



### What did I say?

When my daughter Melise first started talking, she surprised me one day by saying “uh-oh.” It was cute, of course, but my first reaction was: Where did she learn that?

I don’t say that, so she must have heard it somewhere else. But where?

As the next week passed, Melise continued to say “uh-oh” to every little accident and upset. With a laugh, I swore to everyone who heard it that she didn’t learn it from me. Then one day we were outside trying to herd our chickens and guineas into the chicken house. In a flash, one of the guineas flew into a nearby tree. Melise and I watched as it flew up and the first thing out of my mouth was “Uh-oh!” It came out so naturally that I had to finally admit to myself that I was the source of Melise’s new vocabulary.

Toddlers are little imitators and we can catch remarkable reflections of ourselves in their games. Melise does a great imitation of me on the phone. I’m on the phone several times each day with family and friends and Melise is always within hearing distance. When she picks up a pretend phone (or a banana or domino or remote control—anything that can be held to her head in a phone-like manner) I hear something like this:

“Hiiiiii! . . . uh-huh . . . no . . . no! . . . yeah . . . oh! . . . oh? . . . uh-oh.”

At this point she takes the phone away from her head to look grumpily at it as if she lost signal then puts it back to her ear. “Oh, uh-huh . . . nooooo . . . yes . . . bye!”

“Is that really what Mommy sounds like?” I ask Melise, but she only looks at me as if to say “Why were you listening in on my private conversation?”

## The Laughing Mom: humorous tales of motherhood

Written by Susan Pfaltzgraff

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You learn quickly with toddlers that they're absorbing everything you say and do, not just the intentional lessons. One thing I want her to learn is to be kind to others. Since we don't have a lot of other children around, we practice on our pets. So I was a little appalled one day when some chickens got close to her and she angrily yelled, "Go, go!" My confusion at the source of this behavior was only momentary as I realized that I do exact same thing when I fear that the chickens are pecking her. All my instructions to Melise to be gentle with the birds had been completely rewritten as soon as she saw my behavior! I wonder when she'll understand the phrase "Do as I say, not as I do."

But then, there are times that I do want her to chase the pecking chickens away from herself.

Just the other day, in fact, a chicken was paying too much attention to Melise's pants, which were colorfully decorated. She started whining because the chicken was making her nervous. I told her to either walk away or tell the chicken to shoo. Melise contemplated what I said and then started shuffling her feet.

My own mother was standing nearby and broke into giggles. I had no idea what she was giggling at, but started to repeat my instructions to Melise. My mom interrupted me with "You told her to shoe!"

Still confused, I turned back to Melise to see her holding one of her shoes out, waving it wildly at the chicken! I was soon in giggles myself. Just another lesson for me about how complicated communication actually is.