

Peaceful Parenting

Elementary kids can make parents proud one minute and frustrate them the next. Without strategies to handle trying behavior, some parents resort to yelling, and wish they could find a way to stop.

The good news? There are many techniques you can use instead of shouting. Here are 10 programs and strategies that offer alternatives to raised voices. Try them and see what works for you.



1. Put behavior in perspective.

Knowing what's "normal" for elementary children can keep frustrations in check. Their push toward independence and their growing knowledge of words may lead to unacceptable behavior, like back talk. When you respond, show by example how you want your youngster to act. For instance, instead of shouting at him, let him know in a calm voice that he hurt your feelings.

2. Count to three.

The next time your youngster whines, throws a tantrum, or behaves in a way you want to stop, try using the "1-2-3" system developed by child discipline expert Thomas Phelan. Without lecturing or showing emotion, simply say, "That's one" for the first offense. If the behavior continues for a few seconds longer, say, "That's two." The third time, state, "That's three. Take five," and send your child to her room for a break (try one minute per year of age). Decide in advance which behaviors will warrant using "1-2-3."

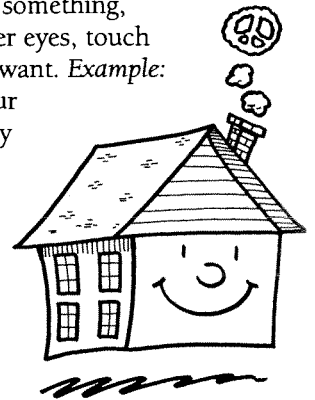
3. Put it in writing.

Child psychologist Ruth Peters suggests putting a behavior plan in writing. Start by listing daily expectations, such as brushing teeth and doing homework. Next, write down unacceptable behaviors like tattling. Finally, list rewards, which can be as simple as extra computer time. Decide how many tasks your youngster must complete—and the limit on the number of violations he can have—to receive rewards. Post the agreement where he can easily see it, and help him check off the list throughout the day.



4. Ask effectively.

When you ask your child to do something, bend down to her level. Look into her eyes, touch her gently, and clearly say what you want. *Example:* "Jenny, please sit down and start your homework." As you speak, gesture by pointing to the chair, then her textbook. Notice her efforts when she does what you've asked ("Great! You've started your homework. Now you'll have free time after dinner").



5. Be clear.

Whenever possible, instead of simply refusing your child's request to do something, tell him specifically *when* he will be allowed to do it. For example, if he asks you if a friend can visit, don't just say, "No, Mike can't come over to play" or, "Not until you've picked up your things." Try explaining, "You may invite Mike over after you've put your coat and shoes in the closet."

6. Give notice.

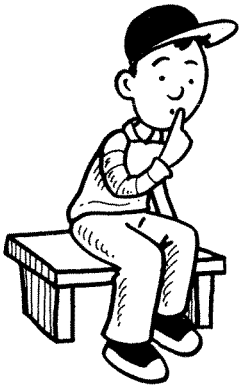
Imagine how you'd feel if you were talking to a friend on the telephone and you suddenly got disconnected. That's how your child might feel when she's asked to stop an activity without warning. Try to give advance notice when she needs to shift her attention. *Examples:* "Ten minutes till we eat. Finish that stage of your video game"; "We have to leave the amusement park in a half hour. Which ride do you want to go on again?"



7. Find solutions.

When you feel like raising your voice, view whatever’s upsetting you as a chance to solve a problem. Invite your youngster to suggest ways to remedy the situation. *Example:*

“We have one TV and two people who want to watch different shows. What could we do?” Then, ask, “What might happen if we do that?” Be prepared to help your child think of solutions. Over time, he will learn to consider choices and choose ideas that work best.



8. Tame conflict step by step.

Conflict-resolution skills can bring peace to times of tension. Try family psychiatrist Lyndon Waugh’s suggestion for the whole family. First, think. Recognize that you are angry, and tell yourself anger is okay as long as you respond appropriately. Consider what you are really angry about. Next, talk and listen. Calmly state your feelings, admit any responsibility for the problem, and listen to the other person’s point of view. Finally, brainstorm solutions. Pick an idea everyone can live with, and choose a time to get together to talk about whether it’s working.

9. Watch for warning signs.

Pay attention to how you feel just before you become angry. Does your heart beat faster? Do you feel pressure in your chest? Do you clench your hands? By knowing your warning signs, you can catch yourself before you erupt. Think of ways you can calm down, such as breathing deeply or walking away for a few minutes.

10. Know your limits.

When your youngster “pushes your buttons,” it may be a sign that something else is going on. For example, if your child’s ungratefulness upsets you or makes you angry, ask yourself if you’re overindulging her. Perhaps there’s something you wished you had when you were growing up. Learning to identify what’s happening under the surface and separating your issues from your youngster’s behavior will go a long way toward putting you in control of your anger.

Resources

For more suggestions, check your local library for these titles:

1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2–12 by Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D.

Don’t Be Afraid to Discipline: For Ages 7–16 by Dr. Ruth Peters

Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline: The 7 Basic Skills for Turning Conflict into Cooperation by Becky A. Bailey, Ph.D.

Kid Cooperation: How to Stop Yelling, Nagging & Pleading and Get Kids to Cooperate by Elizabeth Pantley

Peaceful Parents, Peaceful Kids: Practical Ways to Create a Calm and Happy Home by Naomi Drew

Raising a Thinking Preteen: The “I Can Problem Solve” Program for 8- to 12-Year-Olds by Myrna B. Shure, Ph.D.

Raising Your Spirited Child: A Guide for Parents Whose Child Is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, and Energetic by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

Tired of Yelling: Teaching Our Children to Resolve Conflict by Lyndon D. Waugh, M.D.

When Your Kids Push Your Buttons and What You Can Do About It: For Parents of Toddlers to Teens by Bonnie Harris

Your School-Age Child: From Kindergarten Through Sixth Grade by Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D.

Editor’s Note: This list was compiled for information purposes only and does not imply endorsement of these particular books. Feel free to pick and choose the ideas that make sense for your family.

