

Language of Reverence

"The child has a fundamental role in the construction of the human being. If the dignity and the rights of workers are recognised, so should be the dignity and the rights of the worker who produces [humans]. Based on the affirmation of the child's dignity, we have to ensure the child's right and freedom to grow and develop wholesomely, so that [they] can contribute to human progress with all [their] faculties, thus fulfilling the task assigned to [them] by nature."

- Dr. Montessori, Citizen of the World

Why Language of Reverence?

Language of Reverence explores the power of our words and their effects on human flourishing. By examining and changing our word choice to and about children, each other, and ourselves, we can change our sense of the school community and ultimately our outcomes. The Language of Reverence model emphasizes creating a powerful, shared language that allows all members of the community—children, families, and school-based adults—to feel respected and valued.



There are two ways our words digress from Language of Reverence- when we use language of diminishment and language of violence. Language of diminishment includes words that imply judgment and fail to assume a person's best intentions, instead serving to diminish such as manipulative or tantrum. These can be replaced with words that see beneath the behavior, reflecting empathy such as persuasive or having big feelings. Language of violence includes words that emerge from, and reflect a culture of war, or competition such as trigger, bullet points, or us/them. These words seem harmless yet reinforce a way of thinking and can be easily replaced by words such as activate, pop points, or we.

The words we choose express not only our views but also our values. Therefore choosing the most respectful language allows us to communicate our reverence for others and their perspective. It is



a form of inclusion and validation to consider how others might receive our words and thus modify them accordingly. Through our word choice, we connect with the unmanifest potential of every person, recognizing that everyone is learning and growing all the time, and honoring their inherent worth and dignity. Our words also have the power to reconstruct society into one with peace as its origin and goal. If children grow up hearing words that reinforce a world of collaboration and reconciliation this will ultimately impact their awareness and ability to change systems that perpetuate a world of divisions, war, and violence.

Language of Reverence is a pathway to honest talk in your community.

The approach forwards curiosity, avoids judgment, and allows room for everyone's perspective. Through this shift in how we speak, arises the construction of shared understanding that will lead the work forward. It also is a way of capturing the community's care and intention, experienced through everyone's commitment to change some culturally-normed ways of talking to and about children, each other, and ourselves. Language of Reverence work can offer [a glossary](#) of replacement terms used to create shared language to describe situations, actions, or behaviors. When a community builds a shared glossary, it invites conversation that may lead to further observation and thus a deeper understanding of root causes. It is also a useful phrase for reminding community members that their words matter and are impacting others.

“Let's use Language of Reverence!”

Language of Reverence Glossary

Was	Is
all over the place	active
attention seeking	connection seeking, Looking for engagement
behind....below grade level	has lagging skills
blowing up	having big feelings
bullet points	pop points
bully	struggling socially, not yet confident, seeking friends
consequence	response
crybaby	sensitive, emotionally present, finding balance
defiant	making a different choice, exerting will
disruptive	wants to be acknowledged, seeking connection
fussing	making a request, requesting love
giving me a hard time	having a hard time
high maintenance	connection seeking, seeking love and support
hot mess	working without organization/order
impulsive	instinctive
kids/kiddos	children
lazy	uninspired
manipulating, manipulative	using their tools, persuasive, establishing agency
melodramatic	spirited
messy	not yet organized
misbehaving	having a moment
naughty	innovative, curious, bold... (what's the behavior? Select something relevant)

Was	Is
needy	has unmet needs
never on task	lacks connection to materials/learning/work
nosey	curious, engaged, connected
on my last nerve	growing me
oppositional	independent
parent work hours	community involvement hours
parents	families
problem	opportunity
red flag children, problem child	key children
resistant	unsure
shoot me	help me
shooting myself in the foot	unideal alignment
so negative	having a hard time
SpEd kids	children receiving extra support
spoiled	used to things a certain way
stubborn	goal-oriented / tenacious/strong-willed/ persistent
stupid -I am stupid/feel stupid	I am discouraged/feel embarrassed
tantrum	having big feelings, needing more support
tattletale, tattling	values clarification
testing	needing clarification, exploring, feeling safe, figuring out...
throwing a fit	having big feelings
time out	take a moment
trigger	activate
whiny	expressing urgency
won't do his/her work	uninspired

This work began at the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector. We invite you to add to this glossary!