

Yelled at your kids lately??

If I took a survey of American parents to determine how many yelled at their kids in the past week, I'd probably find close to 100%. If I asked how many were yelled at as children in the course of a week, the answer would be about the same. It seems it's a way of parenting life in our culture. Do we consider it our right, our duty, even? How did we come up with the idea that in order to raise healthy and successful children who take responsibility for themselves, are respectful of others, and cooperate with us, we should yell at them and make them feel bad? When was the last time being yelled at motivated you to listen and be cooperative—unless your job was at stake? Do we really want our children to feel that our love is at stake? Isn't that how we felt when we were yelled at? Some of us were able to back down and "be good" and others of us couldn't. Then there was bigger trouble.

Most parents I talk with yell and scream as knee jerk reactions when frustrated by their child, then they regret their actions, feel guilty, and incompetent. So...when are we going to get with the program? A new program, that is—one that gives us permission to listen, talk respectfully and kindly and connect with our children. We seem to think that in order to have authority we have to yell, punish, enforce suffering—thinking it's the only way they will do anything. That is autocracy, not authority.

Look, you can only hold power over your children just so long. When they are old enough to walk out the door, nothing you say or do will stop them if they don't like their living conditions. They may not be able to live on their own, but they sure can make life miserable at home. Rebellion is not necessary when there is nothing to rebel against. It is certainly not necessary for independence—that's just rationalizing. Let's face it, we yell at them because they hurt our feelings, resist our demands, and push our buttons, and we want to hurt back. It's called retaliation, not parenting.

So for those of you who yell and then regret it, I thought I'd offer some suggestions. It's never too late to go back over a situation and say, "Remember when...? I didn't like my reaction. I feel badly about what I said and want to apologize. I'd like to rewind it if you'd be willing and try it again." When

emotions are down, you can say what you wish you had and ask your child to say what he wishes he had. You will find yourself problem-solving and teaching your child a valuable lesson. At the very least you will be modeling leadership behavior.

Have you ever given an emphatic no to something your child wanted and then stood on principle even though after some thought you saw little harm in it? Our nos can be knee jerk reactions preventing us from listening to an argument. What if you sought your child out, even days later, and said, “You know when you asked me about...? I’ve been thinking about it and realized I gave a pretty quick no and didn’t listen to what was important to you. That must have felt awfully dismissive. I’m sorry. I’d like to discuss how we can make this happen so I feel okay about it/how we can do this differently in the future.” Your child will feel important to you, grateful, and probably cooperative in working out what you need to get to a yes.

Many parents fear that apologizing or changing their mind is a show of weakness or “giving in.” On the contrary, it is the powerful, proactive move for a parent to acknowledge a mistake, apologize and make amends. Think of the modeling—isn’t that what you’d like from your child? Even if your answer doesn’t change, going back to your child after emotions are down and saying, “I know you feel angry about what I said. You have a right to. I’m sure I would too if I were you. I just want you to know that I love you, and I understand how hard it is being a kid when somebody is always telling you what to do.”

Making connection is the most powerful thing you will ever do with your child. And the older your child is, the fewer opportunities there will be. So take them while you can. You will never regret it. Jack Kornfield said, “When we let go of our battles and open our hearts to things as they are, then we come to rest in the present moment.” We spend far too much time in the past and the future. The present can be so different if we slow down, listen, and let go of how we think it should be.