

Tips for Taming Your Tongue

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Your language might offend some people, but the tone and attitude behind your words do far greater damage to all of your relationships.

Even if your friends and associates commonly use cuss words, you will be perceived as more mature, intelligent, articulate, polite, considerate and pleasant if you control your language and the emotions that typically prompt expletives. You can choose to have character and class, or be considered rude, crude and crass.

Cursing is sometimes humorous, but sometimes abusive. It can help vent anger, or provoke it. It can relieve stress, or cause it. It can be clever and flirtatious, or sexist and intimidating. Consequently, be aware of when and where you swear. Control it, tame it, time it. Or, to be on the safe side, stop using it altogether.

Recognize that swearing does damage.

You probably swear because it is easy, fun, candid, emphatic, expressive, breaks rules, and somehow partially reduces anger and pain. But the negatives outweigh the positives. You really don't win an argument by swearing. You don't prove that you are smart or articulate. You don't earn respect or admiration. You don't motivate, you intimidate. Swearing doesn't get you hired, promoted, or romantically connected.

Start by eliminating casual swearing.

Pretend that your sweet little grandmother or your young daughter is always next to you. Use inflections for emphasis instead of offensive adjectives. Be more descriptive instead of using the "s" word to describe everything from objects, work and the weather to the way you feel, the way someone looks, and the way something smells.

Think positively.

Look to the bright side. Develop a "can do" attitude. Worry only to the point that motivates you to prepare for the problem, then hope for the best. A positive mental attitude not only eliminates lots of swearing, it brings you contentment and brightens your personality.

Practice being patient.

When you are stuck in line or in traffic, ask yourself if a few more minutes matters. Be honest -- does it really matter? If so, and you have no control of the situation, plan the rest of your day or do the thinking that you say you never have time to do. Talk to someone, even a stranger in line with you.

Cope, don't cuss.

We live in an imperfect world, yet our expectations continually increase. Each day can be filled with aggravations, delays, disappointments and frustrations. The fact is, we have to deal with them anyway. So stop cussing and learn to cope. Consider even the smallest annoyance a challenge, and feel proud of yourself for taking care of it cheerfully and efficiently.

Stop complaining.

Before you start griping or whining about something, remind yourself of a very important reality: no one wants to hear it! Why would they? Avoid complaining about matters that you and the people with you have no control over. For all other complaints, try to offer a rational solution. Others will admire your common sense, wisdom and calm approach to the problem.

Use alternative words.

English is a colorful language, but chronic cursers repeatedly use the same, unimaginative words that have been around for centuries. Take the time to develop your own list of alternatives to the nasty words you now use, relying on your own intelligence, a thesaurus, good books, and even some of the more clever TV shows. Select a few powerful or even funny words, and get in the habit of substituting them for swear words. For example, instead of B.S., choices range from lie, fabrication, nonsense and exaggeration to bunk, baloney, drivel, malarkey, hokum, hogwash and balderdash. They might not give you satisfaction at first, but they will eventually.

Make your point politely.

Some substitute words can be just as offensive if your tone is abrasive or you insult someone. Think of the response to what you are about to say, and decide if you need to reword your statement to be more effective. For example, if someone suggests that you are doing something incorrectly, your response can range from "Who gives a flying f___?" to "I don't care," to "It really doesn't matter," or "I think my way is faster." The first reply is defensive, defiant, belligerent, and reflects a terrible attitude. The last reply is a justification that the other person might appreciate. Take the time to make your point in a mature and convincing manner.

Think of what you should have said.

It is easy to blurt out a swear word at an inappropriate time, or to bark out a tactless or tasteless remark before you have a chance to consider the impact. Think of what you could have said. After you shout an expletive, simply say the tamer word you wished you had said. If you make a statement that you later realize was negative, confrontational or rude, think of how you could have phrased the statement. Over time, these exercises will train you to think and act differently.

Work at it.

Breaking the swearing habit might prove to be no easier than losing weight, giving up cigarettes, or correcting any other habit. It takes practice, support from others, and a true desire to be a better person - not only by controlling your language, but the emotions that prompt you to swear. Here are a few exercises to condition yourself:

- Think in clean language, and switch negative thoughts into positive solutions.
- When you are on your way to a situation you know will test your temper and your tongue, plan ahead what you will say and how you will say it.
- Tell your family or friends what you are doing, and you will be more cautious around them.
- Determine when and why you swear the most, and develop your own tricks for changing your behavior.