



**THINGS
WE
SHOULD
NEVER
SAY TO
KIDS**

JIM HANCOCK

Ten Things We Should Never Say to Kids is temporarily offered free by the author under a [Creative Commons](#) License. Share it as widely as you wish but don't alter, charge or take credit for it. comments to: j.hancock.web@mac.com or thetinycompanycalledme.com.

INTRODUCTION

I wrote this book because I think raising children is a drag. People who enjoy raising children creep me out a little with their cheery sayings; things like, “Once a Dad, always a Dad.” I think that’s baloney.

Seriously. Don’t you find it the tiniest bit *needy* when a parent conspires to keep her offspring dependent into their twenties? Because if you don’t, you may not be wild about this book and my advice is, turn back now. Give the book

to someone whose kids are so crazy you don’t want your children associating with them. Just be aware, if someone gave *you* this book, it probably means she doesn’t like your children. The exception to that would be if you got it from your parents, in which case it probably

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means they are newly sober and still hoping that making amends comes in handy book form.

For some time now—20 years, I guess—I’ve harbored the suspicion that the whole point of parenting—THE WHOLE POINT—is raising people who, bit by bit under our influence, stop acting like children and start acting like adults.

How that happens—that raising adults thing—is the subject of a book called, with significant flair for the obvious,

Raising Adults

(thetinycompanycalledme.com). If it

turns out you like what’s in this

book, trust me when I say you’ll

love that one. *Raising Adults* is the kinder, gentler, empathetic, hugging, hand-holding, sister to this book.

This book is about ten things that get in the way of raising adults—ten attitudes, habits, assumptions, and the unintended consequences of things I really truly believe we should never say to our kids. Please believe me when I tell you I believe these ten things are a

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genuine threat to raising the kind of people we would want to raise our grandchildren. This isn't *Ten Things You Can Say to Get Kids to Do It Your Way*. This is *Ten Things that Drive a Wedge Between Children and Parents; Ten Things That Make Kids Want to Smoke, Drink Huff, Cut, Vomit, Sleep Around, Lash Out, Run Away, Give Up & Die Young*. So...no pressure, but... you know.

This book could I suppose be seen by some as the least bit snippy. Were it a person, this volume is the sort who would want to slap that guy in the fourth paragraph—the one who is OK with raising boys and girls instead men and women—and scream *Snap out of it!* like Cher smacking Nicholas Cage upside the head in *Moonstruck*. I'm afraid that's just the kind of book this is—don't let the soft cover fool you.

Mr. Editor is peering over my shoulder, suggesting I could dial back just a smidge on the caffeine. Fair enough; I can do that. But it won't lessen the urgency of what I sat down at the Macintosh to write.

That urgency springs, I think, from a sense of justice delayed.

I spent nearly 20 years in sympathetic, daily contact with adolescents as a church-based

youth worker. If you think that means I taught Sunday school, you're partly right. The rest of my week was engaged in designing non-formal learning experiences, developing peer leadership perspectives and skills, creating prevention programs to keep healthy kids healthy, helping parents learn to understand and nurture their children and, more often than I would have imagined, crisis interventions with adolescents, parents and campus communities. And lots of hanging out, lots of listening, lots of simply paying attention.

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This was the main substance of my working life from 1972 (as rank amateur) through 1991 (as embarrassing middle-aged ponytail guy). I spent much of the next decade making 150 short films for people doing what I used to do. There are probably

people who have told the stories of more adolescents across a broader range of subjects than me; but who those people are, I couldn't say.

One thing that's held steady decade after decade is that adolescents are not treated particularly well by adults. It's not just that they feel misunderstood. I believe they are, in fact,

misunderstood, feared and, on the whole, disliked by their parents' generation. Do you find that remarkable? I do. I'm amazed that, having learned so much, so little has changed.

But there it is, coming out in the disrespectful way adults talk about kids when they're not around, not to mention the disrespectful way adults talk directly at kids. Don't tell me you didn't feel it when you were young. Most of us remember the worst adult offenders and the wonderful exceptions—the adults who put us down and those who lifted us. We don't tend to remember the ones who stood by passively while one of their peers hammered away at us.

And don't tell me you don't see it now. It's all around us. Only the haircuts have changed.

We can do better. I know it; you know it; our children don't know it but they suspect it's true.

The modest proposal of this book is to start by stopping. I think there are things we should never say to our kids so, of course, I think we should stop saying them. The trouble is, we learned these things from our own dear parents and teachers (and they from theirs') and it seems

like most adults repeat what we hear without thinking and without seeing the damage done.

So, consider this the lowbrow literary equivalent of being sent to our room to think about it.

All right, then. Here we go.