



## **My Word! A Lexicon of Peaceful and Powerful Responsiveness.**

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Several people have asked about the four levels of responsiveness that I described in my keynote address for the 2009 MEI Conference: My Word!: A Lexicon of Peaceful and Powerful Responsiveness. As I mentioned at the time, I am in the early stages of sorting out what I want to say about levels of assertiveness in our responses to bothersome situations. So, I'd like to sort that out a bit more here.

In *SongWorks 1: Singing in the Education of Children* (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997), we wrote of four levels of assertiveness for dealing with behaviors in a classroom. Using the two-word phrase, "Sit down," we described ways to increase the intensity of our meaning by the ways in which we speak the words. Level one is a courteous invitation. Level two is assertive and matter-of-fact. Level three is aggressive and very firm, and Level Four is harsh and oppressive. It was these four levels of assertiveness that gave me the idea for a framework in our responsiveness to difficult situations.

**A habit of extremes.** My theory is that many of our responses to bothersome actions and words fall into the categories of 1 and 4, and these responses are rarely satisfying. In Level 1, we give our power away to another in order to avoid "rocking the boat," or upsetting the person further. And in Level 4, we are out-of-control when we use bullying behavior to punish one who has bothered us. For some of us, the repression of our feelings that are a hallmark of Level 1 responses builds and builds until we hear ourselves jumping from Level 1 to Level 4, with nothing in between.

Levels 2 and 3 offer alternatives to these two extremes. By developing calm, assertive ways to respond and reply, we can save ourselves and others the emotional turmoil and stress that so often accompanies difficult encounters and confrontations . . . encounters that leave neither of us satisfied and leave one of us feeling subjugated by the other. Levels 2 and 3 offer both *peacefulness and powerfulness*, and these are the goals of this framework for responsiveness.