

## Calm Voices, Calmer Kids

Sometimes it's hard to keep your cool, but less yelling means better communication

Parents know that in the midst of the mayhem, staying calm (aka not yelling) is a golden rule. But unless you're made of stone, it's pretty tough to maintain a measured tone when you're dealing with kid's day in and day out.

There are very few situations that merit yelling, other than when a child is doing something dangerous or harmful. Yet "I don't think there's a parent who hasn't yelled," "This will happen. Let it go."

So why is it so important to be firm — without raising your voice?

### What's wrong with yelling?

- **Upping the ante, losing the message:** Yelling often fails to get the point across because emotions can overcome the message. It will also likely escalate the situation, and the child's aggression, be it verbal or physical.
- **Heard it all before:** If parents yell all the time, "kids may either shut down or ignore it because it's nothing new." "Sometimes, a whispered 'I'm very disappointed with your actions' is much more startling to a child than a screaming rant."
- **Hard on self-esteem:** We know that yelling and harsh parenting are associated with lower self-esteem for kids, and can affect their performance in school. Kids who are the object of verbal aggression are at risk for aggressive or disruptive behavior.
- **Missing out on the positive:** When yelling is the chronic mode of communication, both children and parents are missing out on the chance to form positive, affectionate bonds. And for kids predisposed to anxiety and depression, internalizing these negative interactions may be the tipping point.
- **You feel bad, too:** Meanwhile, blowouts can leave parents feeling guilty, frustrated and demoralized. Adults who express anger in negative ways increase their chronic stress, which contributes to health problems.

### Why calmer is better

Addressing inappropriate behavior calmly enables you to focus on teaching the child what's problematic about his behavior, and following through with effective consequences.

- **Modeling behavior is major:** When parents practice healthy self-regulation, it helps kids learn how to self-regulate themselves.
- **Kids feel safer.** The best style of parenting features "a high degree of nurturing, firm but kind," says clinical psychologist Melanie Fernandez. As much as children and teens may act like they want control, what really makes them feel safe are calm, consistent, fair authority figures.
- If you work on specific strategies that help yourself feel calmer, you can help your children learn to regulate better.

## Tips for Parents

- **Identify problem interactions:** Pinpoint the recurring problems that frequently set you and your kids off. If getting out the door for school in the morning is a chronic issue, solutions might include laying out their clothes and showering the night before, or everyone waking up a bit earlier. Try to break it down into steps you can tackle calmly
- **Create consistency:** With younger kids, it helps to create a set routine with simple, one-step directions that could include visual aids, not to mention plenty of labeled praise and rewards.
- **Consider triggers:** Being aware of the context of the behavior allows for calmer responses. If we recognize when a child is cranky because he missed his snack or is overtired, it can be easier to temper our own frayed feelings.
- **Understanding = patience:** It's also important for parents to know and understand their children's capabilities, since this can help them become more patient.
- **Time management:** Trying to do too much causes stress. "The times I lose it are the times when I'm already overtaxing myself,". Parents trying to multi-task, increases the risk of kids misbehaving. "Just be there with your kids; it's less likely they'll throw their breakfast on the floor."
- **Count to 10:** Take a break and breathe. It's important to recognize when you're about to lose control so you can step away from the situation, even leaving the room when you can do it safely.

Sited: childming.org, Beth Arky