



Series 1. Episode 12

Turning *Little Stones* show notes

Listen to a conversation with Jo Parrott
about the WORDS we use.

Episode 12

Words are powerful!
with Jo Parrott

Jo Parrott is a trained and experienced early years practitioner. Since having her own 3 children (9 years, 5 years, and 6 months), and changing career, she takes time during Maternity Leave to reflect on aspects of her training relating it to her own young family and working life.

Words are powerful!

'Sticks and stones may break my bones; but words will never hurt me!'

Oh, really???? SO untrue!!!

We can all *instantly* recall something spoken to us that has 'landed' on us and very likely 'wounded' us. We can remember the exact words, the time, context and we may rehearse a response that we wish we had said in reply!

In some instances, words become labels that define us for years!

Being honest!

Jo reflects on her own language and how she finds herself using phrases she promised she would never use with her own children. Jo's refreshing honesty invites us to consider the words and phrases we might have used with our child(ren) recently. We too might recall:

- how they tried our patience
- how they pushed our irritation buttons
- how many times we exclaimed 'No!' or Stop!'
- the way we began asking them nicely and how it turned into pleading, nagging or worse.
- how we offered a reward (or threatened a consequence) for something!

Oooooch! If we're honest we will all now be feeling a little regretful.

The emergence of strain...

We hear many kind, patient, loving carers gently ask or remind children to do something. Over time, these well intentioned child carers begin to change... their bodies stiffen, their words become more clipped, and the repetitions overtime, become nags.

...and shame...

When my husband asks, 'where are your keys?' (*I have been known to lose my keys!*), my thoughts turn to the (many!) times when I have lost my keys. I feel a smidge of shame. I might reply indignantly, *'Yes, they are in the drawer, and yes I have locked up!'*

Shame and recalling something we don't want to be reminded of is unpleasant for us as adults.

It is the same for children. Children who hear us ask 'are your hands clean?' (they may think they are clean) will likely react negatively (or simply ignore us) or for very similar reasons.



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Nudge Theory

Imagine a friend saying to us, “Don’t think about....?” Guess who comes to mind!

Nudge theory explains how indirect suggestions influence behaviour. It is used by advertisers as a highly effective marketing tool. If this is true for adults who have more filters to control what we think about, how much more for our children?

A typical example...

If I ask (however nicely) a fictional ‘Tom’ to

“Please stop running indoors, Tom.”

the idea of running is being reinforced in Tom’s mind. He is far more likely to continue running – not because he is being naughty, but because he is being reminded of the idea. Nudge Theory.

Even worse is telling Tom to “wait until you’re outside so you can run”. He now needs to grapple with two ideas:

1. not running (but we’ve just reinforced the behaviour by naming it) *and*
2. ‘Wait!’ (a word that children probably least understand)

We have in fact created the perfect conditions for Tom to ignore our request. Sadly, if he starts to hear adults calling him ‘naughty’, over time he may find that label fits his behaviour.

Learning to tune out the negative and tune up the positive

Just changing the words and phrases we use with our children can have an astonishing effect.

Tom is more likely to comply if I explain,

“Tom, you’re running. We’re inside now, so we need to walk.

Do you want to stay inside? Yes? OK, we need to remember to walk indoors.

Look at who else is walking... Toby is walking and so is Josh.

Would you like to walk like Josh too?

That’s perfect... we are all walking indoors. Thank you, that’s just how we walk when we’re inside.

Just let me know when you want to go outside.”

In this example, Tom has heard the word ‘walk and walking’ 7 times, and the word running just once. Nudge theory.

Tom has been given a clear example showing him how to move indoors. He was given a choice. He was given clear guidance on how to walk and was given specific affirmation when he did.



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And let's not forget to affirm where Tom is when he is outdoors and can run freely,

"Tom, this is a great place to run... look at how fast you are. Outside is a great place to run!"

A space for every behaviour?

No behaviours are completely off limits. Even tricky ones, such as kicking, pinching, pushing... (something we'll chat about in other podcasts). It takes some thought but finding opportunities where our child can perform these actions safely and acceptably is important:

Agreed, in some contexts, it may be unsafe or inappropriate to run about, but having a space where a runner can run (indoors too) is important. Jo explains how her family sometimes transform an indoor space to allow space for '*cushions off rough and tumble*' times.

The words and phrases we use become positive, simply by directing them to the appropriate space and celebrating what they are doing and where.

Phrases to lean on

Jo explains that these phrases are ones that she can 'lean on' in times of exasperation. With practise, she assures us that they begin to feel more natural, and our children begin to use these phrases with each other.

Have a go!

First, we need to try to catch ourselves when we are about to say, "No! STOP! Don't...!"

We need to rehearse how to rephrase what we are about to say. Ideally, we need to say the positive word as near to 7 times as possible.

When we say the behaviour that we want them to stop; we speak it just once, calmly and without irritation – "you're running". We follow this quickly with the many reminders of the behaviour that we want them to use.

Keep at it – it works!

It takes practice and perseverance, but the results are transformative...

*Jo co-hosts the first set of *Delving a Little Deeper**

'Getting to Know You'

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones

Delving a little Deeper

See website for details.