

# Faith



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

## Three words our kids need to hear

It is Monday morning, and my daughter drags into the kitchen. She sits on a barstool, slumps her shoulders and casts her eyes down at the bowl of Cheerios I slide in front of her.

She moans and groans and tells me how tired she is. Part of me is irritated. I need her to step it up because I have four kids to get to school in 30 minutes. I don't have time for this.

But then I remember — I get tired, too. And like me, this child really needs her sleep. So instead of rushing her, I take a minute to let her wake up.

"I get it," I tell her, remembering the many times I've struggled to get out of bed. "Mornings can be hard for me, too."

It is Wednesday afternoon, and I can tell by the look on my daughter's face as she walks toward my car that she's upset. As she buckles her seat-belt, she blurts out what's troubling her.

Once again she didn't place in the school art contest. Once again her friend won first place.

With a bitter tinge in her voice, she complains that it's not fair. Part of me wants to correct my child. I want to tell her to be happy for her friend. But then I remember — I get jealous, too. And being jealous of a friend is the hardest kind to overcome.

"I get it," I tell her, remembering the times I've felt overshadowed. "You worked hard on that piece, and I know you wanted to place. I get

jealous of my friends sometimes, too."

It is Sunday, and on the way to church I argue with my daughter because she didn't brush her teeth like I asked. We've had this argument, so often I feel compelled to describe how her mouth will look when her teeth begin to rot.

Inside church I reflect on my words, and I feel bad about being harsh. I wish I'd held my tongue. I lean over to my daughter and whisper an apology.

She shakes her head and pushes me away. She's mad and not ready to forgive. Part of me is hurt. I want closure to ease the guilt. But then I remember — I need time when I'm mad, too. Forgiveness isn't always instant.

"Okay," I say, kissing her head and giving her space. I ask God to forgive me and to work in her heart so our little arguments don't lead to resentment.

The mistakes I make as a parent are relatively common. And in terms of our children's moods, we often expect them to have mastery over their emotions. We expect them to get over unpleasant feelings, soldier on and not need time to process them.

But our kids are *human*, and like all humans, they have some messy emotions that need to be acknowledged and worked through. They have good days and bad days, highs and lows, shining moments and moments we wonder where our

child has gone.

I am learning, as my kids get older, the importance of being empathic. Taking even a minute to listen and understand how they feel can make a huge difference in whether they open up and talk through their feelings or keep them bottled up.

My tendency is to react too soon. I throw out quick solutions or express my thoughts on how my children *should* feel without taking into account how they *do* feel. And of all the tools I'm using to break this habit, the most effective one is compassion. Sometimes what my kids need most is permission to feel what they feel with 100 percent honesty. They want a sounding board, not a problem solver. They feel comforted when I nod and say, "Yep, I've been there. That happens to me all the time."

Everyone knows the cornerstone phrase of parenting: *I love you*. But I believe we need three other words in our vocabulary, too, words that build bridges between hearts and strengthen the parent-child relationship.

**I get it.**  
*I get it you don't feel like going to school.*  
*I get it you're jealous of your friend.*  
*I get it you need time to cool off before we talk again.*

Saying "I get it" isn't a green light for our kids to act on unpleasant emotions or dwell on them. It doesn't lower or compromise our

expectations. More than anything, it connects us with our children and reassures them they aren't alone. It reminds us they are human, and sometimes it helps to cut them a little slack in honor of that fact.

A little empathy can go a long way in growing a relationship. So can the right words. One goal I have in parenting is to have less of a lecturing mouth and more of a listening ear. The conversations that result when my kids express their real emotions bring priceless insights. They teach me about my kids and teach my kids to be comfortable expressing their inner reality.

I want my kids to know that if I get it, others will get it, too. Someone will relate to any messy emotion they wrestle with. Knowing this makes the world a more approachable place. It gives them the courage to be real, and the power to build relationships based on truth, empathy and our perfectly normal humanity.

*Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist and blogger for The Huffington Post. Her first book, 10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know, is now available on Amazon and everywhere books are sold. Join her Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer," visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.*



### Let's Create the Home of Your Dreams

Window treatments, furniture, wallcovering, floor covering, accessories and more.  
Your style and budget. We bring it all to you!  
Contact me today for a FREE in-home design consultation.  
205.447.4589 • laurap@decoratingden.com