

Seven things you should say to a parent

We made it to the third aisle at Hy-Vee before it happened. A meltdown of epic proportions. It began with a simple request for a cookie. And then it escalated quickly to a battle of the wills. There was screaming. There were tears.

As a mom, I wanted to cry, too. I can't give in every time my son screams louder. But, I was also exhausted. And embarrassed.

I scanned for the nearest exit, and then I remembered my empty fridge.

An older gentleman looked at my son, flung on the floor in a puddle of tears, and looked disgusted.

Was everyone looking at me? Judging my parenting?

Just then, a mom came down the aisle with two (well-behaved) kids in her cart. She glanced at Henry, looked me right in the eye and smiled kindly. Then, she said, "We had a similar scene over Elmo yesterday. Hang in there, mom."

I wasn't alone.

My embarrassment immediately vanished. It was almost like she gave me a fist bump right next to the Cheerios. Being a parent can be challenging and it can be lonely. But sometimes, a kind word makes a world of a difference. Whether you are a caregiver yourself or someone who simply wants to encourage others, here are seven things you should say to parents to support and encourage them.



I've been there.

All parents want to know that what they are going through will pass and that they are not alone. And telling a caregiver that you've been there isn't only important for the tough times (like the grocery store meltdowns). I also find comfort in talking to parents with older children about how the good memories are cherished for years to come.

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How can I help?

It's not easy to ask for help, and many parents don't have a strong, local support system. By asking how you can help, you are telling them that you care and want to do something for them.

You can load groceries into the van, provide a couple hours of babysitting, or even offer to do a few loads of laundry. Also - remember that most people don't ask for help. So consider ways you can just jump in and help a caregiver. Insist on carrying groceries to the car, doing dishes after dinner, or helping put the kids to bed.

However you lend a hand, know that your small act of kindness can mean the world to someone.

Your child is so polite/smart/_____.

All caregivers love to hear that their kids are making them proud. So, when you see a child being great, try giving the parents the compliment. Chances are, the child learned it from them.

Your hair looks great today.

This may sound superficial, but many parents put themselves last, and may appreciate a kind word about their appearance. Between all the activities of the day, there may be little time for a shower or regular haircut. If you notice a mom (or dad, grandparent or caregiver) who looks great, make sure to point it out.

You make a great team.

Working together as partners raising kids can be one of the most challenging aspects of parenting. Sometimes, differing opinions lead to butting heads.

So when you see a pair of parents who work well together and make parenting decisions as a team, tell them how awesome they are doing. Chances are, they don't realize that anyone even notices the hard work that goes on behind the scenes.

I've learned a lot from you as a parent.

I have a friend who is a master of diversion. She is able to redirect her toddler in less than three seconds. From her, I've learned ways to do the same thing with my two-year-old.

We're always learning and growing as parents. When you learn from another caregiver, make sure to tell her. And be specific. I guarantee you that it will make the person's day.

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Your kids are so lucky to have you as parents.

We've all had those days when we feel like failures. But these words of encouragement remind parents that they are doing lots of things right.

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The next time you see a caregiver having a **now what?** moment, try encouragement instead of judgment. Just a few simple words can turn a tough situation into something much more manageable.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 8/6/14. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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