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## The power of words

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Oprah Winfrey says in her book 'What I know for sure' that 'words can destroy, but they can also heal'. When we see someone who has lost weight, often, instead of complimenting them on looking good or healthy, we respond with, "You must be dieting as you have lost weight!" While the intention is not to hurt or devalue the person, what gets communicated subtly, is that the individual while he has thinned and is looking good must have lost weight by dieting. We thus rob them of the credit of the feeling that they are looking good and fit.

Often our intention is perhaps to celebrate, but the words, the language and the tone we use is not always complimentary. Marshall Rosenberg, the author of a technique called Non-Violent or Compassionate Communication says that people tend to address one another violently by using harsh language when what is required is actually gentleness and compassion when we talk to one another.

If we are to cultivate the habit of using language when speaking to each other in a pleasant fashion we must first recognise within ourselves the need to be considerate, soft spoken, patient and gentle. Gentleness does not mean lack of firmness but it certainly means kindness.

A child scores 75 per cent in a class exam and shows the marks to her mother, who instead of complimenting the child, say, "You should have got 85! In saying so, she has robbed the child of the opportunity to feel good about the marks she has actually scored. Speaking compassionately would entail first complimenting the child, celebrating her marks and then perhaps not telling her that she should have scored 85 per cent, but asking her meaningfully what she could have done better her marks. The child feels well regarded and responds with positively, instead of reacting to her mother's unintentional put down.

Words, when used with care and compassion, can restore instead of wound. A famous quip says 'use words softly, sweetly and gently for one day you might have to eat them.'

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