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NEWSLETTER

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Dear Caregivers,

As we enter this holiday season, I was thinking about all the conversations with friends and family who might not understand the reasoning behind the philosophy at SYC. For me, raising my kids in this respectful and conscious way has been very different from how I was raised and how many of my family and friends raise their children. At times, it has been quite challenging to explain to folks outside of this community that my children's preschool actually does have a lot of structure, boundaries and limits, however it looks very different than what mainstream society expects. Instead of using top down structure and rigid rules and expectations, SYC believes in the importance of relationships (and the trust that comes with them) as the foundation of our structure. This takes teachers that are not only empathetic and patient, but are knowledgeable of brain development, curious about motivation, know how to ask good questions, masters of moving through uncomfortable situations, and utilize playfulness and humor to form deep connections. Simply put, **SYC runs on the power of human connection and curiosity**. It is the groundwork for humans that have a secure sense of self, who are innovative, intrinsically motivated, emotionally intelligent, and clear communicators. And isn't this what the world could always use more of? Below are some of the phrases used at SYC (the ones found on the back of our t-shirts) with explanations of what's behind why we say it, and how we expand on it to help children learn and grow.

Truths about SYC

To best understand where SYC developed these sayings, it is important to understand some fundamental beliefs that SYC bases our philosophy towards children on.

- **Children deserve to be treated with dignity and respect**, meaning we will have developmentally appropriate expectations for children and we value and honor their unique ideas, insights, autonomy and voice.
- **Children's voices need to be heard and their ideas need to be explored.**
- **All behavior is communication.** We use our relationships as structure to get curious about the needs of their behaviors and set limits/ boundaries that are logical and natural when possible
- **Being uncomfortable is a part of life.** Being uncomfortable in a safe, secure environment allows children (& adults) to practice these situations and learn valuable skills, and builds confidence and resilience.
- **Children are capable humans.** To build skills they need someone to confidently coach them through hard things and be patient in the process.

At SYC we say:

You're the boss of your body

- **Why we say it:** We know that teaching children that they have control over their own body is fundamental to keeping them safe, gives them the groundwork for advocating for their needs and wants, and teaches them to listen & reflect on their body cues. It also lays the foundation for consent, which is a fundamental principle at SYC.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:**
 - "I wonder if you want them to touch you? If not, tell them- don't touch me." Teachers use social coaching to help children evaluate their body's needs and give them language to set a boundary. We expand on this by asking children to check in with themselves, what do they like? How do they feel? What sensations are coming up for them?
 - We ask them to read the social cues of another person. Before you touch someone, you have to ask. If they say yes, they can change their mind to a NO at anytime, this is why we coach them to check in with their playmate by saying "are you still having fun?"
 - If they're not verbalizing an answer, they're probably showing you some signals- "Are they making any sounds?" "What does their face look like?" "Is their energy level the same as yours?"

Here's what I know

- **Why we say it:** It's a way to give factual information and then trust kids will make the best decision for themselves with that information. It's a way to give information that doesn't directly challenge another person. It also gives space to allow kids to verbalize their ideas and share their expertise by not assuming that the grown-up is all knowing.

- **What we say to expand on this phrase:**

- Often times this phrase is used as teacher talk to give information- "Here's what I know- bodies aren't for hitting." "Here's what I know- you can have more than one friend." "Here's what I know- you are the boss of your own body."
- Teachers use this opportunity to give more information, give language through social coaching or place a limit.
- If there is a safety concern teachers may then place a limit BUT this phrase avoids a power struggle because the emotion has been removed from the conversation.
- If a limit is placed this is also a teachable moment to build emotional intelligence- "Wow, you really wish you could do xyx and this is making you really [insert emotion]."

All feelings are Okay

- **Why we say it:** Feelings are a biological process. They're neither negative nor positive- they are reactions to the stimuli around us. Some humans feel feelings more intensely, and others do not. Making space for all feelings allows for kids to feel seen and heard. Humans feel safe and secure when in a relationship with adults around them who can handle their range of emotions, including the intense ones that can feel more overwhelming. It also helps them to begin to understand that humans are complex beings. You can feel multiple emotions at the same time, which can be confusing. It also removes shame from the emotions we feel. This is the key to building emotional intelligence.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:**
 - All feelings are ok, all behavior is NOT okay.
 - A teacher might say- "You look really mad." This is an authentic moment to build a coping skill- "I know when I am feeling frustrated, I take a deep breath in and let it out slowly." It might be a time to validate the emotion and let them know they are heard. "You really wish you could do xyz and you're feeling frustrated because you can't. I feel frustrated too when I am not able to do what I want, but that is not an option right now."
 - If the feeling is based in conflict, a teacher investigates the situation, checks in with each kid by asking their wants and needs, and then coaches them on appropriate ways to solve the conflict. This might sound like "Look at them and say- I don't want you to hit me." "Ask them to let you know when they're done with it so you can be next."

It's OK not to share

- **Why we say it:** From *It's OK Not to Share*: "It's okay if it's not hurting people or property." Forced sharing is a cultural preference BUT not relationally appropriate. As an adult you would never just give something you had to someone just because they expressed interest in it, so why is this the expectation of children? Valuable lessons are learned from knowing that you are able to play out your entire idea without the fear that someone else is going to take it away. Valuable lessons are also learned from waiting to play with something that you have an interest in. Not being forced to share also creates an intrinsic sense of self, meaning seeing yourself and your ideas as important. You can't learn to share something until you know what it feels like to really own it with no threat of it being taken away.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:**
 - Teachers might say, "I know you want to use that dinosaur but [kid] is using it right now. I can make a list and I will let you know when it is your turn. I wonder what you will do in the meantime?" A teacher might help the kid waiting manage the feelings that arise from not getting instant gratification. Being able to develop a new idea when your first choice is not available is an important life skill. Waiting helps children develop resilience, be creative, and manage frustration, the goal being for children to eventually take turns with other children without teacher/caregiver intervention.

It's OK to go up the slide

- **Why we say it:** This addresses SYC's belief about healthy physical, social, emotional and intellectual risk to build confidence and resilience in children. If you think about it, why is this a rule and why do we follow it? Children need opportunities to practice risky behavior. As teachers, our job is to balance risk and learning, and to help children assess risk on their own. Through this they learn in an authentic way how to evaluate risk, take chances, and make mistakes and try again after mistakes are made. It opens up a world for them to rely on themselves and their knowledge to test out risk, BUT first they have a safe and secure place to practice these risks with teachers who can help them evaluate their internal feelings, coach them through challenges, and support their confidence to try again.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:**
 - We can only safely allow children to try risky behavior because we provide CLOSE SUPERVISION and we KNOW OUR KIDS. Trust is a vital component of risk taking. We ask ourselves as a staff: What's the worst that can happen? How likely is that to happen? Why are you uncomfortable with this as teacher? How can we lessen the chances of that happening while not taking away from children's learning? Is the learning worth the risk?
 - Risk looks different for every kid. Teachers use language & coaching to encourage children to try something risky for them by saying "I know kids need to move their own body but I won't let you fall." We teach them to focus, evaluate and talk through the process. We also celebrate their risks and/or validate their emotions and feelings surrounding the risk.

Have any questions, comments or topic suggestions? Let's chat! e-mail me at alicia@syccolumbus.org.

Office hours: Tuesday 9:30-10:30 am, Wednesday 1-2pm or by appointment