

Fingers get pointed after grandson launches F-missile

Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston TribuneA family reaches an important crossroads in its development the first time a child speaks a swear word.

Until then, the child is still an innocent baby; needing his mama and daddy to shield him from the vulgar, cruel world out there.

But when the first expletive is uttered - as it was recently when my 5-year-old grandson, Henry, who was having trouble getting the cap off an ink pen said: "That (expletive) cap" - the gig is up. That cold, cruel, vulgar world has invaded the sanctity of our home.

I was in the car with the rest of the family when this incident happened. In fact, it was I who gave Henry the pen. I didn't realize the cap was stuck and I don't think Henry realized everybody was listening when he dropped the F-bomb.

But even though we were traveling on the freeway in a big city in heavy traffic it was as if time, noise and heartbeats suddenly stopped - a ponderous moment suspended in an ice flow.

The parents' reaction was typical.

"Henry, who taught you that word?"

"Must have been that potty-mouthed girl at school."

"Grandma, why did you give him that pen in the first place?"

It's called avoidance; deflection; denial. Anything to keep from admitting that a child often picks up language like that because that's what he's heard around the house.

Time for some self-examination.

Frankly, I am a person who does not get overly upset about swear words, having used them liberally in the past and even occasionally in the present. I didn't want to admit this in front of the kids, but it is possible Henry could have picked up that spicy language from his grandmother. It's been known to happen, as in that time I was driving my granddaughters in Southern California and accidentally ran a stop light. As soon as the F-word was out of my mouth I heard the girls gasp and whisper: "I'm telling Mom."

But while I sometimes feel verbally assaulted whenever I watch an Eddie Murphy or similar movie where profanity punctuates practically every sentence, I think there are actually some good reasons to keep a few well-polished oaths in one's vocabulary.

When my children were young I even gave them permission to use cuss words on certain occasions.

When you stub your toe or hit your thumb with a hammer; when you burn the gravy or miss the free throw - those are times when the expression, "Gosh darn it," just doesn't do it.

In those instances, I told my children, they were free to use a swear word as long as they put it back in the box when they were finished.

I realize not everybody agrees with this philosophy. And when my kids got older and I discovered them using obscenities on more occasions than necessary, I wondered if I had made a mistake by giving them a limited pass earlier.

The result, however, would probably still have been the same. Since they have become adults they've learned to refine their speech a little more carefully, although apparently not as carefully as they thought. Because Henry seemed to have a good grasp of how to properly deploy the F-missile.

Must have picked it up from that little potty-mouth girl at school.

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