

Words matter

Sticks, stones and the weight of our words

I was recently talking with one of the nannies on my team, and it sparked a discussion about something many of us grew up hearing without questioning:

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

One early printed version of this rhyme appeared in 1862 in *The Christian Recorder*, the oldest continuously published African American newspaper in the United States, founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. During the American Civil War, encouraging children not to respond physically to cruel words may have carried a much deeper meaning. It was not simply playground advice, but possibly a lesson in restraint, safety and survival during a deeply racist and dangerous time.

And still, during our conversation, we found ourselves questioning the expectation hidden inside that advice. It teaches children that words should simply slide off them. It suggests they should not feel pain when someone speaks cruelly.

The truth is, words do hurt. Children do not experience our words only intellectually. They

experience them emotionally and physically. A harsh tone, a shaming label or a dismissive response can feel threatening.

At the same time, our conversation kept circling back to another question. If we teach children that words can hurt, are we also teaching them to give too much power to what other people say? Don't we also want children to grow up

with enough confidence to know that someone else's opinion does not define them?

Perhaps the goal is not to teach children that words do not matter, nor to teach them that every unkind comment should be carried forever. Maybe the lesson lies somewhere in between: words have the power to hurt and heal, and we should use them with care, but we can also help children build a strong sense of self that is not determined by every opinion they encounter.

THE REALITY OF OUR WORDS

As our conversation continued, one of the nannies asked a powerful question: "So, how do we teach children that words hurt?" For me, the answer begins with empathy.

Instead of telling children to brush things off, we have to help them understand how words feel. We have to teach them to pause,

reflect and imagine another person's experience. This goes beyond forcing a quick, mumbled "I'm sorry" on the playground. It means getting down on their level and asking, "Look at your friend's face right now. How do you think those words made them feel?"

We want children to recognize that what they say has real weight. Their words can wound or comfort, disconnect or repair.

Of course, teaching this is not always easy. When a child spills juice again, refuses to listen or leaves a mess behind, it can be tempting for adults to react quickly. Sometimes that reaction comes out as a careless label: "You are so clumsy," "Why are you always such a mess?" or "You never listen."

But those words do not teach a child how to do better. They teach the child something about themselves.

That is the danger of labels. A child may forget the exact situation, but they may remember the feeling of being called difficult, dramatic, careless or too much. Over time, those words can become part of how they see themselves.

Words are not only about vocabulary. They are also about tone, timing, volume and the emotional energy behind them. The same message can land differently depending on how it is delivered. A firm boundary can help a child feel safe. A shaming sentence can make a child feel

small.

Children are sensitive to the emotional tone of the adults around them. When an adult uses words that shame or frighten, a child is not calmly absorbing a lesson. They are trying to feel safe again. This is why our words matter in ordinary moments. The way we respond to a messy room, a tantrum or a mistake becomes part of the emotional environment a child grows up inside.

THE POWER OF REPAIR

If we want to raise emotionally resilient children, we have to begin by paying attention to our own words. We have to notice our tone, our reactions and the climate we create. Children learn as much from how we speak as from what we say. They are watching how we handle frustration. They are learning what respect sounds like during conflict.

We are human. There will be moments when we snap, react too quickly or say something we wish we had not said. When that happens, the most powerful thing we can do is repair.

Saying to a child, "I am sorry I called you clumsy earlier. I was frustrated about the spill, but it is never okay for me to use hurtful words," teaches accountability and humility. It also shows children how to repair their own words when they hurt someone else.

LA GRECA, A18



Gabriela La Greca
Snowmass Nannies

Colorado's Constitution isn't a wildlife management plan

Colorado has amended its Constitution many times in its 150-year history. Its strongest amendments established enduring principles of government, not policy questions better left to statute and science.

Initiative 302 asks voters to cross that line.

Before signing a petition or voting, ask a simple question: What constitutional problem does Initiative 302 actually solve?

There isn't one.

Hunting and fishing are already legal in Colorado. State law already recognizes them as wildlife management tools, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife carries out that work through trained biologists, current science and public input.

No court has threatened to outlaw hunting. No law would abolish fishing. The 2024 statewide vote on mountain lion hunting worked

exactly as democracy is supposed to: voters debated it and rejected it.

Even supporters of Initiative 302 say the amendment "does not expand or restrict any current laws." If that's true, why rewrite the Constitution? If it does change something, voters deserve honesty about what.

The Constitution isn't a repository for today's policy preferences. It establishes the rules future generations inherit.

Initiative 302 goes well beyond recognizing hunting and fishing. It declares them the "preferred means" of managing wildlife, protects "traditional methods" and limits regulation to what is "necessary for sound scientific wildlife conservation and management."

Those phrases sound reassuring in campaign materials. But undefined constitutional language rarely stays undefined — courts define

it. Once those words enter the Constitution, judges — not wildlife professionals or voters — ultimately decide what they mean.

Wildlife management evolves as conditions shift, disease emerges and science advances. Professionals adapt. Constitutions don't. CPW manages all of Colorado's wildlife — not just game species — and the risk isn't losing hunting or fishing. It's that constitutional language could lock routine wildlife management decisions into one preferred framework, inviting litigation and limiting the flexibility wildlife professionals need to respond as science and conditions evolve.

Supporters of Initiative 302 point to similar right-to-hunt-and-fish amendments in other states as evidence they work. But North Carolina spent years litigating whether its amendment overrode Sunday hunting restrictions. This year in Marco Island, Fla., a proposed nighttime fishing restriction

intended to protect nesting sea turtles was abandoned after a legal challenge citing Florida's constitutional right-to-hunt-and-fish amendment. Colorado isn't those states. The lesson is the same: once wildlife policy enters a Constitution, constitutional questions inevitably follow.

Supporters of Initiative 302 also point to Oregon's Initiative Petition 28, which would remove hunting, fishing and farming exemptions from that state's animal-cruelty laws. Whatever happens there says nothing about the language before Colorado voters.

Elk, mule deer, black bears and mountain lions are part of daily life across the Roaring Fork Valley and Western Colorado. Sound wildlife management shapes ecosystems, public safety, recreation and the public lands that define this region — whether you hunt or not.

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