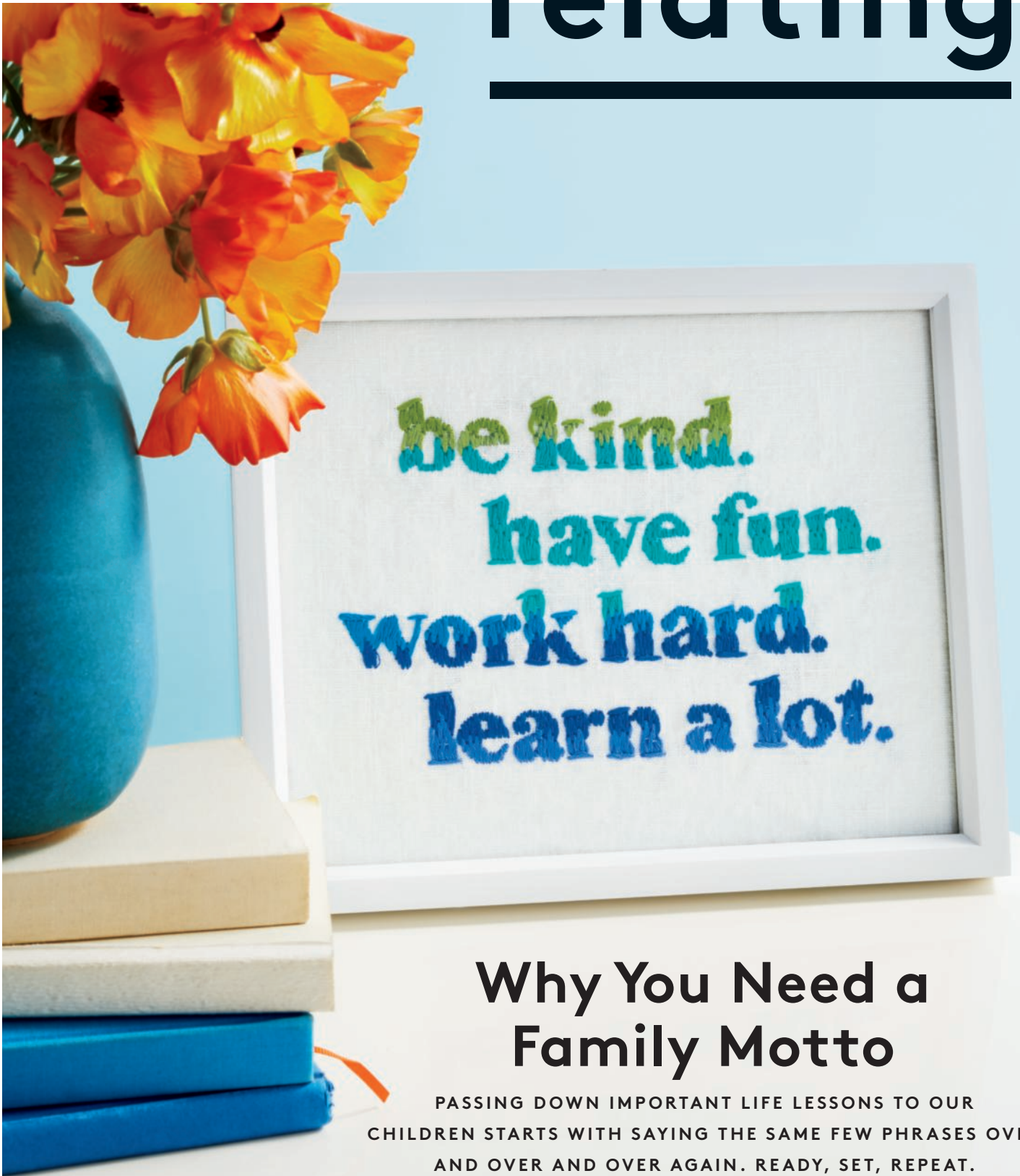


MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS
IN A MODERN WORLD

relating



Why You Need a Family Motto

PASSING DOWN IMPORTANT LIFE LESSONS TO OUR CHILDREN STARTS WITH SAYING THE SAME FEW PHRASES OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN. READY, SET, REPEAT.

By Erin Zammett Ruddy

PROP STYLING BY KATJA GREEFF; EMBROIDERY BY SARAH LASKOW, SARAH LASKOWDESIGNS.COM

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, my dad—a former air traffic controller—constantly urged me, “Make a decision and make it work.” It was his way of encouraging me to stop second-guessing myself, which I was all too prone to do, and to realize I was in control of my life. I follow his advice to this day. (He also used to say, “Don’t f— up. And if you do, don’t get caught,” but that’s a story for another time.)

Despite my dad’s wisdom, the only phrases on repeat in my own house these days seem to be “Keep your hands to yourself!” and “Don’t forget to wipe!” Not exactly inspiring. “We constantly repeat ourselves as parents, whether we’re imparting wisdom or not,” says Zelana Montminy, PhD, a Los Angeles-based psychologist and the author of *21 Days to Resilience*. “Thinking about what our kids are hearing and being deliberate about what we say to them are key to shaping who they will become.”

We all want to be the voice in our kids’ heads—to help protect and encourage them and to remind them to do the right thing when we’re no longer hovering close by. Getting in there with maxims and mottoes they’ll remember is as easy as, yes, repeating yourself all the time. But it’s also about choosing the right things to say. “The words we hear repeated as children become our internalized voice as adults,” says Suzi Lula, a parenting expert and the author of *The Motherhood Evolution: How Thriving Mothers Raise Thriving Children*. “They reaffirm family values and serve as a real compass for kids as they get older. You’re doing your child such a big service to say these things to them now.”

How family mottoes become memorable

Repetition speeds learning—just think back to all those flash cards you used (or, perhaps, should have used) in high school. So when we say something again and again to our kids, they’re more likely to absorb it. “There are neural connections that form in the brain when we learn something new,” says Montminy, who studies the effect of positive psychology on the brain. “The more repetitive something is, the less energy is needed to create those crucial connections—meaning it’s easier to learn.” And the more those connections are used, the stronger they become. “Eventually the things we say to our children become second nature to them,” says Lula. For the past year, whenever Megan Christ, from Brooklyn, New York, dropped her daughter off at preschool, she’d tell her, “Be kind. Have fun. Work hard. Learn a lot.” Now her 3-year-old recites the morning motto without having to be reminded.

“It may seem like kids tune you out, but they’re listening,” says Lula. They’ll be even more receptive if you stop what you’re doing, get down to their level, and say your piece while

making eye contact. This gesture will signal to them, “Hey, this is important. Pay attention.”

Framing these life lessons positively is essential to their efficacy. If you want to encourage gratitude in your child, saying, “Stop worrying about what other people have!” won’t work as well as saying, “We need to be grateful for what we have.” According to Montminy, “Our brain tends to go into shutdown mode and be less receptive when we feel attacked or hurt, so those important neural connections won’t be reinforced.” Effective mottoes should focus on the behaviors or values you want to see (persistence) rather than those you don’t want to see (giving up). And if your words start to feel nagging and frustrating, retool your delivery or rethink what you’re trying to relay. “These phrases shouldn’t come out as emotional outbursts,” says Montminy. “That might feel like hard work at first, but it’ll become more effortless with time and practice.”



So what exactly should we be saying?

“For these life lessons to really sink in, they should be simple to say and easy to remember,” says Lula. So no tongue twisters or novellas. You might want to say, “Please don’t ever do drugs. They will not make you cool; they will rot your brain and ruin your life and then you will die.” But, instead, try this: “You get only one body in this life—treat it right.” The motto should also be authentic to who your family is. Not sure how that translates into a catchy phrase? “Come up with the most important values you want to relay to your children,” says Montminy, who does this exercise with clients: Jot down 5 to 10 items for your family’s “code of conduct.” Under each, write down a few simple, age-appropriate ways to articulate the rule. If honesty is important (it should probably be in everyone’s top five, no?), you might say, “We value honesty in our family,” or “The truth may be difficult, but it’s always the best choice.”

The “we” voice is crucial when doling out advice, notes Thomas Lickona, PhD, a developmental psychologist at the State University of New York at Cortland and the author of *How to Raise Kind Kids*. “Talk about these things in terms of shared goals—it means that you’re all in this together, that these values matter to all of you.” You can also think of them as family mission statements, he says. “Have your children help come up with the qualities they think should define your family.” Quickly review the mission statements at the beginning of the week—or as needed. “The words should become a living part of the family,” says Lickona.

And you don’t have to reinvent the wheel: You can steal sage advice from movies, Mother Teresa, even Mick

Jagger. “‘You can’t always get what you want’ is said often in my house,” says Nora Weber, a mother of two in Burlington, Vermont. A friend quotes *The Princess Bride* to her kids: “Who says life is fair? Where is that written?” (Not all mottoes are sweet, and that’s OK.) The Dalai Lama is widely quoted as saying, “Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.” I’m definitely throwing that one into the Ruddy family rotation!

One-size-fits-all family mottoes are great to have, but you’ll also want to customize directives for each child. “My youngest daughter needs to learn to stand up for herself more, so I tell her, ‘Be confident. Be brave. Speak up,’ while my older one needs reminders to let her friends take the wheel sometimes,” says Amy P., a mother of three in Nashville. Whatever it is you’re saying, it has to apply in an authentic way to the person on the receiving end.

Words of wisdom really do work

When I asked friends which pearls of their wisdom they’d like their kids to remember, the majority started with, “It’s something my parents used to say to me.” Those words stay with us and shape how we approach life—and how we react to it. The proof is in the kids themselves: “Something my mom always said to me growing up was, ‘Of course it’s hard. If it were easy, everyone would do it,’” says Lyz M., a college senior. “Now when I feel anxious, those words come to me and I remember that I’m doing something that’s both difficult and rewarding.” Andrew G., a high school sophomore, used to be hard on himself in the classroom and on the playing field.

REAL REFRAINS

Poach-worthy family mottoes and maxims from moms and dads

“You always have a choice to make someone’s day better or worse. Choose wisely.”

—JESSICA L., MOTHER OF TWO, GREENLAWN, NEW YORK

“The only things you’re in charge of are your effort and your attitude.”

—BRIG S., FATHER OF TWO, NASHVILLE

“Just show up.”

—ANNETTE UVENA, MOTHER OF TWO, HUNTINGTON, NEW YORK

“You are capable of great things. That’s why I expect great things.”

—CHRISTI WAMPLER, MOTHER OF TWO, KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

“Please and thank you are two of the most powerful things you can say. Say them often.”

—SEAN PHILLIPS, FATHER OF ONE, NEW ORLEANS

“Always look deeper than the beauty on the outside.”

—JENNIFER BERDING,
MOTHER OF TWO, LOUISVILLE,
KENTUCKY

“The harder choice is almost always the right choice.”

—ADRIENNE PORZIO,
MOTHER OF TWO,
PITTSBURGH

“You become an average of the five people you spend the most time with.

Choose those people wisely.”

—RORY HUGHES,
FATHER OF TWO,
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

“You will figure it out. Find a way.”

—JENNIFER TIETJEN-PROZZO,
MOTHER OF TWO,
FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT

“Give 100 percent in everything you do, even when no one is watching. Don’t do things halfway, and don’t do them for the recognition!”

—RAQUEL F., MOTHER OF FOUR, PHOENIX

“Since I was a little kid, my mom has always said, ‘We all make mistakes. I’ve made plenty. But what I know now is that you can either dwell on them or learn from them.’ I can really hear her voice whenever I get a grade I’m not happy with or miss a shot I should have made—and it helps.”

Indeed, the words we instill in our kids aren’t just meant to inspire them to reach great heights or remind them not to be jerks—they can coach them through real adversity. Lauren Gallagher, PhD, a school psychologist on Long Island, New York, sees parents’ words in action a lot. “You want kids to have the tools to talk themselves through tough spots in the classroom, with friends, with sports,” she says. “Being consistent with the language we use with our kids will help them respond intuitively to situations over time.” Having them repeat the words can also calm them on a much deeper level. An Israeli study showed that repeating words and phrases can help you focus and feel less scatterbrained. When my friend Meredith’s 5-year-old starts to melt down, Meredith soothingly says, “Take a deep breath and count to three—this is not an emergency.” She says it to herself sometimes too.

Here’s the catch: These words will mean nothing to your kids if you’re not putting them into action yourself. “If you want to teach your kids something, you better live it,” says Gallagher. Show them what it means to be kind or grateful or to persevere; model the behavior you want to see in them. And look for real-world examples to reinforce the message. “If you see something or hear something that’s in line with or counter to one of your family values, talk about it then and there if appropriate,” says Gallagher. It’s a combination of practicing what we preach and preaching what we practice. “For our words to matter,” says Lickona, “they have to ring true.”

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (CONTINUED)

Serious and/or immediate allergic reactions have been reported. They include: itching, rash, red itchy welts, wheezing, asthma symptoms, or dizziness or feeling faint. Get medical help right away if you are wheezing or have asthma symptoms, or if you become dizzy or faint.

Do not receive BOTOX® Cosmetic if you: are allergic to any of the ingredients in BOTOX® Cosmetic (see Medication Guide for ingredients); had an allergic reaction to any other botulinum toxin product such as Myobloc® (rimabotulinumtoxinB), Dysport® (abobotulinumtoxinA), or Xeomin® (incobotulinumtoxinA); have a skin infection at the planned injection site.

Tell your doctor about all your muscle or nerve conditions, such as ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease, myasthenia gravis, or Lambert-Eaton syndrome, as you may be at increased risk of serious side effects including difficulty swallowing and difficulty breathing from typical doses of BOTOX® Cosmetic.

Tell your doctor about all your medical conditions, including: plans to have surgery; had surgery on your face; have trouble raising your eyebrows; drooping eyelids; any other abnormal facial change; are pregnant or plan to become pregnant (it is not known if BOTOX® Cosmetic can harm your unborn baby); are breast-feeding or plan to (it is not known if BOTOX® Cosmetic passes into breast milk).

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Using BOTOX® Cosmetic with certain other medicines may cause serious side effects. **Do not start any new medicines until you have told your doctor that you have received BOTOX® Cosmetic in the past.**

Tell your doctor if you have received any other botulinum toxin product in the last 4 months; have received injections of botulinum toxin such as Myobloc®, Dysport®, or Xeomin® in the past (tell your doctor exactly which product you received); have recently received an antibiotic by injection; take muscle relaxants; take an allergy or cold medicine; take a sleep medicine; take aspirin-like products or blood thinners.

Other side effects of BOTOX® Cosmetic include: dry mouth; discomfort or pain at the injection site; tiredness; headache; neck pain; and eye problems: double vision, blurred vision, decreased eyesight, drooping eyelids and eyebrows, swelling of your eyelids and dry eyes.

For more information refer to the Medication Guide or talk with your doctor.

To report a side effect, please call Allergan at 1-800-678-1605.

Please see Summary of Important Information about BOTOX® Cosmetic on next page.

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