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### When Children Use “Bad Words”

Most people who care for children have run into at least one child who swears or uses words that aren't acceptable.

Sometimes children hear these words from other children, brothers or sisters, parents, or on TV. The child may repeat what she heard without knowing what the words mean.

When an adult hears a young child talk like this, they usually either laugh or are shocked. Some children really enjoy the reaction they get from others, so they will continue using these words.

#### WHY CHILDREN USE “BAD WORDS”

There are a number of reasons why a child uses these bad words. Watch closely to find out when the child says them and what's happening at the time. If you understand why children are using bad words, it's easier to work with the child and deal with the problem.

*Here are some reasons why children use “bad words” and some ideas for working with the child.*

#### **Reason — Child hears these words at home.**

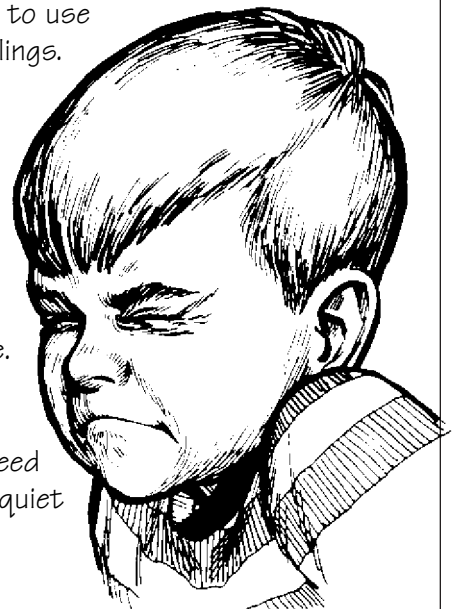
What to do — Be careful not to blame or put down a child's parents or family. When you hear a child use “bad words,” say to her, “That's a word we don't use here.” Then help the child get involved in an activity. Remember — children will repeat what you say and do. Be sure to use the same words that you want the children to use.

#### **Reason — Child repeats what another child says.**

What to do — Help this child find better ways to get attention. Quietly say to her, “You have good words of your own. You don't have to use the same words Jessica is using.”

#### **Reason — Child is mad or upset.**

What to do — Teach this child to use other words to express her feelings. You could say to her, “I know it makes you angry when John takes your toy. Tell John, ‘No, I'm playing with that truck.’” Or you could say, “I understand you are upset when the blocks fall over. But the word you said is not one we use here. If you are upset, you may say, ‘Rats!’ (or another word you use) instead.” This child may need some help going to a different quiet activity until she calms down.



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**Reason — Child is trying out new words and a bad one slips out.**

What to do — Keep the fun going and move the child beyond the bad words. You could get the child to think of words that rhyme. Say, “What rhymes with silly?” “What rhymes with cat?”

**Reason — Child likes the attention she gets from others for saying bad words.**

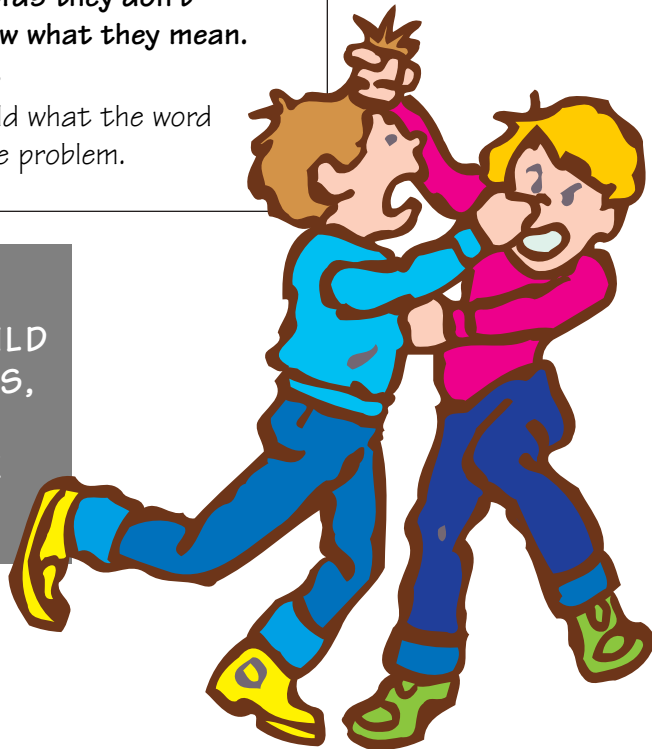
What to do — The attention that she likes may be coming from you, other children, or from home. There may not be much you can do about the attention she gets from other places, but you can reduce the attention she gets while in your care. Make a point of going to this child often during the day. Talk with her and pay attention to her when she is doing good things. Point out positive things about her to the other children. You could say, “I liked the way you asked John if you could play with the truck” or “Kara has a good idea of where we can go for a walk today.” If she does use bad words, tell her again, “That’s a word we don’t use here” and help her move on to another activity.

**Reason — Sometimes children use words they don’t understand because they want to know what they mean. This often happens with sexual terms.**

What to do — Briefly explain to the child what the word means. That will usually take care of the problem.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO BLAME A CHILD’S FAMILY IF THE BAD WORDS COME FROM WHAT A CHILD HEARS AT HOME.

IF YOU UNDERSTAND WHY A CHILD USES BAD WORDS, IT’S EASIER TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM.



**Pennsylvania Pathways**

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Sources: “So This Is Normal Too?” by Deborah Hewitt, “Those Four-Letter Words” by Christine Todd.

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