

WoH 499

Early speech – Power of Words

Sara: Hi Miriam! How nice to see you! How are you and your beautiful children? I heard you've been visiting your cousins.

Miriam: Hi Sara! We're fine thanks. And we had a good visit...but it was difficult seeing my 2 year old, Peter with his cousins who are about the same age.

Sara: Why?

Miriam: Well...Peter's only saying a few words and I can't always understand him. His cousins were talking a lot and I could understand them easily.

Sara: So...are you worried about it?

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*, I'm Tammy and Carol's here too...

Carol: Hi there... well I'm ready to hear what Miriam answered...do you think she should be worried about not always being able to understand her two year old? Let's listen to more of Sara and Miriam's conversation...

Sara: Well Miriam...mothers usually have a strong sense about how their children are developing, so it's good that you're thinking about this.

Miriam: You used to work with children who had difficulty with speech didn't you?

Sara: I did – it was quite a long time ago, but let me think... I know that 'normal' is a very broad range. Some children will learn to speak earlier than others. But I can understand your concern. There are some important stages that little children go through as they learn to talk.

I remember my own babies making lots of sounds from early on. In the first few months they made sounds like "aaah" and "ooo" and later they started adding a consonant sound, like "paaa", or "booo". And a bit later they made-up words like "ububub" and "tatata".

If babies don't make sounds or don't seem to be noticing what you say or do, that could be a reason to be worried.

Miriam: Uh huh...

Sara: Around their first birthday or a few months after, children often start saying their first words...like "more", "mum" or "dad". These words might not be clear to you but they're meaningful to the child. They should also be starting to understand some basic instructions... like "come here"... "where's the ball?".

Miriam: OK...

Sara: Between 1 and 2 years, children will usually learn to use a *lot* of words – mostly single words, but by about 2 years old, they'll start putting 2 words together ...like "mummy drink", "more ball". By this time they'll usually follow some simple instructions - "touch your nose?", "give me the cup".

Miriam: Yes, Peter seems to understand simple instructions. So what more should *he* be saying by now?

Sara: He should be trying to say quite a lot of words. Between 2 and 3 years old children usually learn the words for most things and will start putting 2 and 3 words together, like "mummy gone market". They can often understand simple conversation and by 3 they should be able to follow a more detailed instruction like, "Go and get your shoes and bring them to me".

Miriam: Peter seems to understand and follow instructions ok, but when should I be able to understand *his* words better?

Sara: Well, by 3 years old, you should be able to understand most of what he says. People who don't know him well may still have some difficulty understanding him at times...but that's pretty normal. And by the time he's 4 years old, most people - even if they don't know him - should be able to understand what he's saying.

Miriam: Ok – so we should soon be able to have a nice little conversation that we can both understand by then. I'm looking forward to that.

Sara: Yes... But if you're concerned about it now, go and talk to your local children's health worker. She will soon tell you if he needs any help with his speech. And she will be able to tell you who to go and see for help.

Miriam: I might do that just to be sure.

Carol: I wonder if *you* have a small child, or maybe you take care of a small child and you're not quite sure what to expect as they learn to talk. Sara said that by 3 a child should understand most of what you say to him and you should be able to understand most of what he says to you...

Tammy: I remember being a bit worried about one of my boys too – but it didn't take long before he was chatting away happily about all sorts of things. (*or add something more appropriate for you*)

Carol: Miriam and Sara talked for a little longer...let's hear what they said...

Miriam: Before you go Sara, can you tell me what I can do to help Molly learn to talk well... she's only 6 months old. I already get down on her level and make sure we can see each other's faces. I talk and sing with her about what we see and do together, but I feel a bit silly sometimes talking to my baby like this.

Sara: Not at all! It sounds like you're doing just the right things – it's important to say words and sounds over and over with babies. And when they make little sounds, they love it if you copy them...and they'll copy you and say it again. It's a good little game.

I used to make up songs to sing with my children as we did things – like “we're doing the washing, washing, washing...or...we're buying some rice, rice, rice...”.

Miriam: Oh I'm glad I'm not the only one! (laughing)

Sara: And point to things as you say them...and soon Molly's eyes will follow where you're pointing. She'll see the bird in the tree or the dog in the park.

And of course teach her to wave “hello” and “goodbye” and clap hands – she'll soon copy you. You can even use actions as you say words like “eat”, “drink”, “sleep”, “more” or “stop” ...and she'll copy the actions. This will help her remember the words better.

She might even learn the action before she can say the word properly...and she can tell you what she wants. If she wants a drink she might make the sign you've taught her for drink. You can get excited and make the sign back, as you say, 'Do you want a drink?' And reward her with the drink!

Miriam: I'll try that – good idea!

Sara: And of course there's nothing like reading or telling stories. You can start that as early as you like. All children seem to love stories...it really helps them to talk and understand...and helps prepare them for learning to read and write when they're older.

Miriam: Oh good. I really enjoy telling stories to Peter and I notice that he's trying to say more words each time we read. But I must read more to Molly too.

Tammy: This is *Women of Hope*. Carol did you read to your children when they were babies?

Carol: I did – I loved it and so did they...the more I read to them, the more they wanted to hear stories.

Tammy: If you think *your* child might be a bit slow developing his speech, then maybe you could do the same as Miriam. Take him, or her, to your local child health clinic.

Carol: And if you're concerned, it's very important to get their hearing checked. At the clinic they'll tell you who to go to for a hearing check...and who to see for any help with your child's speech.

Tammy: Welcome back, this is *Women of Hope*. We've been talking about children's speech and how we can help them to learn to speak well. But I wonder if you've ever thought about how important it is that we adults say the right sort of things when we speak. I don't mean clever words or words that will impress people. I'm talking about saying things that are helpful and kind.

Let's hear a story about a lady called Nagat. Could you tell us the story Carol?

Carol: Nagat had been sick and she was feeling very tired. Her two children had been sick too so she had been looking after them. She didn't have the energy to tidy

up her house and do all the usual cleaning. But, of course, her family had to eat so she started work on preparing the food for the day. Then she sat down to have a little rest.

Just then her neighbour Lilla knocked at her door. Nagat heard the knock but she really didn't feel like having a visitor. She felt like saying, 'Go away. I need a little rest.' But she didn't; she called out, 'Come in. I'm in here.' Lilla came in and sat down next to Nagat. She looked around the house and noticed that it was looking a bit messy.

'Nagat, I used to think you were the neatest person in our village,' she said, 'but not any more. Your house looks a bit like a pigsty!'

Nagat didn't know what to say. She was shocked that her neighbour could be so mean. She just said, 'I'm sorry. I know it's a mess,' but inside she was crying. She felt very upset that her friend had made that mean remark about her house.

'I can't stay,' said Lilla. 'I have to get to the shops. It was nice to see you.' And she disappeared out the door. Nagat felt the tears running down her cheeks and her face felt hot.

'Lilla is so mean,' she said to herself.

But before she had time to think much more there was another knock on the door. This time it was Jana.

'Can I come in Nagat?' she called.

'Yes, come in,' said Nagat quickly wiping the tears from her face. 'How are you?'

'Nagat, I heard that you and the children have been sick. I just wanted to come and see you,' said Jana. 'You're such a good friend and I've missed you while you haven't been coming to my shop.'

'Yes, we've all been sick and I'm still very tired,' replied Nagat.

'I've brought some food for you and here's a card I've made.' Nagat read the message on the card. It said: 'To my good friend. Get well soon.'

Once again, Nagat felt like crying – but this time it was with happiness at her kind friend's words.

'Thank you so much Jana, you've made me feel so much better.'

'I'm so glad,' said Jana. Maybe you'd like me to come and help you after I finish at the shop today.

'That would be wonderful,' said Nagat. 'Thank you.' And as they said goodbye she felt a little better than she had all day.

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope* we've been talking about our words – the things we say... Thanks for telling us that story Carol. Nagat heard two very different kinds of words that day didn't she!

Carol: Have you ever said something and then wished you hadn't said it? I have – many times. Once words have been said we can't take them back can we? It's so easy to speak before we think and say something that we really shouldn't say.

Tammy: Maybe you've heard someone else say something and you've thought, 'She shouldn't have said that. What a mean thing to say,' or, 'What a silly thing to say.'

...Or maybe *you* have been deeply hurt by something someone else said.

Carol: Words are very powerful things aren't they? There's a saying that I often heard when I was a girl: 'Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can never hurt you.' But is that true? Can words hurt you?

Of course the things people say don't break your bones or bruise your body, but they can 'bruise' your feelings – a lot. Yes – they *can* hurt you. And your words can hurt someone else.

Tammy: In God's word, the Bible, it talks about the things we say. It says that our tongues, which do our talking, can have a very big effect. Let's listen to what it says:

It takes only a spark to start a forest fire! The tongue is like a spark. It is an evil power that dirties the rest of the body and sets a person's entire life on fire with flames that come from hell itself. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed and have been tamed. But our tongues get out of control.

They are restless and evil, and always spreading deadly poison.

Carol: Well that certainly makes our tongues sound powerful and it says they sometimes get out of control.

Tammy: Yes, God's word compares our tongues to the spark that starts a big fire. It says that our tongues can be evil and spread deadly poison. Of course this isn't the poison that makes our bodies sick. It's the bad effect of nasty words, or lies, or gossip.

Remember Sara who came to visit Nagat, in our story? She didn't say anything nice to Nagat did she! She just criticised her for having a messy house. It was unkind and it made Nagat feel bad. The words were a bit like poison to Nagat.

Carol: And sometimes people tell lies and spread untrue rumours about other people. That's just like a little spark starting a fire. The lie spreads and has bad effects. It's so important to take care with what we say so we don't say things that have bad effects for others...or for ourselves.

Tammy: But of course, our tongues only speak what our minds and hearts tell them to speak. We will only *say nasty things* if we're *thinking nasty thoughts*. And we'll only tell lies when we decide in our minds not to speak the truth. We will only gossip and tell people lies about other people if we're thinking about how to treat them badly. Our tongues, and what we say can be very nasty but we **can** control our tongues and what we say. We can choose to say only kind and helpful things.

Let's hear some more of what the Bible says about our tongues:

My dear friends, with our tongues we speak both praises and curses. We praise our Lord and Father, and we curse people ... and this isn't right. Can clean water and dirty water both flow from the same spring?

Tammy: This tells us that our tongues can say both good things and bad things.

With the same mouth someone can praise God, and curse other people. So it's up to us to choose to use our tongues to say good and helpful words.

What do you think it means when it says, 'Can clean water and dirty water both flow from the same spring?'

Do you think it's talking about what's in our hearts? If we have nasty thoughts in our minds and hearts, then nasty words will come out. But if we have loving and kind thoughts in our minds and hearts then loving and kind words will come out.

Carol: A while ago we learned about some proverbs from the Bible...words that teach us how to live well. Here's a short proverb that's a favourite of mine:

Kind words are like honey—they cheer you up and make you feel strong. (Proverbs 16:24, CEV)

Have you ever been really cheered up by something someone has said to you? Maybe you were feeling very sad or tired and then someone said something to encourage you and make you feel better. Nagat's friend Jana's words were like honey weren't they? They cheered her up and made her feel much better. Those are the sort of words God wants us to say – kind words.

Tammy: My friend, would **you** like to say things that will help other people and encourage them? Would **you** like to cheer people up and make them feel strong?

God can help you to be the sort of person who speaks good words. When you're tempted to say mean things or things that aren't helpful you can ask God to help you control your tongue and to say good, helpful words.

Carol: It's time for us to go now, but before we do perhaps you'd like to pray with me and ask God to help you use your tongue to speak loving, kind and helpful things to other people. Let's pray.

Dear God, I have said things that I shouldn't say but I would like to say kind things that help and encourage other people. Please help me to do this. Help me to be a blessing to others.

Tammy: We would love to hear from you – you can contact us at....

Goodbye

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