

First Published in the Hendricks County ICON
September, 2009
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“Sticks, Stones, and Words”

Most of us can remember being told, “Sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never hurt you.” Did we ever really believe that or were we just putting on our brave faces so others wouldn’t know how much their words actually hurt? I can remember words hurting quite a bit, sometimes more and with longer lasting effects than sticks and stones. Sure, sticks and stones might have broken some bones, but bones heal, sometimes even becoming stronger than they were before.

The damaging effects of words spoken by others, especially when we are young, can last a lifetime. When we are older, we have usually gotten good at putting up our defenses and realizing that we actually choose how to respond to others, that no matter what anyone says or does, it doesn’t change who we are. But when we are young, what others say can influence what we believe about ourselves.

Sometimes, words don’t have to be spoken to have ill effects. Have you ever had someone just look at you a certain way and you knew exactly what they were thinking? Much of communication, up to 90% (depending on many factors), is nonverbal. In addition to the words we use, we communicate with body language, with the tone and quality of our voice, with our eyes, and with other means that have nothing to do with the words we use. Imagine how powerful the communication is when multiple components are combined, when words and the way the words are spoken (inflection, tonal quality, and body language) all come together to relay a forceful message.

When children absorb the messages around them, whether they do so accurately (in accordance with the intention of the messenger) or not, their interpretation can determine a decision or belief about themselves that they might carry, unconsciously, for the rest of their lives. When that belief is negative (I am not good enough, worthy, lovable, etc.), it can have a devastating effect on the child through adulthood. That unconscious belief will determine how that person behaves towards others including how he/she treats relationship partners, children, and him/herself. For example, smoking and overeating are often symptomatic of an unconscious belief.

Do you say kind things to yourself? When you make a “mistake,” what do you tell yourself? If you are critical of yourself, perhaps you are carrying an unconscious belief that is limiting your life in some way. I used to beat myself up rather mercilessly. I am happy to say, now, that I am a “recovering perfectionist.” I am grateful for all that has happened to me over the years to help me get to this point in my life when I am able to help others. Of the many things I have learned, the most important is that I am perfect, just the way I am. I am perfect in my imperfection, and so are you! How cool is that!

About: Karl R. Zimmer III is a therapeutic hypnotist, licensed and certified by the State of Indiana. His practice, Zimmer Success Group (<http://Z-Success.com>), is in Plainfield.