



# NEWSLETTER

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## Dear Caregivers,

We made it through the holidays, give yourself a pat on the back! I'm sure there were lots of conversations about your kids and what they're up to. Maybe you were around other families and you had the thought "parenting is hard no matter how you do it" and perhaps "Man, we are doing this DIFFERENTLY." I want to assure you that SYC's model is the latest in evidence-based early childhood research. SYC's focus on rich relationships allows for an environment where children's needs for safety and security are met and they are able to focus more on freely exploring and acquiring skills through authentic child-led play. The use of relationships is our behavior management plan, we welcome conflict and challenges because life is full of difficult social and emotional situations and we know the enormous benefit of building confidence in ourselves through navigating emotions and conflict. Below are the second half 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

Remember these are the 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:

### What's your idea?/ What's your plan?

- **Why we say it:** This question is great for slowing things down and getting curious. Often, adults immediately shut down our child's play idea because it looks unsafe or something we're not comfortable with; however, that instinct assumes that we know our children's play better than they do. This leads to squashing ideas that are actually harmless. Getting curious first allows us to get that information and make an informed decision about whether or not this play is safe or needs a boundary. It gives time to determine what is happening, the motivation behind it and allows children to be the expert on their play. This simple phrase can lead to children gaining a greater vocabulary, risk assessment skills, advocacy skills, the ability to think through an idea and bring it to fruition, emotional regulation skills to manage disappointed feelings, persistence, resilience and confidence that comes with innovating an idea; truly the list is endless.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** A teacher might say, "I'm noticing that ....., I'm wondering what your idea is?" or "Hey, this looks dangerous to me, I wonder what the idea/plan is?" or "Wow, you've gotten out ALL the [materials] I wonder what your idea is?" This simple statement also allows kids to take an idea and make it a thought through plan. Also, this phrase does not create a power struggle and leads to more open communication. Teachers can then follow-up and say, "I know you want to do xyz but that's not a choice right now/ that's not a safe plan/ I know it's not okay to dump everything out." A teacher might then redirect the child to another idea or suggestion of something that is a choice and then help them manage the feelings associated with this disappointment. If after the child explains their idea a teacher decides it is something they can do, a teacher can ask more questions. Both scenarios give the opportunity for a rich learning experience in an authentic child-directed way.

### What do you need?

- **Why we say it:** Since the goal at SYC is for kids to learn to be more mindful of their thoughts, ideas and emotions, this statement gives pause to help them learn to evaluate these very things. Often, we walk around this world unconsciously doing things, this statement allows us to take a pause, reflect and get curious. While reflecting you might check in with your body and any sensations you are feeling, check in with your emotions and to see if you have an unmet need, re-assess or elaborate on your plan or idea. It also reaffirms the relationship, that another cares for you or sees you and gives space for curiosity and connection.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** Teachers might expand on this in similar ways to above. Often times this phrase is used when children are visually dysregulated, meaning their bodies are moving without a plan (like in a meltdown) and they seem overwhelmed by something- be it big feelings, something sensory based, unmet needs, etc. Here teachers lend their calm to children to help support them through whatever is going on. This co-regulation might look like modeling a calming breath, gently holding their body and providing a deep squeeze, encouraging them to go to the bathroom or eat a snack. The teacher is utilizing that power of their relationship with the child, in order to support them through an uncomfortable situation. Children are learning emotional regulation through the safety of their relationship and the trust that the teacher can handle them, even when things feel out of control or uncomfortable.

## Even grownups make mistakes

- **Why we say it:** To build confidence and resilience in preschool children they need to learn that making mistakes is a natural part of life. Making mistakes can lead to frustration and big emotional outbursts and can lead children to internalize what this says about their abilities, especially as compared to older children and adults. Also, children often put adults on a pedestal of being infallible, and who likes to make mistakes around someone we feel is infallible? To help children understand that mistakes are just a part of life, we model this for children. By stating “even grownups make mistakes” it highlights for children when grownups mess up and it also models for them how one can recover from making a mistake. This might seem small stakes now, but think of how important it is to develop the confidence that all humans make mistakes and it says nothing about you as a person. If we want our children to know that mistakes are really okay to make, they need to observe that they are not the only ones making them.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** This is a phrase that comes up in a lot of conversations with children. After a child makes a mistake and points it out, a teacher might follow up with “mistakes are okay. I make them all the time.” Teachers might draw attention to mistakes they make in teachable moments. As the relationship strengthens, children begin to point out mistakes that teachers have made. This gives the opportunity for teachers to model emotional intelligence, frustration tolerance, coping skills, etc. Teachers also might say this during teacher talk with another teacher or parent. “Wow, I make mistakes all the time” and another teacher might respond with “I still like you even when you make mistakes” or “I’m not mad at you” these phrases help solidify for children that mistakes are a part of life and that people will still like you in spite of these perceived flaws.

## You can do hard things! / You are so capable!

- **Why we say it:** Doing hard things is uncomfortable especially when we lack the confidence that we will make it through. SYC knows that avoiding uncomfortable situations is not preparing children or ourselves for this big crazy world. We also know the only way to not feel so uncomfortable is to practice being uncomfortable and making it through. This not only applies to difficult tasks but also difficult social and emotional situations. When children do not have the confidence within themselves, it is so important that we share our confidence in them. Think about the impact and importance of a trusted grown-up saying to you that they know this is difficult and yet they know that you can do it, that you are capable. This is where great personal growth and learning happens, to be presented with a task that appears difficult and to make it through, despite it being hard. As children grow these are the voices that will be their internal monologues– what a powerful thing!
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** A teacher might say, “Wow, that looks really tricky but I know that YOU can do hard things, you are so capable.” or “It looks like you’re feeling scared to do xyz, I wonder if you are also excited to try something new. Did you know you can feel scared and excited at the same time.. You can feel two feelings at the same time!” or “I know it’s hard to tell someone what you need, but I know you can do hard things. Would you like me to be there to support you while you do it?” All of these scenarios are built on the deep relationship between teacher and student. Teachers might say this after observing a child working through something. They might say, “I’m noticing that....” helping children reflect on their accomplishments is a key skill as well. Preschool children are greatly impacted by seeing themselves as noticeable and capable humans. For children whose temperament is more timid this can be especially impactful to help them build confidence and gain new skills.

## I’ll put your name on the list.

- **Why we say it:** This phrase lets kids know that they’re seen and validated but honors another person’s need to have ownership over something so that they can complete their idea. Putting their name on a list is a visual representation that they will get a turn. It also allows them a place to put their anxiety of needing to wait their turn. Waiting can also bring up big feelings and this provides an opportunity for children to work on emotional regulation and managing uncomfortable situations related to not receiving instant gratification. This also provides opportunities for kids to have authentic instances to learn and develop skills to build resilience that they will indeed make it through uncomfortable situations. This may seem small but the latest evidence based anxiety research focuses on children needing to experience situations that make them feel uncomfortable with supportive caregivers instead of avoiding these situations. Great learning comes sitting in uncomfortable feelings and realizing that you will make it through.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** After putting their name on the list a teacher might say, “It’s hard to wait, I wonder what you will do while you’re waiting?” Sometimes amazing ideas come from not being able to do your first choice. Teachers also might validate the feelings surrounding needing to wait. “I know you really wanted to play with xyz and you’re on the list. I get frustrated when I’m not able to do exactly what I want to do” or they may respond with “I know that [child] gets to have as long a turn as they need with xyz, just like you will when it becomes your turn.” Teachers will also refer children back to the list if a child asks again. This builds visual tracking and literacy skills since children will need to identify their and other children’s names. It also dissolves power struggles because it’s the list, not the teacher that is delaying the gratification. SYC children quickly learn this is how classrooms operate and begin to easily advocate for themselves by saying “can you make a list for this” or “can you put my name on the list” which is concrete evidence to the power (and benefit) of using lists to build skills.

## Different people like different things

- **Why we say it:** Preschool children are naturally egocentric beings due to their brain’s immaturity. Being able to take another’s perspective is a skill that does not develop until the end of the preschool years. Realizing that each person has their own thoughts, feelings and perspectives is the psychological concept called theory of mind. From the website SimplyPsychology “Theory of mind is our ability to recognize that other people have thoughts, feelings, and perspectives that may be different from our own. It’s a key social skill that usually develops in early childhood, helping us predict behavior, show empathy, and navigate relationships.” Knowing that egocentricity is developmentally appropriate in the preschool years helps teachers (and parents) to have appropriate expectations for their children. A child often doesn’t show empathy or reciprocity in relationships because their brain is immature, not because they are malicious. As adults, we can help model perspective in the context of their relationships. This statement acknowledges that we are all individuals and can make our own decisions about what we like, but it does not place a judgement on it. It gives children the opportunity to practice perspective taking and helps children evaluate and solidify their sense of self.

- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** Oftentimes this statement is met by a chorus of “I like that” and “I don’t like that” from other kids. It’s a statement that can lead to reflection and evaluation of one’s own self. It can lead to rich discussions about children, the different things that children like and how that is different for everyone, however the importance is that there is no judgement about likes and dislikes. Often it gives teachers the opportunity to normalize people liking different things while not diminishing one or the other. A phrase that may come up here is “Don’t yuck someone’s yum.” This works in the context of food but also in really anything. This lays a foundation that differences are a natural part of life and should be celebrated instead of feared.

### I hear you saying

- **Why we say it:** Children are given the opportunity to be the expert on their own thoughts, ideas and beliefs. As teachers we try not to make assumptions about what children are trying to communicate but know it can be difficult to put our thoughts and feelings into words. This statement gives the child the message that we hear them and their words are powerful. This is especially important as children develop greater language and communication skills to enforce that using words is a more effective communication tool than communicating physically, for instance hitting, pushing, biting etc. These are really powerful ways to express yourself because they get the message across quickly and concisely when you don’t have the language to do so. When we tell children “to use your words” they need to buy into the fact that their words will get their message across just as powerfully, saying “I hear you saying...” give children just that.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** This statement is often used as a clarifier to help a child’s message get through. Teachers might say, “I hear you saying xyz, is that right?” or “you can let me know if I’m not understanding the message correctly.” This gives children an opportunity to pause, reflect and connect with their message. Teachers might follow up with “what do you want to happen?” or “what do you need them to do?” or “what do you need?” This all strengthens their cognitive and linguistic development because they have to be able to reflect on their emotions and needs. If there is a conflict the teacher might say “I hear you saying.... And I hear them saying.... It sounds like you two have different ideas. How are we going to solve this problem?” which is the basis of managing and negotiating a conflict. Wouldn’t it be nice if someone could break down all your conflicts this way?

### What do you want to tell them?

- **Why we say it:** We all know that human interaction can be really tricky to negotiate. Preschoolers are just beginning to learn how to navigate, negotiate, and manage social interactions. They’re still gaining important skills to be able to communicate their wants, needs, and ideas. We know that sometimes in interactions, especially ones with big feelings associated with them, it’s hard to access language and communicate your feelings and needs. This is where our connection to our kids comes in. In this we honor both children in the interaction and help them manage a tricky social situation, giving them the tools to set a limit with a peer, advocate for their needs, protect their bodies, ask for and give consent, problem solve, and negotiate conflict.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** Often this phrase is used during conflict. “I noticed you and [child] were playing, I now see your face looks really mad.... I heard you make a screaming sound.... You seem really frustrated, I wonder what you want to say to them?” This gives the child the opportunity to express their needs/ emotions and advocate for themselves. A teacher can also provide social coaching to help the children learn to negotiate conflict and problem solve. Depending on the age of the child, a teacher might say “I hear [child] saying that he did not want you to touch their body... They did not like what you were saying/doing.... They don’t want you to call them that... That’s too loud for their ears...” For older preschoolers the teacher might say, “I hear you saying that.... Tell them that .... Turn to them and say ....” This gives the child an opportunity to advocate for themselves and negotiate the conflict with support but without someone doing it for them. The teacher can also support the other child by stating “I see this happened, [child] wants to tell you something. No one is in trouble, but we need to listen to [child]’s message.” A teacher might also encourage further problem solving and conversation to help their pair reconnect and repair. This protects the dignity of both children, encourages and models respect, and gives them each a voice in the situation.

### I wonder how you can start?

- **Why we say it:** SYC recognizes that sometimes children have amazing ideas but it’s really hard to figure out how to get them started. This phrase is simple and says to a child, I see you and know you are the expert on your idea, but how can you break it down into tinier, more manageable pieces to help it come to fruition? We know the rich learning that comes from being able to do this and that this is a life skill needed in all areas of our lives. Isn’t it great to be able to learn to do this in a safe space that focuses on connection and curiosity so that you can build the skills to initiate and innovate your idea.
- **What we say to expand on this phrase:** A teacher might say, “I hear you have this idea. Let’s evaluate so we can make it happen. What materials do you think you will need? How much space will that take? Let’s assess the risk to make sure it’s safe.” Through this interaction kids can learn crucial skills of taking an idea and planning it out. They might learn language and communication skills to take something in their mind and figuring out how to make it happen. They might learn the crucial skill of breaking something into manageable chunks which helps build resilience. They might gain confidence that their ideas can really work and they can advocate and communicate for their own ideas and needs.

Have any questions, comments or topic suggestions? Let’s chat! e-mail me at [alicia@syccolumbus.org](mailto:alicia@syccolumbus.org).

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