

Parenting Tips on Sarcasm

by Victoria Todd, Child Psychoanalyst

I think it's important to think about things from a developmental perspective. So, let me take you back to the second half of your child's first year of life. Remember the biting? Remember how it hurt? Well, sarcastic children no longer bite with their teeth; they bite with their words. But their biting comments still hurt.

Unfortunately sarcasm is rampant in our society. Just turn on the TV and you'll get a big dose of the mean-spirited comments that America calls humor. But here *the example that you set is crucial*. Be mindful of your words and what you laugh at. Take advantage of opportunities to encourage empathy so your child will be able to put himself/herself in other peoples' shoes. "How do you suppose Sophia felt when Chloe called her stupid?" "Did you hear Ryan call his little brother a baby? He said he was just kidding, but his brother looked so sad. Wonder what you thought about that."

Be sure to intervene in private if you see your child engaging in sarcasm.

"I heard you call Emily a loser and I wondered what was going on. Thought you and Emily were friends."

"We are."

"Wonder why a kind girl like you would treat her friend in a mean way."

"Just kidding."

"Is it? I remember how picky you were about Emily's birthday present and how you made her a card when she was sick. That's how to be a friend. But mean words drive others away."

By so doing, you're making your child aware of her meanness. You're also reminding her of her kind side and how self-defeating sarcasm is, if you want to have friends. You might also remind her of when someone's sarcasm hurt her feelings. "Wasn't funny then and it isn't funny now."