

Topic: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Title: The Language of Love

Description: Helping Children Find The Language to speak respectfully about our similarities and differences. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are challenging topics even for adults to understand. In this session, we explore how to help children speak respectfully in a culture that welcomes every race, gender, religion, mobility, ability, and family structure.

Intro

RESPECT song

Thank you so much for joining us online today. I am Carissa Figgins, Assistant Chief of Community Impact with Child Care Aware of Missouri and founder of The Sparrow's Nest Teen Maternity Home. I consider it a distinct honor and privilege that you have allowed this time in your day to listen to me. Thank you so much for making the Community Services Summit a priority but I want to especially acknowledge the fact that if you have carved out the time to watch this recording, you are in fact demonstrating a whole other level commitment to your community and in particular the children in our community. To honor your time and commitment I have tried to make our time together as engaging and mildly entertaining as possible. Don't worry you won't miss out on all my stuttering and spitting. If you have heard me speak before you know that my spirit animal is a llama for that very reason. Even though I am on this screen you may still need a tissue or too.

That being said be sure to take of yourself even while watching the video. Rest your eyes every once in a while from the screen, stand up, and stretch. We will have breaks throughout the presentation for moments of reflection, application, and

planning so make sure you have something to write on for this session or open up a doc on your computer or phone. Grab a bottle of water. Take a second to smile and high five your Self. Say Self, we ARE doing a great thing today! Well done Self!

No doubt if you are watching this video, you may have watched many other videos of other fantastic speakers from the Community Services Summit. There is so much expertise to learn from. However, I need to let you know something. A little Quid Pro if you will. My subject today is centered around the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Now if you take the knowledge of the rest of the Summit is filled with experts and apply that knowledge to me, you will be wrong. I am not an expert in DEI. But wait, before you click off hear me out. I have spent over 35 years either working with children in a variety of settings whether it be in the classroom or home visitation or direct services. I have also spent a great deal of that time working with the grown-ups in those children's lives. I am currently the Assistant Chief of Community Impact for Child Care Aware of Missouri where I help build systems of support and change for early childhood professionals and child care providers. I also advocate on behalf of children and families to ensure we have safe high quality early care and learning opportunities. I am the Founder

of The Sparrow's Nest Maternity Home, which is a longer-term housing option for pregnant and parenting teen moms in O'Fallon.

The main reason why I chose to talk about this topic is that I realized I have been on a journey of trying to see and understand all the people placed on my path from a pretty young age. My family moved a lot when I was a kid. And no, we aren't a military family. My father has ADD and a little bit of anger management issues, so we moved for his job "opportunities." I remember moving from Kansas City to Memphis and then to Little Rock and my mother making it perfectly clear that we would hear new words in these communities used to describe black people that were absolutely forbidden out of our mouths. In third grade, I remember being asked to stay with Matthew every once in a while during indoor recess. Matthew used a really fancy wheelchair because he had something called cerebral palsy. The teacher needed someone to play with Michael because some of the kids thought they could get cerebral palsy if they got too close to him. I remember in the 5th grade moving from Little Rock where Bernina Williams made it perfectly clear who was in charge of the playground, and it wasn't because she was African American, and I was one of the few white children in the school but because she was actually taller than me. Reading books like "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry" just wrecked me but I kinda thought that was just an unfortunate piece of our history. I remember in high school trying to figure out why people were so

threatened when one of our classmates came out as gay. How did that person's individual choice about themselves invoke so much anger from everyone else?

When I was in my student teaching Austin taught me how to navigate part of the autism spectrum in an inclusive classroom as he said "Roll That Beautiful Bean Footage!" 30 times a day. As an adult my husband and I adopted our youngest son from Guatemala. I found out I made the wrongful assumption that even though he is a person of color, his Irish pasty parents and siblings could not protect him from discrimination and inequity. Over the years I find myself saying "well it is the year 2000 things will finally change for women, well it's the year 2010 things will finally change for women, well it's 2021 that glass ceiling surely cannot exist anymore... right?? Isn't equal pay for equal work a subject of the past because it has just become part of our everyday?" Throughout my life I seem to have been aware of many things, I shudder to think of the things I have been ignorant to or chose to overlook. But I decided I couldn't be that person anymore. Because I see generation after generation of children being negatively impacted by the grownup's decisions. I started having much more intentional conversations to try to learn what the root cause is for issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Why do people cringe or roll their eyes when they hear that phrase? How can I help my own children navigate this world in a positive manner? So I decided to start gathering more of an academic framework around all these experiences and

conversations, and books, and podcasts and I earned graduate certificate in Diversity and Inclusion. And now you are a part of that journey that well. And even though it appears I have been on this journey for a while, I have a feeling I am just getting started.

So let's get going here. There are 6 things we are going to accomplish in the time we have together.

1. Breathe- I KNOW there are A LOT, and I mean A LOT of feelings, emotions, concerns around diversity, equity, and inclusion. In just a few minutes we will take a moment to acknowledge that little Fear Monkey and ask him to get off your back to open up your heart and mind.
2. Second we will take some time for self-reflection. It's hard to know what you don't know. It's also challenging to pass on skills like love and respect if we don't know what we think or feel about those topics as well. Children learn what they live. They live in the spaces and environments created by us as the grownups. So we need to take a moment to see where we are in our own self-awareness.
3. Third, we get a few basic reminders on language acquisition. It's important to see how children learn to speak when we want to teach them how to

Speak with love and respect to anyone. Some of those basic principles apply when we are teaching children to speak respectfully with love.

4. Fourth, I am going to give us all a nudge towards recapturing the Art of Dialogue. It's 2021 and we still seem to be operating in a mode of children need to be seen not heard but then wonder why they spout off.
5. I want to make sure I give you some practical applications along the way. This is all well and good to talk and talk and talk but I will share a few practical applications just to prime your incredible brain pump for how you can positively impact the children in your life.
6. Finally I will ask you to set some goals after today. All the things you will hear me say today—how are you going to use it. Because I am going to ask you to email me at carissafiggins@gmail.com

Alright, just a little bit about me as a self-proclaimed Defender of Childhood. I love children, they absolutely fascinate me. I have been able to build my life around understanding them, studying them, teaching them but more importantly learning from them. We grownups have gotten waaaayyy to serious and lost our curiosity somewhere along the way. I have had the privilege of being a classroom teacher, interventionist, advocate, and parent educator. I have had the honor of playing with children to watch them learn for almost three decades which is some of that new

math since I am obviously hardly a day over 29 (don't you just love these zoom filters). I have a Bachelors from Texas A&M University WHOOP! And a master's in education from Texas Woman's University. I am a John Maxwell Certified Speaker, and I recently completed a graduate certificate from Cornell University in Diversity and Inclusion. I am currently the Assistant Chief of Community Impact with Child Care Aware of Missouri. I engage stakeholders all over the state to elevate the importance of early childhood and the first two thousand days of a child's life. I help create safe high quality learning environments for young children by advocating and supporting the early childhood professionals and child care providers in their lives. I am also the proud auntie to Chance, Tucker, Chloe, Lily, and Nicholas and the fiercely proud mama to my daughter Emma who is 22 and just graduated from Belmont University and started her career as an audio engineer (one tuition down CA-CHING), my son Sam who is 19 and also an audio engineering student at Belmont University, and my son Alex who is 15 and a freshman at Howell High. I would have none of that without my incredible husband Robert. We have been married for 29 years and celebrate about 18 of those but that's a different story for a different day. I'm just saying, maybe we should pay a professional to take care of our plumbing and electrical needs.

It's also helpful for you to be aware of my Ergo Manifesto. Say this in your best Buddy The Elf voice saying Francisco. Ergo Manifesto. This is my philosophy about children and the grown ups in their lives.

I believe...

- Children are beautiful human creations.
- Children deserve to be children for as long as possible.
- Children have prime opportunities for learning.
- Grownups were children.
- ERGO...
- Grown-ups are beautiful human creations.
- Children deserve grownups to be the grownups.
- Grown-ups have prime opportunities for learning.
- Grown-ups need to be reminded they were children.

This is the framework I try to operate from and everything we talk about today will come through this filter.

Let's move right into our first goal. ERGO

Breathe.

When we see children acting out, or exhibiting frustrating, problematic behaviors very often there is a language issue. Their incredible brains are working faster than their mouths. When grown-ups are acting out, exhibiting frustrated, problematic

behaviors such as ignorance, hate, etc can we assume, ERGO that there an language issue? Are their mouths working faster than their brains? One of the reasons this is so important to me to start wrapping my heart and mind around all of this is because of **this** issue. There is a shrinking middle ground in our world today. I am all for competition. You give me a water challenge I will be racing to the potty all day long, but I am going to beat you. I take Red Rover Red Rover Send Sally right over very seriously. However, we are accepting this constant culture shift of Us vs Them and it is not going to end well for any of Us.

The children in our lives are growing up in a world of greater diversity than ever before. Our language, and words and definitions are expanding exponentially. We are the grown-ups, we don't get to abdicate our responsibility because things have gotten more complicated and multi layered. We have to show children how to navigate these times. They need to hear it from us. I recognize that there can be a lot of fear and apprehension around trying to honor a culture that welcomes every race, gender, religion, mobility, ability, and family structure. We are all sensitive to mis-stepping, saying or doing the wrong thing.

Theodore Roosevelt once said *"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."* I need you to hear me say we cannot afford to do nothing. Our children need us to be brave.

There are a few ground rules between you and I today. Remember that you are human. With that comes with an enormous number of emotions, experiences, perceptions, hormones, just beautiful complexity. You may feel confusion today. You may feel anger. You may feel fear. It's on, You are not a robot. Identify those feelings then keep moving on this path a bit with me. Also remember everyone around you including me are humans, at least as far as we know. I am a HUGE Marvel/Star Wars fan so there may actually be aliens among us. But the point is extend the same grace you want for yourself to those around you. Come at the topic of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Love, and Respect from a sense of compassion but moreover curiosity. Some of us come to this table with the perspective of this is weird and uncomfortable ... others of us come to this table with the perspective of weird and uncomfortable ... either way I ask that we all be humane. Be civil, have good manners, be humane as humans.

Helping children find the language to speak respectfully about our similarities and differences is a lot like learning to speak a new language. Maybe you have an experience similar to this. <video>

If there is no one around at least chuckling over that clip right now could one of you get one going like the Wave at a baseball game? Thanks! Humor is universal. We have all had that experience when someone is laughing so hard they can't get their words out, they can't even catch their breath. We don't completely

understand what they are talking about, but we can relate to their laughter and humor. Helping children of any age speak respectfully in a culture that welcomes every race, gender, religion, mobility, ability, and family structure can be centered in that universal language of laughter and humor. One way of eliminating the fear and uncertainty around teaching children to speak respectfully and with love is to give yourself a break and realize that we are learning to speak a new language, not a spoken language, but an awareness. Let's break this down a bit more. I want you take three to five minutes and write down how you would tell someone step by step to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. You can do this by yourself but I would love it if you did this with 3-4 people seated around you and you each choose a different persona. Choose one of the following individuals to tailor your how-to instructions. For instance, choose to write the instructions to speak the language of a 50 something female boss, or your French pen pal, or Nathan your 5 year old neighbor, African American Marine who uses a wheelchair. Take a few moments to organize yourselves. No pressure, I will just sit here on the other side of the screen waiting for you to complete this group think and we will reconvene in about 5-7 minutes. Ready. Go...

Ok pencils down. Now before we process this activity I want you to watch this video. I recently asked my friends Campbell and Cadence to do the same thing to me.

<video of C/C telling me how to make a peanut butter sandwich>

When I re-watch this video several things pop out to me. Cadence and Campbell approached me with a such gentleness. As children they exhibited patience as I tried to understand what they were sharing with me. Did anyone notice how Campbell spent most of the time just observing me and taking me in? Throughout the whole little exercise both girls maintained a smile, they laughed *with* me, and they kept trying to help me understand from their perspective how to make this darn peanut butter and jelly sandwich. If a certain approach didn't work, then they found a different way of connecting to me. Without a huge in-depth cultural back story, in just a moment these girls were able to intuitively see our differences and honored our similarities. They found what language we had in common, what common experiences we shared and were able to simultaneously host and guest to both similarities and differences. When you were walking through the exercise with the people around you what are the lessons learned, how do we have to cater the delivery, how did humor play into the process? No doubt as the grown up you had questions about the individual you were trying to teach. Those questions, that inquisitiveness are the beginnings of respect. If we had not asked questions, if we had injected the same formula to every persona what would the end result be? We didn't have to even have all the answers to those questions to accomplish our goal. How did respect change the end result?

As we intentionally lean into and help children speak respectfully to anyone they encounter it makes sense that we not just throw that word around but really define it for ourselves. In this next activity take the next three minutes to write down or put in your phone the answers to these fill-in the blanks.

1. Respect isn't _____
2. Respect looks like _____
3. Respect feels like _____
4. Respect sounds like _____
5. Respect is defined as _____

Take a few minutes while we pause for you to reflect on a few or all of these statements.

Ok now come to a stopping point. Take a few minutes and tell the person to your right or across the aisle how you answered that last question and why that is an important definition to you. How do you define respect? This is a really important activity to also engage the children in our lives. For me respect is caring how words and actions may impact others. Respect has two parts: 1) having respect for someone because of how my actions impact others and 2) showing respect by changing my actions to be sure I don't have a negative impact. Respect is also a choice, it does not mean agreement but understanding. I may not agree with what

you believe but I can at least start to understand your line of thinking and why you believe as you do.

We know what respect is and what it looks and sounds and feels like. Now let's talk about who we give our respect to, and how you decide whether or not to give someone your respect. I'll read an idea about how someone might get respect and you give me a thumbs up if it's something that makes you choose to respect someone.

Does someone get your respect...because of their intelligence? Thumbs up or thumbs down.

Do you give someone respect because they are smart? Thumbs up or thumbs down.

Is it about them being a certain age? Like you choose to respect someone because they're older versus younger? Thumbs up or thumbs down.

Does someone need to earn your respect? Thumbs up or thumbs down.

Does someone get your respect by showing respect to you first? Thumbs up or thumbs down.

Or does someone get your respect just for being human? Thumbs up or thumbs down.

This is another simple activity to lead children through and create spaces where it is safe for them to talk through their own belief systems. You can make it fun and simple. If the children need more movement, consider asking them to stand to show their agreement, maybe even included a crouch/half stand for partial agreement. Depending on their answers you can ask them to expand for instance about how someone would earn their respect and *should* respect be earned or given.

As we move into some more self-reflection.... Hold up.... I think some of you just rolled your eyes when you saw this next slide. You might of thought, come on now how much more self-reflection is she going to make us endure?? Well, my friend, you can't teach what you don't know. We don't know what we don't know. Fear and confusion often crowd into places that have not been defined. When we don't clearly define what we believe in when we are afraid to make decisions we often can become deer in headlights and not do anything. And remember our good buddy Theodore Roosevelt's advice? Often the worse things we can do are nothing. So we dig just a little deeper into our grownup selves with this slide.

When you were a child how were you taught to show respect and manners? Right, wrong, or indifferent I was taught....

Now as a grown up I show respect by... and my manners...

Actions speak louder than words. Remember this new language we are learning?

It's not one that is spoken but one that we are acutely aware of as grownups who truly want the best for the children in our lives. Youth are learning everyday from all the grownups around them. They learn from us. How one behaves is much more an indicator of what one believes than what one says. As the experts in the room you all know that over two thirds of our communication is nonverbal. ERGO what we say confirms what we have already demonstrated in our actions. Do you have a faith tradition? For those of us who claim a faith tradition there are certain tenets that should guide us in our interactions and treatment of others, especially those that are different from us. Even if you do not consider yourself a person of faith, there are principles or guidelines that you follow in life. No matter the source or direction this is what it means to have morals and ethics. It is each of our common courtesy. To put it a different way I recently heard this quote from Shola Richards during the 2021 Global Leadership Summit. "Your legacy is not about titles and degrees. Your legacy is defined by how you treat others. That is civility. Civility is a demonstration of respect." Our own morals, our own ethics, our own civility those belief systems are one part of us. However, it is quite another in how we live out

those beliefs. It's not just our thoughts but really the things we actually do, the policies we support, who our friends are or are not. Those actions are the things we really mean. From a communications/language perspective we communicate to the world but more importantly we communicate to the children in our lives a lack of consistency in what we say we believe and our own grown-up behavior. For instance, we may be in a huge hurry at Target. We pick up one item in a certain aisle, turn on to the next aisle and actually find a better item put that in our cart and leave the first item in the wrong place. Not a big deal, we are just in a huge hurry. We get out the parking lot, trying to throw things in the back of the car and the cart corral is full, we do our best to kind of finagle our cart in the corral, jump in the car and speed off, not noticing that the wind has actually got a hold of our cart and has guided into the side of someone else's car. We aren't bad people because of this. We just need grace for this moment in our lives. Now what if you are the person coming behind you. What are your thoughts and actions when you see random items on the shelf? What if our car is the one struck by the cart? Are we still extending grace and understanding or are we totally up in arms? We can't believe someone made those choices and decisions. Do you see how our beliefs and behaviors are in dissonance? Sometimes a simple way of harmonizing our beliefs and behaviors is simply through manners.

I was doing some quick research of speaking the language of love and respect to people with disabilities and I came across these ten commandments from Office of Disability Employment Policy. I am going to read just a few of them to you and see if you start to see a pattern.

1. When talking with a person with a disability, **speak directly to that person** rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, **it is appropriate to offer to shake hands**. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, **always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.**
4. If you offer assistance, **wait until the offer is accepted**. Then listen to or ask for instructions.

5. **Treat adults as adults.** Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)

6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's **wheelchair is similar to leaning on hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying.** The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.

7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. **Be patient and wait for the person to finish,** rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.

8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, **place yourself at eye level** in front of the person to facilitate the

conversation.

9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. **Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively** to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and **keep hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.**

10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about that?" that seems to relate to a person's disability. **Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.**

Is it just me or are all these actions appropriate for ANY human we interact with?

Have we really gotten to a point that the basic common courtesy we should extend to anyone from any race, gender, religion, mobility, ability, and family structure has to be literally spelled out in employment documents? And the answer is yes,

and despite my initial response, I realized these are pieces of the foundation of common courtesy for teaching children how to speak a language of love.

So let's look a little closer at the blocks of language acquisition to add to this foundation of common courtesy. I want to talk very briefly about this to give you a practical framework to add what you already know.

So we know all of us start as babies, no worries I am not slipping into my sex ed talk...and babies begin communicating before they are even born with sounds, and cries, and grunts, and facial expression. The grown ups and other humans in their lives begin interacting and responding to those sounds. They make human assumptions and connections but connecting words to those sounds and facial expressions. Typically a three year old will have around 300 words and speak in simple 3-4 word sentences. My little friend Reese next door is 3 and routinely meets me after I get home from work to say, "I am a mail person." "Today I am a doctor." She is also giving me clues of how to interact with her each day. Don't mess up US postal service language with a surgeon language. By age 6 a child will have around 20,000 words and are able to speak in much more complex and longer sentences. My other friend Alyen meets me after work to say, "How was your day, my day was great, we got a new dog and his name is Finn, but he whines a lot we think because he is missing his mother." Sometimes I drink another cup of coffee on the way home to match the energy I will get to encounter as I pull into my

driveway. The point is we know the more sounds, words, sentences, paragraphs, and stories children are exposed to, the more that language and understanding of language and use of language grows. 18 years old's will usually know over 35,000 words in their native language and we continually learn at least one new word a day until middle age.

ERGO can we demystify how to navigate DEI, how teach children to speak with love and respect to anyone by using what we already know about language acquisition? Go with me a bit. Let's say you are a parent , or an infant-toddler specialist, or a parent educator. When speaking to an infant or toddler to teach them how to use language you will obviously want to speak clearly to that child and model good speech. We repeat what that child says to show that you understand. We add on to what she says. We use words like, "Want juice? I have juice. I have apple juice. Do you want apple juice?" In that whole process did we ever shame that child or tell that child they were wrong or in correct or hush them for being incorrent? No we gently and lovingly built on their understanding at the time. Just like Campbell and Cadence did when they were telling me how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

When we are expanding a child's language abilities we are helping a child understand and ask questions. We sometimes will play the yes-no game. We ask questions such as, "Are you Marty?" and "Can a pig fly?" Sometimes we have a child make up questions and try to fool us. Is it a possibility that we could use this the exact method to help children speak in a language of love and respect? We use respectful and sensitive vocabulary that may come up about race, gender, religion, and ability. As the grownups in children's lives, we take the time to educate ourselves about that terminology because we have a posture of learning and we come with curiosity and respect. We use kind humor as a universal marker to help normalize the language around diversity and humanity.

When we are interacting with early elementary aged children it's pretty normal for us to praise a child when she tells us something. We show that we understand her words. Typically, we will pause after speaking to give that child a chance to respond. How do you *already* help children learn new words? Well you probably actually say a new word, and tell him what it means, or use it in a way that helps him understand. For example, you might use the word "vehicle" instead of "car." You might say something can say, "I drove my vehicle to school today. How did you get to school today?' How can you apply what you already know about language acquisition to say..religious diversity? In our area our

children's friends may include Muslim, a Jew, a Catholic, a Protestant or someone whose family **practices** no organized religious faith. If you introduce the topic of diverse faiths or it comes up in natural conversation, could you use this term of **practices** to build that child's vocabulary to show love and respect? Often our uncomfortableness with religious diversity is centered less about the beliefs and more about the practices. What if we teach this word **practices** that are a part of our traditions? We can convey respect that some of our friends and neighbors practice a different faith than we do and that these differences are nothing to fear but instead lay the groundwork for opportunities for learning.

With older children we really focus on the application of language through speaking, writing, and reading. Children from all racial and ethnic backgrounds need to be able to use language and hear language that is appropriate for talking about other people that does not devalue or make strange the differences of others.

We can encourage children to ask questions about their own parents and grandparents family history. Approach cultural experiences such as art forms, collages, poetry, not as something we are forced to do but as opportunities for reflection for yourself and students to recognize skin color but also the impact of race on society and to cultivate positive anti-racist identities. Start gentle conversations to help children unlearn subconscious patterns of viewing themselves as superior or inferior.

So here is my small nudge towards making time and space for actual dialogue about these topics. We absolutely without a doubt have to create the physical and emotional environments for children to be able to communicate anything to us as grownups. And that is hard for all of us. But we seem to be dismissing the art of dialogue and jump immediately to debate. We have adopted this mantra of “agree to disagree” which is really code for you and your opinions, and your experiences are dumb. That phrase has become an excuse to not find a space of common courtesy and civility. In order to have a hospitable situation you have to have a willing hostess and a willing guest. If you don’t have one of those you are not going to have a nice visit. We can all think of someone in our lives that can express hospitality no matter where they are. They are so engaging. They aren’t necessarily the life of the party but sometimes they are. It is because they know how to draw people in. They know how to connect with anyone through great story telling, or conversation, or they somehow draw your story out of you and make you feel like one of the most important people on the planet. This is what we have to intentionally teach our children. We can totally blame it on screens. We can totally blame it on texting. We can totally blame it on one sided comment boxes on social media or blogs. But we have to re-teach ourselves and children how to have basic conversation skills. But it’s not going to happen if we are still shushing children. If we have policies where they have to remain silent in the waiting room, remain

silent in the hallways, don't talk during lunch. If we only talk to their caregivers ABOUT them rather than TO them we are stealing their voices. To build a world a love, to even have your corner of the world reflect love, and grace, and mercy we have to move away from this incredibly archaic mindset that children are to be heard not seen. We still have this idea, we still teach this mindset, that a good kid, that an easy kid is a quiet kid. You know who the world changers are? Those kids who would not shut up, those kids who routinely ask questions and finally had an adult who wasn't afraid to answer. Those are the world changers. If you are uncomfortable with the way the world is going, then model a good conversation. When you leave a great night out with friends it usually is centered around you feeling accepted, loved, and heard. You had some form of a great conversation. What can you pull from that experience and make intentional spaces for children to experience the same level of acceptance and love and understanding at their level? Challenge put downs or hurtful comments, but not necessarily by shutting them down. Build those conversation skills by helping children talk through why they might respond that way and how they might still communicate their feelings and opinions in a respectful manner. They still need to say what they need to say only clothed in love and respect. Put **thinking** ahead of knowing and ask open ended questions. Have informal chats about books, movies, and experiences and

encourage turn taking in conversations. And put down the phone. Look them in the eye.

Diversity dialogue teaches us all to respect and celebrate the similarities and differences in all humans. It also helps them realize that we're all humans, despite differences in how we look or dress, or what we eat or celebrate. It builds bridges and emphasizes common goals.

So today we learned to breathe and tell ourselves its going to be ok when we start to teach our children to speak the language of love, to speak respectfully in a culture that welcomes every race, gender, religion, mobility, ability, and family structure. We learned the importance of self-reflection and really starting to wrap our head around the way we were raised, our own thoughts on respect and how to give it. We talked about the importance of basic conversation skills, helping children to be heard not just seen to rediscover the art of dialogue as a demonstration of respect. We had a few reminders about language acquisition and how we might use that knowledge to develop a language of love. And we had a few practical applications along the way. So what will you do with this information now? What will be your own goals of application? I would love to continue that conversation with you so be sure to email me your goals to carissaffiggins@gmail.com . I want to leave you with this poem from Dorothy Law

that has been a constant reminder to me after my third-grade teacher Mrs. Pope hung this poster in her classroom. As the grown-ups we have a huge responsibility sometimes overwhelming responsibility to our children. We are shaping generations. But I encourage you to continue to embrace that responsibility and the children in your lives. Don't abdicate that responsibility out of fear. Come at this with a posture of learning, curiosity and humility. Be brave for them. Let's create a nice place for them to live together.

If children live with criticism,

They learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility,

They learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule,

They learn to be shy.

If children live with shame,

They learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement,

They learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance,

They learn to be patient.

If children live with praise,

They learn to appreciate.

If children live with acceptance,

They learn to love.

If children live with approval,

They learn to like themselves.

If children live with honesty,

They learn truthfulness.

If children live with security,

They learn to have faith in themselves and others.

If children live with friendliness,

They learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

Thank you.

What is your reasons to be learning this language

Why do you want children in your life to speak through love and respect?

<https://theconversation.com/what-i-learned-when-i-recreated-the-famous-doll-test-that-looked-at-how-black-kids-see-race-153780>

https://www.ted.com/talks/helen_pearson_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_human_development

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQuM5e0QGLg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FY4qNs4onYQ> In the name of vocabulary