



Sticks and Stones

August 30, 2021

During my reflection time this weekend, I found myself thinking about all the impactful things said to me from elementary school through graduate school. The more I reflect, and the older I get, **the more I realize how truly powerful words are.**

In one good book I read, it says, **“The tongue has the power of life and death.”** My personal experiences over the 51 years I have been on the earth have proven and continue to reveal to me the validity of this statement. Words in my life have been powerful – and I suspect they have been in yours, as well.

Recognizing that words are powerful is in direct contradiction to the idiom that we were all taught in elementary school, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” I understand this was shared with us all as a way to help us deal with the negative that was sure to come to all of us. But this statement is simply not true. Words do matter. They hurt, and, in some cases, they cause irreparable harm.

The challenge is we hear so many words from so many different people. Sometimes it is hard to know what is true and what is not while we are still in our developmental process. It is natural for all of us, especially children, to place much more importance on the words said to us and about us from persons of influence than random folks where no relationship exist. **As educators, we are persons of influence and the words we say matter more than most.**

I remember words that were said to me by Mr. Hatch at the end of kindergarten over 47 years ago.

I can hear the words Mrs. McBride shared to me 46 years ago.

I remember the teacher I loved and what she said about my dream 39 years ago. I know she loved me and didn’t mean to hurt, but unfortunately it did. My mind was not developed enough at the time to realize she was trying to motivate me. It could have crushed me like it did several of my friends. She was honest and we loved her, but her words hurt.

I remember my eighth-grade teacher, a friend of the family, who had low expectations for me. I remember her words communicated to me that I was not capable. Now I know that was not her intent, but 39 years ago, a two-minute conversation impacted the rest of my life. To this day, she has no clue of how detrimental it was to my self-concept.



I also remember the words my typing teacher, Mrs. Cauley, shared with me daily for my last two years of high school that changed my entire life. It was her powerful words that gave me the lift I needed to overcome the other negative words I heard. Her words were not always positive, but because of the relationship she had with me, they were always meaningful and what I needed – both back then and what I still need and welcome today. It was amazing that it only took one, but she was the one who understood the power of words.

As I think about each one of you and our collective responsibility and individual opportunity, I encourage you to recognize that what we were taught about sticks and stones is simply not true. Not only do words hurt, they also can have lasting, very destructive impacts on students’ self-concept and their future aspirations.

On the other hand, words can be transformative and give students and others the power needed to overcome negative messages. The challenge we all have is that we don’t know which words others will remember, or even how they are internalizing the things we are saying and doing.

I encourage each one of you to realize what you say and what you do matters and carries weight. It is critical that you are **intentionally uplifting and positive and explicit to students in your intent.**

Whether you are a paraprofessional, a teacher, a counselor or an administrator, you are in an influential position and your words carry weight and, in many cases, they are heavier than sticks and stones. I challenge you to speak life into your colleagues, your situation, your parents and the children you are blessed to come into contact with. Be intentional in adopting an uplifting tone with yourself and others. Focus on the possibilities, not on the problems, and use your words to uplift and encourage and not to tear down.

I challenge each of you as we go through this week to find a student to encourage, a colleague to uplift, a friend to appreciate and be a blessing to someone else with your words. The power of life and death is in your tongue.

Sticks and stones can break your bones, and words can hurt. But, as a Crowley ISD family, I challenge us to pledge to do no harm with the words from our mouths. And, as a Crowley ISD team, let’s realize that we need each other to survive so that we all can thrive.

Act like a family and work like a team,



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