

Welcome to my blog posts from partlycloudy.co.uk, the travel journal I wrote when living in Singapore from 2012-2017. Not wanting to do away with website content, I've made PDFs of some of the posts and uploaded them here, to keep the adventures alive.

## **Bad language**

*Feb 27 2013*

SmallMonkey said a rude word over dinner, something utterly out of character for him. I put it down to him being tired, told him off, assumed he wouldn't do it again. But he went and texted it to a friend. "PING!" went his phone with a short, sharp message back – from the friend's mom. Sadly for us both he'd picked a friend whose mother is the opposite of OK with this sort of thing. While he dropped the phone like a hot brick, realising the gravity of what he'd done, I picked up the trail and set about apologising. As a result he now has one less pal for two weeks, and my name is mud.

It's one of the tricky things about expat living, that we don't just have Mandarin and Singlish to navigate but every cultural and social code that fellow expats bring with them. Everyone has a different value, and those values need to be memorised, and our kids have to remember them too. Sometimes we get it and sometimes, well...

In the same way that I often have to dial down my 'eccentric Brit' act when I sense people are finding it a bit too much, my son is having to do the same. Poor little s\*d (whoops) – as if he's not isolated enough just by being here. Haven't we all said a rude word at the age of eight? Maybe not. And maybe in some cultures it's just not OK.

Our personalities are being put to the test, and the downers can cut short a meetup for us both. For every social blip that happens at school, I've experienced something similar. A homesick, lonely morning with new friends to whom I don't feel connected. A sticky moment where I've not got my point across in the way I intended. At least I'm old enough to make sense of it, and I don't get my devices taken away for two weeks.

My new friends here only know me because we are living in the same country at the same time. We didn't meet at work, in the playground, at baby classes or the school gate. We only have our current lives to go by, and if that's not understood there's no history to put things into context. So if we offend someone, it's taken at face value.

These are valuable lessons, and not without their merits. We can't get away with things we might have got away with at home. There is nothing wrong with pointing out to our son that what happens in our Singapore kitchen is just as important as it always was in our London home. That rude words are banned here too. Just because we're miles away from 'home', people can still hear us, will still take offence.

There are lots of levels to what was essentially a minor incident and I tackled the obvious ones first, those being Internet safety and messaging protocol: 'Those words you're writing don't flutter about in the air,' I said, 'they go into someone's house, and that person reads them, and the mother reads them, and then you're in trouble.'

*'And then so are you,'* he added, to his credit.