

# Foundations

## Does tone really matter?

*Best for ages 9 and up. The purpose of this discussion is to teach children about the importance of how they present themselves when speaking, particularly as it relates to tone, word choice and body language.*

There is a famous statistic that Professor Mehrabian identified in a 1971 study, which states that communication is only 7 percent verbal and 93 percent non-verbal. The non-verbal component is made up of body language (55 percent) and tone of voice (38 percent).

A simple way to convey this message is to use interactions with babies as an example. Ask your child why babies smile back at adults when adults smile at them. Challenge your child about the typical response from a baby, when the person holding them is smiling and laughing – regardless of the words being said. If the person is smiling and laughing and says with enthusiasm, “You are not cute or fun to play with at all!” the baby will react just as if the person said, “You’re so cute and so fun to play with,” by returning the smile/laugh. The opposite is true as well. If someone is holding a baby and not engaging with them or smiling at all and says in a serious tone, “You are so cute and so fun to play with,” the baby will likely just stare back and not start smiling or laughing.

Explore how this reality exists in every aspect of life. When people are trying to resolve a conflict and harshly confront their opponent, things usually escalate as opposed to getting resolved. When people approach conflict in a solution-focused, “Let’s resolve this together” manner, conflicts are measurably more likely to get resolved smoothly.

This conversation is an opportunity to assist your child(ren) with learning how to be proactive when anticipating a potential confrontation. Assist your child(ren) with recognizing that they have a lot more control over the outcome of a potential confrontation when they are cognizant of how they present themselves with their tone, word choice and overall manner.

For example:

**Parent (after explaining the baby example above):** What do you think about this?

**Child:** That’s funny. I’m going to try that.

**Parent:** Does it make sense to you?

**Child:** I mean, yes. They probably would still smile if you are smiling no matter what you are actually saying to them.

**Parent:** Think about when you are mad at your sister for taking your brush. How does she react when you yell at her as opposed to reminding her to please ask you before she takes your stuff?

**Child:** It doesn’t matter what I say, she never listens to me anyhow. But I guess when I yell she gets madder and yells back and when I just ask for it calmly she gives it back without getting mad.

Continue with this dialogue to help your child(ren) process the importance of their tone and communication style.



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