really hate you? The truth, it seems, is a little more complicated.

What Does "I Hate You" Really Mean?

According to Christine Hierlmaier-Nelson, communications expert and the author of *Green Yellow Go! Nat Knows Bananas*, a children's book about patience, "I hate you" merely means that your child is upset with you and that they may be testing you. "Your child also may have learned that this is an attention-getting device or a way to get you to change your mind on something."

So should a parent worry if their child says "I hate you?"

No, but according to Hierlmaier-Nelson, parents *should* worry if the statement puts them on the defensive. "Don't allow the child to take away your power by playing on your emotions. As a child gets more upset, your job is to get calmer and more logical. Keep an even tone of voice and say something like, 'Wow, I can see you are upset right now. If you would like to talk about what is bothering you, I'm ready to listen.' Hearing such words from your child may hurt your feelings, but they are just words."

Hierlmaier-Nelson suggests that parents remember to be available for their child. Families are so busy today that children often act up just to get some attention. Giving them the attention they're looking for, and working to make it positive instead of negative, is a great way to improve your relationship.

Maybe Things Aren't So Bad After All So maybe it's not exactly the end of the world when those words smack you square in the face. You can't give your children every single thing they want. And when you figure that their version of a perfect friend is someone who agrees with every dumb thing they want to do, being the non-liked voice of reason is most certainly preferred, no matter how difficult it may be. They will learn to trust your judgment over their friends'.

Besides, it takes a lot of energy to hate someone and your kids are doing so much growing and learning that, as long as you're doing everything you can to help them, they'll eventually look to spend any wasted energy "hatin'" on much more interesting things, like maybe dating or romantic pursuits... which is a whole other mess of issues to consider.

Circle of life indeed.

à *What's the worst thing your child ever said to you? Or what's the one thing you most regret saying to your parents?*

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