

Tired of Yelling at Your Child? 6 Tips To Stop Screaming and Start Parenting Effectively

By Janet Lehman, MSW

If you're a parent, you've probably been there: your child says or does something that pushes your buttons, and the next thing you know, you're yelling and screaming at the top of your lungs. And they're responding in kind.

Afterward, you feel drained, upset, and frustrated. You wonder why it always has to come down to a screaming match.

No Parent Is Perfect – We All Yell at Times

It's important for parents to remember that we're not perfect, and we can learn from our mistakes. A periodic scream or two doesn't make you a bad parent. We all yell at our kids at times.

Let me tell you a story about my own family. I had a long commute home from work when my son was growing up, and from time to time, I would be in a bad mood when I got home. I would arrive late and find our adolescent son not doing his homework. Instead, he'd be sitting on the couch, eating and making a mess – usually with his feet on the table. I like to keep everything in order, so this was extremely annoying to me. I won't lie – there were some days when I was worn out, hungry, and frustrated, and I yelled and screamed at him.

After that happened a few times, I made it a personal goal to respond better in the future. And by applying the tips in this article (and some practice and patience), I screamed much less and became a more effective parent.

Why Do Parents Yell at Their Kids?

Most parents yell and scream at their kids because they're frustrated. At the exact moment when you lose it, you don't feel like you have any other options. It becomes like a knee jerk reaction or a trigger being pulled. In other words, you don't think about what you're doing. You just respond.

Parents can also let their frustration with their kids build up over time. They go from incident to incident without giving consequences, and the frustration grows bigger and bigger. Eventually, they break and react by screaming rather than dealing with the misbehavior consistently and effectively.

Why Screaming at Your Child Doesn't Work

Yelling and screaming at your kids sends the message that you're not in control. And if you aren't in control, they might assume that they're in charge. It's also important to understand that kids feel unsafe and anxious when their parents appear out of control.

These are bad messages to send to your child, and it undermines your authority in the household.

I want to stress that it's okay to speak strongly to kids. But getting angry and then ratcheting up to screaming is not helpful, especially if it's over anything and everything. When you scream at everything, the screaming loses its effect and has no significance when there's actual misbehavior.

Success in parenting is feeling good about the job you've done in teaching your child how to behave—and you can't feel good about yourself if you're screaming all the time. When chronic screaming becomes the norm, children are also apt to think it's okay for them to scream all the time, too. Your kid learns that screaming is a suitable response when you're frustrated or overwhelmed. It doesn't teach anything positive. Instead, it teaches that life is out of control, and you're out of control.

Here's the bottom line: if you use yelling to get your kids to comply, you're not teaching them better problem-solving skills. Yelling at a problem doesn't make it go away. Indeed, it usually makes the problem worse. When kids are screamed at all the time, they learn to tolerate the screaming rather than change their behavior. Eventually, your child tunes you out altogether.

And if screaming were effective, parenting would be easy. We'd just scream at our kids, they'd change their behavior, and our problems would be solved. But, we all know that it isn't that easy.

6 Tips to Help Parents Stop Screaming at Their Kids

If you find yourself screaming at your child frequently, it's not going to be easy to stop yourself—at least not right away. Learning how to change the way you communicate with your child takes practice. You need effective tools because your kids will push your buttons to try and get you to lose control—which is what they're used to. But you can learn to have control and communicate with them effectively. Here are six tips that will help you get back on track.

1. Don't Attend Every Fight You're Invited To

As my husband, James Lehman, teaches in *The Total Transformation* parenting program,

"You don't have to attend every fight you're invited to."

Walking away from a screaming match will often stop the fight in its tracks, right then and there. No matter if the fight is beginning, if you're deep into it, or it's been going on for ten minutes, you can stop and step away from the situation.

Stepping away from the heat of the situation also helped me as a parent to figure out what my response should be. Sometimes, it meant spending some time away from my child and then going back later and dealing with their misbehavior.

2. Don't Respond Immediately To Bad Behavior if You Feel Triggered

I think it's fine to wait ten minutes – or even wait until the next day – to come back and talk with your child about their inappropriate language or behavior. Often, things with our kids are truly not that urgent. Most of us scream about things that are minor when you really think about it. They might feel urgent at the time, but that's only because of our agitation, and not necessarily because our kid's behavior is so bad.

You can say to your child:

"Your behavior is not appropriate, and we will talk about it later when things are calm."

It's sometimes good for a child to have to think about a situation or incident for a while before you have that talk.

A very simple thing you can do is count to ten while really disengaging yourself from the situation. So count to ten, walk away, go into a different room, do a different activity. Even if you don't have a clue what's triggering your frustration, if you know that you are overreacting (and screaming is usually an overreaction), try to disengage.

3. Give Yourself Transition Time When You Get Home

It's common for parents to fight with their kids right when they get home. Typically, during the commute home, the parent is thinking about the fight they are going to have when they walk in the door. It's almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Therefore, I recommend that you give yourself some time to transition when you come home. Take ten minutes to go wash up, gather your thoughts, and then come out of your room and talk to your kids. They may act like they can't wait ten minutes at first, but they'll get used to it. And they'll learn to give you your space eventually.

4. Prepare Yourself Mentally for Situations That Trigger You

It's important to know your triggers. We all have triggers, and often they're not the most rational things. I think it's useful for parents to know what their triggers are – what sets them off. Is it the feet on the couch, the backtalk, or their mess in the kitchen? Teach yourself what you can do when you're triggered in order to respond more effectively.

When I was on my way home from work, I also made preparations for how I would react. I would think to myself, "Okay, when I get home, if my son hasn't done his homework and if he's made a mess again, I'm not going to yell or scream. I'm just going

to give myself time to unwind, and then come out and deal with his behavior.” So if you know your triggers, you can plan your reaction.

If you’re working on staying in control, I think you need to really look at yourself. Start reviewing what happened after the fact and try to practice more effective communication with your kids where you’re not out of control. Sometimes just having more positive interactions means there’s less time for the negative.

Ask yourself what kind of parent you’d like to be. Nobody wants to be known as the parent who screams at their kids all the time and seems out of control. Ask yourself what kind of parent you want to be. And remember, it’s never too late – you can start making these improvements at any time.

5. Get Support From Trusted Friends or Family

If you’re trying to get more control and would like to stop yelling, I recommend that you talk to your spouse or trusted friends and acknowledge all of it. I don’t think there’s anything to be ashamed or embarrassed about – almost all of us scream. Your spouse might have some insights or some ideas of what you can do. They also might notice what some of your triggers are that you haven’t noticed yourself.

Be careful not to confide in other parents or family members who are judgmental or who express shock or dismay at your parenting challenges. These people will only make you feel worse about yourself, and that’s not effective.

6. It’s Okay to Apologize for Screaming

I would sometimes go over things with my son and apologize for yelling and explain that I’d had a hard day and that I was sorry I took it out on him.

If you decide to apologize, understand that it’s not about getting forgiveness from your kids. Rather, it’s about owning your behavior, learning from the situation, and trying to do better next time.

Also, I made sure our son was held accountable for his actions. Getting homework done and cleaning up after himself were his responsibilities, and he knew that failing to do either would result in receiving consequences. My goal became to stay calm and handle his behavior without losing control myself.

<https://www.empoweringparents.com/>