

# Inappropriate Language

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO



**Do not ignore a student's profanity.** Failing to respond may convey to your students that swearing is acceptable. Confronting the use of profanity also is important because some students swear so often they might not realize that their language was inappropriate. You should address the issue of swearing even if you are not certain who made the inappropriate comments. If that happens, do not dwell on the problem and do not ask students for help identifying the culprit. Rather, let your class know that that kind of language is unacceptable; perhaps saying, "I expect students in this class to talk respectfully to one another." Then return to your lesson.



**React calmly to foul language.** If you perceive that a student is swearing to get your attention or to upset you, react in a low-key, restrained manner. Focusing on the student or getting upset yourself will give the student the attention he is seeking and reinforce his impulse to swear. Instead, let him know in a calm, brief manner that his language is unacceptable and that there are more appropriate ways to get your attention. If you give consequences, do so matter-of-factly. Avoid lecturing or justifying your decision.



**Bear in mind that a young student might not realize the inappropriateness of his language.** A student may tell you that he thought the words were okay because he heard them used by his parents or friends or on television. If that is the case with one of your students, you might say to him: "I understand that you may have heard others use these words but they are not okay to use in school." Let him know that the words can hurt others' feelings and cause classmates to avoid him. Make sure he understands which words are objectionable.



**Teach the student who swears words he can substitute for the swear words.** Help him find inoffensive words or phrases he can use when he is frustrated or upset. The student might have some ideas of his own, or you might suggest some words, such as "darn" or "shoot." He may even be open to using nonsense words. If appropriate, suggest to the student that he express his distress or frustration by putting his thoughts in a journal or writing a letter.



**Consider a mild consequence.** You might establish a rule that students who swear will lose five minutes of recess for every incident. With younger students who need an immediate consequence, consider giving them a brief time out, explaining that students cannot remain with their classmates if they use inappropriate language.



**If swearing persists, inform the student's parents.** After the first offense, have the student write down exactly what he said and why he used that language. You also might add comments of your own. Place the paper in an envelope and have the student address it to his parents. Put it in your desk and tell the student that you will send it to his parents if he swears again.



**Arrange a signal to remind the student about his language.** Agree on a silent signal (for example, putting a finger to your lips) that you will give when the student uses profane or inappropriate language. Tell him that you expect him to stop the profanity immediately when he sees that signal.

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