



Say what you mean, mean what you say.

Sometimes, even if it upsets others.

As far as possible, be kind and caring when you talk to others. We have said this many times in this series. Now, it is time to look at when this golden rule can be bent. There are times when it is best to speak plainly and directly even if it means we may upset our friends. And, there are rare situations when we should speak up even if it means an adult might get angry. This is very different advice from the more common message that you should be nice to everyone. It differs because it applies to special situations calling for extraordinary responses.

Let's examine five scenarios that fall into this category. In each case, it takes courage to speak your mind. Even grown-ups might shy away from saying what they want to because they are afraid of the consequences. Whatever your age, there are certain fear factors that could cloud your thinking about the best way to respond.

1. You say no although everyone expects you to say yes.

Your clique wants to do something that you don't want to do. It might be as bad as smoking cigarettes or sneaking out of school during recess. Or, it could be as harmless as going for a movie you are not interested in. But, your friends expect you to always do what the majority wants to. **The fear factor?** If you refuse to join in, your friends may reject you.

When you give in to peer pressure all the time, then you land up always doing things you don't want to. Wouldn't it be better to say "No, I'm not joining you."? If you don't feel like giving a reason, it is quite alright to say, "Why? Simply because I don't want to." Who knows? There may be others who will follow your lead by bravely saying "No" when they don't want to do something either.

2. You have a better idea than your friend's one.

For a group project, your friend has a good idea that the other members like. Then, you get an even better idea but you decide to keep it to yourself. **The fear factor?** If your team replaces your friend's idea with yours, then she may feel very hurt.

You should go ahead and share your idea because that is your responsibility as a team member. Human civilisation relies on everyone being willing to share ideas! Fortunately, great inventors like Thomas Edison, Marie Curie and Isaac Newton did not worry about outshining their friends. Neither should you.

3. You know the right answer and your teammates don't.

In a maths contest, you work out one answer while your two team mates get another answer. As it is two against one, you give in to them. Yet, you are 100 percent sure that your answer is correct. **The fear factor?** If you insist on using your answer, they see you as a lousy team player.

The rightness of an answer does not depend on how many students get it. In this case, even if your team mates are upset at first when you insist your answer is the right one, surely they will be glad later when the team scores because of you.

4. You witness a bully picking on someone.

During recess, you see a student bullying your classmate in the canteen. You hesitate to do something about it. **The fear factor?** If you step in, then the bully might target you!

Bully behaviour is often done in front of others. Bullies count on bystanders to remain passive onlookers. Change that. Get two or three of your friends together and confront the bully. You don't have to say much; a firm "Stop it right now!" might do. Tell a teacher about it as well. No matter how fierce the bully is, he or she is only one person against all the kids and adults who hate bully behaviour. Even if it is a gang of mean kids, they are still a small minority. If all the kind and caring kids can help one another and also get help from teachers, bullies will soon fade away.

5. You want an adult to back off.

Sometimes the bully may be an adult – either someone the child knows or a total stranger. And, the bullying takes on a different form. The person may follow the child around as a scare tactic, get too close, or may say and do things that he or she shouldn't. The child may be too scared to tell anyone. For kids, this is very hard to deal with. Because adults constantly tell kids to be polite — to always be nice to everyone — it can be hard for kids to then be rude even when they are in danger. **The fear factor?** Kids worry that bad adults may take revenge.

If anything like this is happening to you, get help right away. If the first adult you talk to does not do anything, then tell another adult and go on until someone comes to your rescue. You can also talk to Tinklefriend: call 1-800-2744-788 or email tinklefriend@childrensociety.org.sg. A trustworthy adult from the Singapore Children's Society will respond.

For each of the five scenarios above, we have **pinpointed** what might be scary for kids. Your fears may differ from these. Don't pretend they don't exist though. Instead, try putting them into words; ask yourself what you are afraid of and why. Fears are a part of life and have an important job to do within us. They are our bodies' warning bells that alert us to possible dangers. Knowing this might help you to think about your fears more clearly. Then, speak up to make right whatever may be going wrong in your life.

– By MARY GEORGE

VOCABULARY **pinpointed** (say “**pin**-poin-ted”; verb in past tense) = identified very correctly. The word comes from using pins on a mounted map to show exactly where places are.

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