



The Little Book of Mantras

“Time In, Not Time Out”

When your child is not managing they need help to do so. They do not need to experience what to them is rejection by being sent away and put on a “naughty step” to think about what they have done. With most children they don’t have the ability to think in this way and behaviour is likely to escalate or they learn to say what you want to hear rather than learn!

Time In says, “I care and want to look after you”. You tell them they are not managing so you must help them and they must stay with you until they are in a position to manage better. This is a positive, caring response. You are clearly in charge and capable and this makes your child feel safe and secure. It gives them a positive sense of self-worth and a feeling of being wanted and that you can manage them.

“I Can See You’re Finding It Hard....”

Use this mantra when your child is struggling to cope with a situation. State what they are finding hard as this communicates empathy, shows you understand how they feel and that you care. It is not critical but supportive. It is not telling them off or making them feel belittled or shamed. It is not giving them anything to react to and push things further. In fact it is likely to open up communication and make it more likely that they will tell you more about what the problem is for them.

”Reconnecting makes the most progress”

Use this mantra to help you remember that the brain develops by connecting to the people and experiences around it. The breaking of a connection and then the reconnection stimulates growth and synaptic connections and enhances attachment. So when there has been an episode of discipline or tension it is really important that it is dealt with and then finished. The adult must quickly reconnect to the child with a positive attitude and overtures to return to the easy and relaxed relationship and attunement that existed before the incident. This teaches the child that they are worthy people, that we all make mistakes and that that’s ok as mistakes help us to learn and they don’t affect our relationship in the longer term. It helps our children be confident and resilient rather than feel shame and inappropriate responsibility for everything around them.



“I Wonder...”

This mantra is about being curious about why your child is responding as they are and the way they are feeling. Once again it communicates no value judgements for them to react to or feel defensive about; it is a neutral and a gateway to a reply! Use it when you don't understand what's going on as it is “a curious tell me more response” and generally not what the child expects and therefore more likely to get a positive response. Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child. Curiosity leads to understanding!

“I Can See You Are Struggling With...”

Use this mantra when your child is struggling to cope with a situation. State what they are finding hard as this communicates empathy, shows you understand how they feel and that you care. It is not critical but supportive. It is not telling them off or making them feel belittled or shamed. It is not giving them anything to react to and push things further. In fact it is likely to open up communication and make it more likely that they will tell you more about what the problem is for them.

“Remember to PACE Yourself”

PACE stands for **Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity** and **Empathy**. These are the four attitudes you need to demonstrate and practice every day with your youngster. These are the attitudes that are the building blocks of forming a meaningful relationship and attachment with your child. If you demonstrate these attitudes you will be in tune or harmony with your child and this will allow you to be alongside and with them rather than in conflict with them. As much learning will take place and positive attachments will grow. This mantra is one you must practice and work very hard on to enable you to understand your child and be able to move forward.

“We Are Here To Keep You Safe...”

This is something you will say a lot reminding them that it is adults who can be trusted to help them make the right decisions and stay safe. Often our children have been let down by adults and not kept safe, they may have been hurt, neglected, let down, left alone etc. Adults may not have cared to stop them doing silly things and they may have even been encouraged to do silly things by adults and laughed at for doing so. This then is likely to be a new concept that they won't trust, so you have to keep repeating it and keep keeping them safe again and again!



“Think Toddler...”

Your child is almost certainly behind in their development because of their previous poor experiences. They may be ahead in some areas (or appear to be) but emotionally they are generally younger than their chronological age. Work out with your support workers the age they are functioning at and set the level of your expectations at that age. If you don't your expectations will never be met, you will be frustrated and disappointment.

Save yourself this wasted energy by having expectations linked to their emotional development and then feel pleased, proud and satisfied when your child learns some new skill, or you see them progressing.

This is the joy of parenting so play younger, have younger toys, realistic expectations and see success by “thinking toddler”. Your child’s confidence and resilience will be strengthened as a result.

“Do’s Work Better Than Don’t’s”

It is much more positive and confidence building to tell a child what you want them to do than to tell them not to do something. This teaches them skills, gives them confidence and good self image. To be saying “don’t do this or that” is negative and makes a child have low self esteem and feel shame and guilt. So telling the “What to Do” is positive parenting, benefits all and enhances relationships. Children feel valued as opposed to belittled, they are more likely to listen than switch off and ignore, which then generally leads to further conflict. It can also be a repetitive negative cycle because they don’t listen and learn. Once a skill is learned and practised it is retained, leaving room, energy and motivation to go and learn the next one.

“Have I Nurtured Myself Today?”

This mantra recognises that for you to be good parents and have the energy to do all the things you need to help your child learn and progress that you need to be strong and healthy and feel good about yourself. All work and no play make Jack or Jill a dull boy/girl.

Make time for yourself and your partner; enlist the help of family, friends or services to enable you to spend time on keeping your relationship strong, enjoyable and healthy. Do things alone and together that you enjoy and are for you. This is vital or we become resentful, tired and run down. So don’t ignore your own needs, they are vital to yourself and the rest of the family.



“Praise is Magic”

This mantra reminds us that we all like praise and that the positiveness of genuine praise can work wonders with children who have not experienced an environment where praise and positiveness is the main feature of the people in it.

Some of our children can find it hard to accept praise and so you may need to think about this with your support worker, and find different ways of reinforcing the behaviour you want and building up your child’s self-esteem, so they can feel good about themselves.

Criticism will never help them achieve this and that is why praise and positiveness is magic; when linked with firmness, kindness and empathy you can use it as a force for change. Do not underestimate its power but more so remind yourself that you have to stay positive to enable your child to truly learn and feel valued.

“What we pay attention to is what we get more of”

Obvious really this mantra reminds us that if we focus on poor behaviour we will get more of it. If we focus on positive behaviour we will get more of it. If we present as angry, unhappy and resentful, it is likely our child will reflect this back like a mirror reflects the mood on your face.

We are role models and our children learn how to react to the world by absorbing our every reaction, response, facial expression and feeling. If we want a positive happy child, then we need to focus on these things and model them ourselves, praising and encouraging them in our children. Then we will see them doing the same.

“I’m Puzzled”

This Mantra is about being curious about why your child is responding as they are. Once again it communicates no value judgements for them to react to; it is neutral and a gateway to a reply! Use it when you don’t understand what’s going on as it is “a curious tell me more response” and generally not what the child expects and therefore more likely to get a positive response.

“You Are Not Managing Right Now So...”

This is a form of words to use that tells the child in a non-judgemental way that you are in charge and taking control. Again you are not criticising them but assisting them to manage by regulating their behaviour for them until they can learn to do this for themselves. It is a good lead into telling them how to do something without making them feel bad. It can be used alongside other statements such as “I can see you are finding it hard...” or “I can see you are struggling with....”



“F.N.R.”

If you have attended any of our training you will have heard this expression on more than one occasion.

FNR is a management technique that will allow you to self-regulate and give your child the best response at a time of struggle.

Practising F.N.R. will allow you to put things into perspective before you deal with a situation with your child. The more you practice it the more natural it will become and the better responses you will give.

F(eelings) – This is about taking a few seconds to think “what is my child feeling right now?” you might be witnessing disruptive behaviour, but behind it there might be an emotionally young, frightened and scared child who is struggling to feel safe and needs connection with a parent.

This stage is also about recognising how you are feeling as a result of the situation you are facing. If you are dysregulated your response will be disproportionate and it will likely escalate the situation. When things eventually calm down you might feel guilty and bad about yourself. So this stage is also about taking a few seconds / minutes to put your thoughts together and to recognise your own emotions. Also be mindful that you might feel additional pressure when in the company of extended family and friends and you might feel you need to react in a way that meets their expectations rather than concentrating on what your child really needs (next stage).

N(eeds) – This is about what your child needs at that moment in time. What your child wants might be very different to what your child needs, so it is very important that after to have self-regulated you ask yourself “what does my child need right now?” You know your child better than anybody else and this is about seeing past the behaviour and identifying the emotional needs.

R(espone) – This is about response, and you must ask yourself, “What is the best response I can give in this situation?” If you have gone through the two previous steps, your response might be very different than the one you would have given if you had not taken some time to self-regulate and analyse the situation you are facing.

All this ties very well together with this powerful statement:

“If you see a child misbehaving you will want to punish. If you see a child struggling you will want to help”



“Think Like An Onion With 47 Skins”

This means look after yourself and not to take things personally as they are rarely about you but more to do with the life and people your child experienced before they came to live with you.

They replay the experiences and relationships they had as they do not know how to resolve them. They are confused and need help to work it all out, so you do not need to be offended, feel you are not a good parent or that your child hates you, as this is not true.

So grow some thick skins, analyse what is going on and how to help your child learn with you and with your support, rather than displaying the hurt or anger that they can make you feel. If it happens talk to someone about how you feel. If it happens a lot it may be unconsciously triggering issues from your own childhood that affect how you respond to your child. If this is so be brave and ask for help to address whatever those issues are even though it is hard sometimes to see this is the case.

“Adults Are In control”

Your children have generally learnt to control situations to keep safe before they came to you, so they are not going to give this up easily. They have proof that if adults are in control they are at risk so they will resist. Try not to take this personally, don't give up and keep repeating the mantra and then act upon it. They will eventually get the message if you are resilient enough to keep going. If you are not, the situation will likely make you feel powerless.

Give your children limited choices but not power or control. They need to learn how to be children rather than pseudo-adults and you have to teach them with kindness but firmness.

“Tell, Don't Ask”

If you ask you can be told No. There are times when you need something done so state it firmly, clearly and with confidence and generally your child will comply. If they think there is room for manoeuvre they'll take it.

Their experiences lead them not to trust adults as if they did they were at risk, so they will fight this. So you have to keep at it in a firm but kind way and be consistent and teach them they can rely on what you say and do.

Their understanding of communication, body language and tone of voice may not be as sophisticated as you'd expect and they may see a request as weakness rather than kindness; so be clear. Teach them you are in control, not them as they have needed to be in the past. Don't debate or negotiate. State things once and then act without dialogue. If they do not comply, then later when is all calm, explain why.



“Behaviour is Communication”

Everybody communicates through behavior. An infant may cry when she is hungry or wet, just like an adult may yawn when he is bored at work. A child’s problematic or inappropriate behavior is a sign that he is upset and that something is not right.

Children sometimes have trouble communicating, because they may not be able to verbally describe the problem or not cope with a situation. This is even more complex for children who have had traumatic beginnings in life. At these times, children may act out their feelings or needs and they will engage in challenging behavior for a reason.

When your children display challenging behavior they are sending you the message that something is not right or that their needs are not being met. There could be many reasons for a single behavior, such as being hungry, scared, hurt, tired, bored, sad or angry. Some children may engage in behavior that seems destructive, because they enjoy the physical sensation (for example pulling threads from clothing). Sometimes children feel unsafe or out of control, so they take inappropriate action over the things they do control, like being able to kick someone or saying hurtful things. A child who has tried several times to communicate to adults about what he needs, but whose needs remain unmet, will often use problematic behavior as a way of sending a very loud message.

You can help your child by figuring out the meaning behind his or her behaviour. All children, but especially those who display challenging behavior, need the consistency of a reliable and caring adult who will provide support and guidance, especially during difficult times.

Children’s challenging behavior can be reduced with support, not punishment. Once adults understand what children are communicating through their behavior, they can respond better. Punishing a child for a behavior may stop the behavior for the moment, but it does not give the child support or provide alternate ways to act in difficult situations. When adults help children find positive ways to communicate their needs to others, children learn important social and problem-solving skills that will help them throughout their life.

“I’m Most Irrational When I’m Angry”

This is to remind you not to deal with issues when you are wound up as the decisions you make will be inappropriate emotional ones that are generally way over the top and not thought through.

Often our own issues are very near to the surface when angry and we always respond to meet those needs rather than looking at the situation and deciding what is best for our your child/young person. Take some time out, walk away saying you’ll think about it and decide what to do later. Do not be withdrawn or brooding in the child’s presence; talk to someone else if your feelings are overpowering.



“Only 60 Seconds of Anger Allowed”

There is nothing wrong with expressing anger and disappointment and appropriate boundaries for our children. It would be inappropriate not to do so. However 60 seconds is long enough; more becomes a tirade, punitive and shameful, and maybe it serves our needs rather than being an appropriate response to the misdemeanour.

It allows for the issue to be dealt with and then to re-connect and carry on without the child carrying guilt or feeling that adult disapproval is ongoing, which impacts negatively on their self-esteem and confidence.

To carry the anger on is the most damaging thing to a person’s confidence that can be done and it is the easiest to do without realising. If you go on for longer than 60 seconds your child will tune out and you will lose any effect that your expression of disappointment may have.

This little guide is a quick reminder of how to respond when the going gets tough. Even better though would be to use them daily until they become a habit, a way of life responding to your child. They are tried and tested ideas that don’t work if used once or twice but do have a positive effect if they become part of your parental responses and they are done and used again and again. They are not the magic recipe that we all want, but it is how you choose to use them and when that is important for them to have a positive effect.