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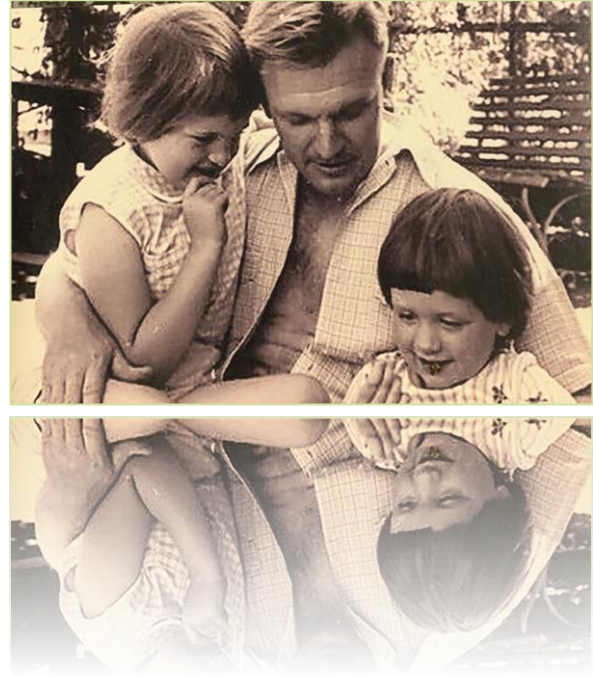
# Words Matter:

- Insight from Children
- Insight from and for Adults

Dr Fiona Pienaar

Before I start...

We were all children  
once upon a time...what  
can you remember from  
your childhood about the  
way words were used?



# Thinking about childhood

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- Significance of adults
- Stages of development; logical reasoning but thinking largely concrete – what they directly experience
- Messages they receive about themselves are internalised
- As children develop, they begin to think beyond concrete concepts and understand more complex and abstract ideas

# What can we learn from children about their experience and understanding of verbal abuse?



"I remember in ski lessons being told 'oh maybe this one's just not your thing' so then it was just 'well, I'm rubbish at sport then'..."

Parent

"If a parent says you are useless it makes you feel like you are good for nothing."

Girl, 15-16

"If you don't feel encouraged, you are going to feel unsupported"

Girl, 11-12

"If you say words enough someone might start believing they are true"

Girl, 11-12

"I think I was quite loud when I was younger, I used to make a lot of noises, and was quite irritating... I find myself saying things to [my son] that people would say to me like 'be quiet'"

Mother

"If she has kids when she is older, she will say it to her kids as well"

Boy 13-14

# What do children want to hear?

“When Mum tells me she’s proud of me, when you are older you are going to remember how they treated you.”

Boy 13-14

“It makes me really happy when he [dad] says a good thing to me like ‘oh you played really well today.’”

Boy, 13-14

“Rather than criticising, say it in a way that makes it seem as though it’s not as bad, it just needs some improvement.”

Boy, 17-18

“When you used to get a certificate, even if you didn’t get 100%, you’d get recognition for trying to do something well, that had a massive impact.”

Parent

# Thinking about solutions...

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Both the Delphi study and the research conducted with children and parents informed us that **awareness, education and information to increase understanding is key**

Explain how the way they talk to children could affect their mental health and wellbeing

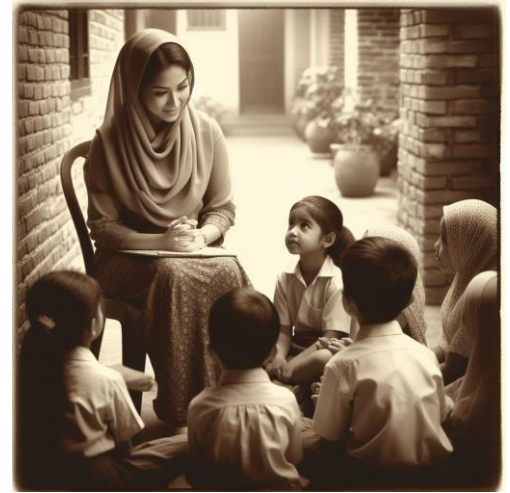
Provide information on how to talk to children



# Practical tips on communicating with children for All Adults, Parents and Carers, and Teachers

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1. Role model
2. Set expectations
3. Focus on positives
4. Stop and think
5. Repair



# Four steps when talking to children

STOP

BREATHE

THINK

SPEAK

# Insight from



1,500 - 2,000 text conversations per day

- Lack of connectedness
- Lack of confidence

"Thank you for making me feel like I am not alone and for validating my feelings."

"It was lovely to talk to a person who was kind and understanding to help me see a positive future."

"You were so nice and kind. You really helped me and I actually got the courage to speak to my family."

"Thank you so much. It felt great to have somebody to talk to as I don't get that very often. They made me feel cared for & loved."

"You have helped me more in our short conversation than anybody has since I was about 7 years old. I couldn't have asked for more from our conversation."

- Shout texter

"Without you I wouldn't have a plan to move forward. Talking to someone helped me so much and having someone say 'I believe in you' is amazing."

# Support for children

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If adults are saying words that hurt, upset or scare you, you can talk to someone who will listen:

[Childline](#) offers free, confidential support for children and young people in the UK, including a free helpline and 1-2-1 online chats with counsellors.

[Shout](#) offers a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. Text 'Shout' to 85258.

[The Mix](#) offers free, confidential support for young people under 25, via phone, webchat or email.

# Support for parents and carers

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If you're going through a tough time, feeling overloaded, are struggling to cope or worried about your behaviour, there are people you can talk to. By asking for help, you will have already taken a major step forward:

[Parent Talk](#) offers a free and confidential live chat with a parenting coach.

[FamilyLine](#) (0808 802 6666) offers free support to adult family members via telephone, text, email and web chat.

[Family Lives](#) (0808 800 2222) offers free support to families via telephone, chat, forums and courses.

[Gingerbread](#) offers free support for single parents.

# Support for teachers and education staff

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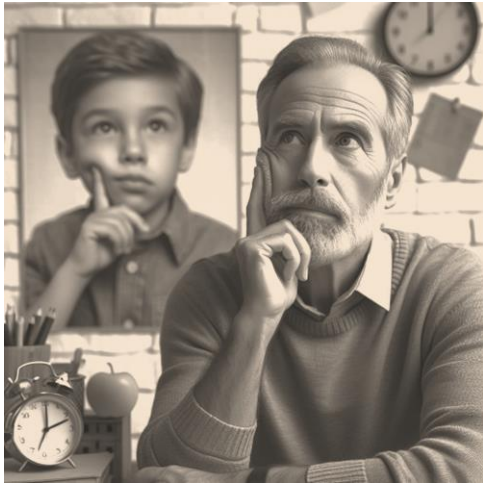
If you are a teacher or member of education staff and need support with your mental health and wellbeing, [Education Support](#) provides a free, 24/7 helpline.



# Support for adults who have suffered from verbal abuse

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If you have suffered any form of abuse, including verbal abuse, help is available. [NAPAC](#) runs a free, confidential support line for adult survivors of abuse.



# If you're worried about your own behaviour

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Respect offers information, advice and support to people who are – or think they might be – abusing a member of their family.

- Call free on 0808 802 4040 from 9am–5pm, Mon - Fri
- Email [info@respectphoneline.org.uk](mailto:info@respectphoneline.org.uk) (they aim to reply within two working days)
- Use their [webchat service](#), available on Tues & Thurs, 10am–4pm.



# Benefits for you and for children

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- *You may have been hurt yourself in childhood, but you can break the cycle*
- *Try not to be too hard on yourself when things go wrong*
- *Focus on the behaviour and not on the child*
- *Regulating your own thoughts, emotions, behaviour and modelling this*
- *You need support too, and ways to take pressure off yourself*

Let's build  
children up,  
not knock  
them down

# First international conference on CVA

## Words Matter: Impact and Prevention of Childhood Verbal Abuse



First international event on **childhood verbal abuse** by the adults around them with the **World Health Organization (WHO)** and **University College London (UCL)**.

Presentations from global experts in the study of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), neuroscience, developmental psychology, and public health to elucidate and promote discussions on unifying definitions, impact, societal cost burden, and prevention.

**11 April 2024**  
**10:00-17:00 GMT**

online and English only



Professor Peter Fonagy, Division of Psychology and Language Sciences, UCL and Anna Freud. (Chair - am)

Dr Manasi Kumar, Department of Psychiatry, University of Nairobi and Department of Global Health University of Washington and UCL. (Chair - pm)



Maria Aarts  
Director and Founder  
Marie Meo International



Prof. Mark Bellis  
Liverpool John Moores  
University  
WHO Collaborating Centre  
for Violence Prevention



Jessica Bondy  
Founder  
Words Matter



Prof. Shanta R. Dube  
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The International Journal



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REGISTER FREE HERE

FULL DETAILS HERE: [www.ucl.ac.uk/psychoanalysis/events/2024/apr/words-matter-impact-and-prevention-childhood-verbal-abuse](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychoanalysis/events/2024/apr/words-matter-impact-and-prevention-childhood-verbal-abuse)