Think before You Speak

I use this activity after we have talked about keeping children out of the middle. We talk about how no parent intentionally puts their child in the middle, but it can easily happen.

Cut the statements below into strips. Give each pair of participants one of the slips and ask them to pretend this is something their child said to them. Have them share what they would like to say (we are all human after all!) and then what they actually should/could say to their child at that point. This exercise gives participants a chance to practice pausing, thinking and reframing before letting potentially hurtful words come out of their mouths. Depending on the time available and the size of the class, I may switch statements around so pairs get more practice or I may ask for volunteers to read/share with the rest of the group.

This also gives an opportunity to talk about how some of these statements give us as parents an opportunity to find out what our children are really thinking; they can be a door to more conversation. For example, in the first situation when Dad asks about the new boyfriend, a parent can just say they will talk to Dad directly and see what he wants to know. But an even greater gift is to say *“You can tell him whatever you’d like to tell him. It’s not a secret. What would you like to tell him?”*  When a child asks, “*What should I tell him,”* she/he may be trying to figure out if it’s necessary to keep some information or some feelings a secret. What a gift to take that burden away!

Dad keeps asking me about your new boyfriend. What should I tell him?

Mom wants to know when you’re going to send the money you owe her.

Dad says the divorce was your idea, that you broke up our family.

Mom wanted me to give you this bill for my dental work.

Mom says you are more about hunting than about us kids

Dad says it’s not his job to make me do homework because he only sees me on the weekend.

Dad said to tell you that he isn’t coming to the door anymore. I’m supposed to just go out to his car when he gets here.

Dad wants to know what you’re doing with all the money he gives you. He said he’s not going to pay for school pictures.

Mom wants to know why you don’t send back the stuff I bring when I come here.

Dad wants to know how come you don’t let me play the computer games he gave me when I’m here.