



School Resource Officer

By SGT Cristie Jacobsen, SRO Supervisor, Fargo Police Department

Words Have Consequences

Words are a powerful thing. When we recognize the power and potential impact that our words can have on others, I hope you choose yours wisely. I strongly encourage you to speak with your children to be mindful of the words they say, the context in which they say them, and the location where they say them.

We all recognize that children tend to act or speak before thinking. We also recognize that children are prone to saying things they don't mean in the moment due to an emotional reaction. That being said, we still cannot discount the negative impact hurtful words can have on the listener.

In the state of North Dakota, a child is culpable for a criminal charge starting at the age of 10. So often when we think of illegal acts, we think about theft or causing physical harm, and thus we teach our kids accordingly to not steal or hit. But, ever increasing is the need to teach our children that their words can also have consequences. In addition to school consequences, a child who threatens to harm or cause another to fear for their safety, whether they meant the words or not, are illegal. Depending on the totality of the circumstances, a variety of offenses may be applicable, such as:

- Disorderly conduct (B Misdemeanor)
- Harassment (A or B Misdemeanor)
- Menacing (A Misdemeanor)
- Terrorizing (C Felony)

As law enforcement officers, while attempting to determine if a crime has been committed, we take the perspective of the individual who is the receiver of the words into higher account than the intent of the person saying them. For example, if one child says to another, "I hate you, I'm going to kill you." If these words cause the child who was threatened to be afraid, then a law was violated even if the child who said them says they didn't mean it.

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School Resource Officer, continued

Now, I am not saying that every time a child 10 or older who speaks out in anger or frustration is going to be charged with a crime, because that's not accurate nor appropriate. My intention in writing this article is to teach the values of our legal system. It is my goal to promote respect for people and property through education and accountability. Also, to help reduce juvenile crime by helping students formulate an awareness of rules, authority and justice. But, I also write this article because I care. I care about the kids who attend school here, as well as their families. I want to do all that I can to ensure a safe environment, physically, as well as mentally and emotionally, within our school system and our community.

I believe this is a cooperative team effort that takes the work and commitment of all of us: parents, students, school staff and the police - *together*.

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