

# Healing Words in the Family

## Fact Sheet



**Words spoken by people in positions of authority** can seriously affect a child's life. Parents, teachers and peers have the most impact on young people. "Hurtful words can haunt people all their lives and may lead to heart disease, depression, suicide or stress, or even the aggression witnessed in the Littleton, Colorado shootings," reports W. Penn Handwerker, a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut. <sup>(1)</sup>



**Children are deeply affected** by the harsh words of their peers. 160,000 kids are estimated to skip school each day because of intimidation by their peers, <sup>(2)</sup> and 5.7 million children in grades 6 to 10 have experienced some kind of bullying. <sup>(3)</sup>



Researchers have found that **a few kind words can boost the spirit** and pep of elderly relatives. Avoid using the negative stereotypes of aging, and watch Grandma kick up her heels more often. <sup>(4)</sup>



**Men are just as likely to gossip** as women; they just call it "shop talk," or "shooting the breeze," or even "networking."



**Some family members use gossip as a tool** to impress people and exert influence. The effect usually wears out, however, as relatives who gossip too much become known as "big mouths" who can't be trusted. Family members may even come to resent them for wasting so much of their time or for stirring up trouble. <sup>(5)</sup>



Oversensitivity to perceived insults can cause people to bear a grudge and take revenge. "Not being able to handle insults is the root of many family quarrels," says family counselor and author, Zelig Pliskin. The good news is that **people can learn to change their attitude** and overcome the pain of insults. <sup>(6)</sup>



**Gossip has been shown to boomerang back on the gossiper.** "When you gossip, you become associated with the characteristics you describe, ultimately leading those characteristics to be 'transferred' to you," reports researchers in the APA Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. <sup>(7)</sup>



**It is tempting to share something told to you in confidence,** with family members, especially with a spouse or parent. This act of "I'll just tell you, but don't repeat it to anyone else" often causes embarrassment, financial loss, or other damage to the person who confided in you. Remember that once you reveal a secret, the secret becomes your master, for you live in fear that the secret may become known.

<sup>(1)</sup> "Hurtful Words Can Have Physical Effect, Says Uconn researcher," by Karen Grava, Office of University Communications. [www.news.uconn.edu/re199010.htm](http://www.news.uconn.edu/re199010.htm), 8/16/99.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cited in "Bullies: The Disturbing Epidemic Behind School Violence," People Magazine, June 4, 2001.

<sup>(3)</sup> "Bullying Widespread in U.S. Schools, Survey Finds," by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development as reported in Journal of the Medical American Association (JAMA), April 25, 2001.

<sup>(4)</sup> "Positive Talk About Elderly Can Have An Effect on How They Function," in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, November 22, 1999.

<sup>(5)</sup> Levin, J & Arluke, A. *Gossip: The Inside Scoop*. New York: Plenum, 1987.

<sup>(6)</sup> Pliskin, Z. *Gateway to Happiness*. New York: JLE, 1983.

<sup>(7)</sup> "Be Careful with that Gossip" by J. Skowronski et al., Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, April 1998.