

## 8 Keys of Excellence



### **SPEAK WITH GOOD PURPOSE**

Speak honestly and kindly—think before you speak to be sure your intention is positive and your words are sincere.

Words have the power to build people up and bring them down. They can uplift and enlighten, or depress and destroy. You have complete control over the words you use, so choose them carefully. The first step is awareness. Think before you speak. Focus on communicating positives: strengths, praise, encouragement. Handle negatives carefully. Stopping to consider your intention before you speak is a powerful tool.

### **Why Speak with Good Purpose?**

Communication is the bridge between people—it's the glue that holds all relationships together. It's what forms the links between teachers and students, between parents and children, between friends, and between siblings. Your relationships thrive or fade depending on the quality of the communication between you and the other person.

Speaking with good purpose can be a challenge—it takes courage, effort, and practice. But when you master this skill the quality of your relationships will change and you'll find the satisfaction of deep, meaningful connections with others that you may not have had before.

Words are powerful. A few cutting words let loose without thinking can wound someone for a lifetime. Maybe years ago your best friend said you had a "retarded smile" ... or your teacher discouraged your progress in math with "you're no good at numbers"—and you still remember those words. Hurtful comments can stay with us a long time. Whoever came up with that rhyme about "sticks and stones" was wrong. Words can hurt.

What you say—whether it's negative or positive—has an impact.

Look for those positive words, words that build up, words that heal. There are times when a few kind words make all the difference. Have you ever had someone whisper, "I believe you can do it," just when you needed to hear it the most? Words matter.

## **Catch yourself — why was I going to say that?**

How can you make sure you're speaking with good purpose? How do you make it happen? How do you direct your speech to build strong bonds and create safe environments?

Begin by thinking about your words . . . think **before** you speak. Ask yourself, "Am I going to say something useful right now? Will my words be encouraging or damaging? Will my words build up or break down the person I'm speaking to and/or my relationship with him or her?" Positive communication is a habit. It's a matter of training yourself to monitor your thoughts before they become speech. With practice, you'll learn to focus on giving words to positive thoughts, recognizing people's strengths, and offering praise and encouragement.

## **Don't stop expressing negative thoughts, just be careful with them**

We don't have to *avoid* expressing negative thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but it's best to recognize them for what they are and decide whether or not we need to say them. Treat a negative thought like a wasp that gets into the house. Don't overreact; don't throw lots of energy at it. Simply think, "Okay, what am I going to do about that?"

If it's simply a random unpleasant thought—you don't like a person's whiny tone or wish someone wasn't so pushy—acknowledge the thought and let it go. Choose not to give it the power of spoken words. But if it's something that needs resolution, you may need to express it. Handle these times carefully. Think about the intention of your words. Are they meant to support the person and build a stronger relationship? Are they focused on finding a solution?

Speaking honestly—without the masks of sarcasm, condescension, or disdain—requires you to state your true thoughts and feelings, even if they're not pretty, even when they're not what the other person wants to hear. Honest speech is about revealing the true you.

## **The power of Speaking with Good Purpose**

Speaking with good purpose allows us to harness the awesome power of our words. When we speak positively, honestly, and directly, with the goal of keeping relationships strong, words cease to be a random force and begin to show their positive power in our relationships and in our lives.

**I think before I speak**

**and choose my words carefully.**