How to Handle Bad Language

Children learn new words by listening to the language around them and then repeating it. They don't always know what the words mean but often use them in the places they have heard adults using them. Children do not distinguish between good words and bad words. Small children will pick up and use bad language without realising that it is offensive.

The reason is often because when they first use bad words they get a reaction of surprise and laughter from the adults around them. So if people think its funny well, then it must be alright to use these words. However eventually the adults realise that this language is no longer acceptable and all of a sudden the child is punished for using these words.

Now the child is very confused and doesn't always understand why they are in trouble. The child may stop using the words because they have been told not to or they may continue to use them because it gets them lots of attention even though it is negative attention; they don't mind.

The best way to stop small children using bad language is to ignore them when they do use it. If they are not getting any attention for the words the novelty will soon wear off. Also the adults around the child must be aware of their own language usage; if children hear words repeatedly they will use them – you cannot expect them to differentiate between good words and bad words. The rules for the child's language must apply to the adult's language – if you don't want them to hear certain language then don't say it around them.

When children are older and come home saying 'Peter said a bad word' you must then talk to your child about what is acceptable within your home and in the homes of others i.e. 'in our home we don't use bad words because it upsets other people'. Children will grow up to understand that everyone has different values and morals and just because another family may use bad language frequently it doesn't mean they are any less worthy - they just have different values.