

Volume 4, Issue 12

MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!



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Motivated Vol 4, Issue 12
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A friend recently wrote and asked me, “How can parents motivate their children without resorting to shouting and yelling at them. Many people don’t seem to know any other way to deal with their children when they don’t listen, talk back, or are unmotivated in their tasks or schoolwork.”

If you’re a parent, you’ve probably been in that situation. Your child misbehaves or talks to you disrespectfully, and before you know it, you’re raising your voice—and your child yells back at you. Afterward, you feel awful. You wonder why it always has to come down to a shouting match, and you wish you had handled the situation differently.

Communicating with children to help them make good choices, and teaching them in the right way is not an easy task. We’ve all come to the point of exasperation, needing advice on how to improve our dealings with our children.

I compiled some interesting and helpful articles in this issue of *Motivated*. I included both practical tips on how to communicate effectively with children, and true stories from people who share their experiences.

And just in case you still feel a bit overwhelmed with the sheer enormity of all that comes with parenting, I thought to remind you to cut yourself some slack. There is no such thing as a perfect parent. The only requirement is to *be* a parent. So, get a cup of tea or coffee, put your feet up, relax, and read on. You will feel better afterward.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*



Why Do We Yell?

By *Life Positive*, adapted

A sage asked his followers, “Why do people yell at each other when they are upset?” The followers thought for a while, and one said, “We lose our calm and so we yell!”

“But explain to me, why do you yell when the other person is right next to you?” asked the sage. “Isn’t it possible to speak to him or her with a soft voice? Why do you yell at a person when you are angry?” His followers gave some more answers but none satisfied the sage.

Finally, the sage explained, “When two people are angry at each other, there is a distance which arises between their hearts. To cover that distance they must yell so they can hear each other. The angrier they are, the louder they will

have to yell to hear each other through that great distance.”

Then the sage said, “What happens when people are in love? They do not yell at each other. They talk softly. Why? Their hearts are very close. The distance between them is very small.”

The sage continued, “What happens when their love for the other grows even more? They do not speak, they only whisper. Their hearts come even closer with love. Finally, they need not even whisper. They only look at each other, and that is all. That is how close people are when they love each other. The heart is like one.”

Next time you feel angry, try speaking in a soft voice, and remember that love is the most important of all. ❧



Tired of Yelling?

By Janet Lehman, MSW, adapted

How to stop screaming and parent effectively

Why do parents yell and scream at their kids? I think most people scream because they're frustrated. At the exact moment in time 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 incidents with their child's behavior pile up. They go from one situation to another compiling their frustrations with their kids. Eventually, they react by screaming rather than with a response that really deals with the misbehavior effectively.

I'd like to point out here that it's important for parents to remember that we're not perfect, and that we can learn from our mistakes. A periodic scream or two doesn't mean we're a bad parent.

I also want to stress that it's okay to speak strongly to kids sometimes. But getting angry and then ratcheting up to screaming is not helpful, especially if it's over anything and everything, because then there's no connection to the actual misbehavior.

My story: "homework" for parents.

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 frustrated and in a bad mood when I got home. I would arrive late and find our adolescent son not doing his homework and sitting on the couch, eating and making a mess—usually with his feet up

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 really tired and hungry and frustrated, and I did yell and scream at him.

After that happened a few times, I felt like my personal homework was to think about how to respond better in the future. The first thing I realized was that I needed some space after work, because

it was a time where my emotions were triggered easily. I also took some time to look back at my behavior afterward, and reviewed the scene in my head. I would sometimes go over things with my son, 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 do that, understand that it's not about getting forgiveness from your kids, it's really just about owning your behavior, learning from the situation, and trying to do better next time. Also, my husband and 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 some consequences. My goal became to stay calm and handle his behavior without losing control myself.

Are you a “chronic” screamer?

If you find yourself yelling at your kids much of the time, understand that it empowers your kids in a negative way, because it gives them the message that you are not in control. And if you aren't in control, they might assume that they are the ones in charge. Both of these are fairly dangerous messages, in my opinion. It's also important to understand that kids feel unsafe when their parents have no control.

When chronic screaming becomes the norm, children are apt to think it's okay for them to scream, too. You're teaching your kids that screaming is a suitable

response when you're frustrated or overwhelmed. It doesn't teach anything positive, just that life is out of control—and emotionally, 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 problem-solving behaviors. Yelling at a problem does not usually make it go away—it only makes matters worse.

Learning how to change the way you communicate with your child takes practice. You might need a big bag of tricks because your kids are going to 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.

You can always get out of a screaming match and stop at any point.

No matter whether the fight is just beginning, if you're deep into it, or it's been going on for ten minutes, you can give yourself permission to stop and step away from the situation. As my husband used to say, “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.

Stepping away—taking that time away from the heat of the situation—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 communicating about his misbehavior. ❧

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen

—And listen so kids will talk

By A. Faber and E. Mazlish, adapted excerpts



The following examples teach “skills” on how to talk to children. You can adapt these pointers to areas you may need help with in your family.

ACKNOWLEDGE CHILDREN’S FEELINGS

When we accept our children’s feelings, they are more able to accept the limits we set for them. What people of all ages need in a moment of distress is not our agreement or disagreement; they need someone to understand what it is they’re experiencing.

Children need to have their feelings accepted and respected. To help your children deal with their feelings you can:

1. Listen quietly and attentively.
2. Acknowledge their feelings verbally: “Oh... Mmm... I see...”
3. Give the feeling a name: “That sounds frustrating!”
4. Give the child his wishes in fantasy: “I wish I could make the banana ripe for you right now!”

Parents don’t usually give this kind of response, because they fear that by giving a name to the feeling, they’ll

make it worse. Just the opposite is true. The child who hears the words for what he is experiencing is deeply comforted. Someone has acknowledged his inner experience.

Engage cooperation by...

DESCRIBING

Describe what you see or describe the problem.

The best part of using descriptive language is that it takes out the finger pointing and accusation, and helps everyone focus on what needs to be done.

“The milk spilled. We need a sponge.”

“The jar broke. We need a broom.”

“These pajamas are torn. We need a needle and thread.”

Now try each of the above statements on yourself, only this time start each sentence with “you.” For example, “You spilled the milk... You broke the jar... You tore your pajamas...” Notice the difference? “You” makes us feel accused and then defensive. When we describe the event, we make it easier for the child

to hear what the problem is and deal with it.

Here's an anecdote to illustrate this:

I was furious when my two young sons came to dinner covered with green watercolor paint, but I was determined not to lose my temper and scream at them. I turned to my list of tips on how to talk with children that I had taped to the pantry door and used the first one I saw—"Describe What You See."

Here's what happened next:

ME: I see two boys with green paint on their hands and faces!

They looked at each other, and ran into the bathroom to wash up.

A few minutes later I walked into the bathroom and was ready to scream again. The tiles were covered with paint! But I hung on to my one skill.

ME: I see green paint on the bathroom walls!

My older boy ran to get a rag saying, "To the rescue!" Five minutes later, he called me in to look again.

ME: (sticking with description) I see someone helpful cleaned all the green paint off the bathroom walls.

My older boy beamed. The younger one piped up, "And now I'm going to clean off the sink!"

If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed it!

GIVING INFORMATION

When we give information, we in a sense give the child a gift he can use forever. For the rest of his life he'll need to know that "milk turns sour when it's not refrigerated," that "open cuts need to be kept clean," that "electronics get damaged when left near heat," that

"crackers get stale when the box is left open," and so on. Parents have told us that the skill of giving information isn't hard. What's hard, they say, is leaving off the insult at the end, such as "Dirty clothes belong in the laundry basket. You'll never learn, will you?"

Instead of...

Adult: Who drank milk and left the bottle standing out?

Give Information: Kids, milk turns sour when it isn't refrigerated.

TALKING ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS

Most parents are relieved to discover that it can be helpful to share their real feelings with their children, and that it's not expected of them to be eternally patient. Children are capable of dealing with honest statements like:

"This isn't a good time for me to look at your composition. I need a little rest right now. After dinner I'll be able to give it the attention it deserves."

Children are entitled to hear their parents' honest feelings. By describing what we feel, we can be genuine without being hurtful.

SAYING IT WITH A WORD

Many parents have told us how much they appreciate this skill. They claim it saves time, breath, and boring explanations.

Teenagers we've worked with have told us they too prefer the single word, "Door" or..."Dog"...or "Dishes," and find it a welcome relief from the usual lecture.

As we see it, the value of the one-word statement lies in the fact that

instead of an oppressive command, we give the child an opportunity to exercise his own initiative, and his own intelligence. When he hears you say, “The dog,” he has to think, “What about the dog. Oh, yeah, I didn’t walk him yet this afternoon... Guess I’d better take him out now.”

However, don’t use your child’s name as your one-word statement. When a child hears a disapproving, “Susie,” many times during the day, she begins to associate her name with disapproval.

Instead of...

Adult: I’ve been asking and asking you kids to get into pajamas and all you’ve been doing is clowning around. You agreed that before you watch TV you’d be in pajamas and I don’t see a sign of anyone doing anything about it!

Say It with a Word: Kids, PAJAMAS!

WRITING A NOTE

Most children love receiving notes—both those who can read and those who can’t. Little ones are usually thrilled to receive a printed message from their parents. It encourages them to write or draw notes back to their parents.

Older children also like receiving notes. A group of teenagers we worked with told us that a note can make you feel good, “as if you were getting a letter from a friend.” They were touched that their parents cared enough to take the time and trouble to write to them. One young man said that what he appreciated most about notes was that “they didn’t get any louder.”

Parents report that they, too, like using notes. They say it’s a quick, easy way

to get through to a child and one that usually leaves a pleasant aftertaste.

A light touch with notes isn’t necessary, but it can certainly help. Sometimes however, the situation is not funny and humor would be inappropriate. We’re thinking of the father who told us that his daughter ruined his brand-new CD.

He said that if he hadn’t been able to vent his anger in writing, he would have punished her. Instead he wrote:

Alison, I’M BOILING!!! My new CD was taken without my permission and now it’s full of scratches and doesn’t play anymore. —MAD DAD.

A little later the father received this note back from his daughter:

Dear Dad, I’m really sorry. I’ll buy you another one this Saturday and whatever it costs you can take it out of my allowance. – Alison ◀◀

(For more about the authors and their work, visit www.fabermazlish.com.)



Answers to Your Questions

Parenting forum

Q: Isn't "how" you say something to a child just as important as "what" you say?

A: It certainly is. The attitude behind your word is as important as the words themselves. The attitude that children thrive on is one that communicates, "You're basically a lovable, capable person. Right now there's a problem that needs attention. Once you're aware of it, you'll probably respond responsibly." The attitude that defeats children is one that communicates, "You're basically irritating and inept. You're always doing something wrong, and this latest incident is one more proof of your wrongness."

Q: If attitude is so important, why bother about words?

A: A parent's look of disgust or tone of contempt can hurt deeply. But if, in addition, a child is subjected to words like "stupid" ... "careless" ... "irresponsible" ... "you'll never learn," he's doubly wounded. Somehow words have a way of lingering long and poisonously. The worst part is that children sometimes pull out these words later and use them as weapons against themselves.

Q: Is there any way to explain the fact that sometimes my kids respond when I ask them to do something, but sometimes I can't seem to get through?

A: We once asked a group of school children why they sometimes didn't listen to their parents. Here's what they told us:

"When I come home from school, I'm tired, and if my mother asks me to do something, I pretend I don't hear her."

"Sometimes I'm mad about something that happened in school and I don't feel like doing what she tells me."

In addition to the children's thoughts, here are some questions you might want to ask yourself when you feel you're not "getting through":

- Does my request make sense in terms of my child's age and ability? (For example, am I expecting a four-year-old to have perfect table manners?)
- Does he feel my request is unreasonable? ("Why does my mother bug me to wash behind my ears? Nobody looks there.")
- Can I give her a choice about when to do something, rather than insisting upon "right now." ("Do you want to take your bath before your video or right after?")
- Can I offer a choice about how something is done? "Do you want to wear pants or shorts?"

Finally, are most of my moments with my child spent asking her to "do things?" Or am I taking some time to be alone with her—just to "be together"? ❧



Which Is Your Case?

Author Unknown

There once were two seven-year-old boys named Bruce and David. They both had mothers who loved them very much.

Each boy's day began differently. The first thing Bruce heard when he awakened in the morning was, "Get up now, Bruce! You're going to be late for school again."

Bruce got up, dressed himself—except for his shoes—and came in for breakfast. Mother said, "Where are your shoes? Are you planning to go to school barefoot? ... And look at what you're wearing! That blue sweater looks awful with that green shirt... Bruce, dear, what have you done to your pants? They're ripped. I want you to change them after breakfast. No child of mine is going to school with torn pants... Now watch how you pour your juice. Don't spill it the way you usually do!"

Bruce poured and spilled.

Mother was exasperated. As she mopped up the mess, she said, "I don't know what to do with you."

Bruce mumbled something to himself.

"What was that?" Mother asked. "There you go mumbling again."

Bruce finished his breakfast in silence. Then he changed his pants, put on his shoes, collected his books, and left for school. His mother called out, "Bruce, you forgot your lunch! If your head weren't screwed on to your shoulders, I bet you'd forget that too."

Bruce took his lunch and as he started out the door again, mother reminded him, "Now be sure to behave at school today."

David lived across the street. The first thing he heard in the morning was, "Seven o'clock, David. Do you want to get up now or take five more minutes?" David rolled over and yawned. "Five more minutes," he mumbled.

Later he came to breakfast dressed, except for his shoes. Mother said, "Hey, you're dressed already. All you have left to put on are your shoes! ... Uh, oh—there's a rip in the seam of your pants. Looks as if the whole side could split. Shall I mend it while you stand up or would you rather change?" David

thought a second and said, “I’ll change after breakfast.” Then he sat down at the table and poured his juice. He spilled some.

“The clean-up rag is in the sink,” Mother called over her shoulder as she continued making his lunch. David got the rag and wiped up the spill. They talked for a while as David ate his breakfast. When he finished, he changed his pants, put on his shoes, collected his books and left for school—without his lunch.

Mother called after him, “David, your lunch!”

He ran back to get it and thanked her. As she handed it to him she said, “See you later!”

Both Bruce and David had the same teacher. During the day, the teacher told

the class, “Children, as you already know, we’ll be putting on our play next week. We need a volunteer to paint a colorful welcome sign on our classroom door. We also need a volunteer to pour and serve the lemonade for our guests after the play. And finally, we need someone who will go around to the other third-grade classes and make a short speech inviting everyone to our play and telling them the time, day, and place.”

Some of the children raised their hands immediately; some raised their hands tentatively; and some didn’t raise their hands at all.

Our story stops here. That’s all we know. What happened afterwards, we can only guess, but it certainly leaves us with food for thought. ❧❧

To Be Like You

By Leslie Hale, adapted

There are little eyes upon you, and they’re watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly take in everything you say;
There are little hands all eager to do everything you do.
Little children who are dreaming of the day they’ll be like you.

You’re the little children’s idol, you’re the wisest of the wise;
In their little mind about you no suspicions ever rise;
They believe in you devoutly, hold that all you say and do
They will say and do in your way when they’re grown up just like you.

There are wide-eyed little children who believe you’re always right,
And their ears are always open, and they’re watching day and night.
You are setting an example every day in all you do
For the children who are waiting to grow up to be like you. ❧❧

Parenting



A man never stands as tall as when he kneels to help a child. —Knights of Pythagoras

Your children will become what you are; so be what you want them to be.—David Bly

Stop trying to perfect your children, but keep trying to perfect your relationship with them.—Dr. Henker

Parents need to fill a child's bucket of self-esteem so high that the rest of the world can't poke enough holes to drain it dry.—Alvin Price

As your kids grow they may forget what you said, but they won't forget how you made them feel.
—Kevin Heath

If your children look up to you, you've made a success of life's biggest job.—Unknown

If you want your children to improve, let them overhear the nice things you say about them to others.—Haim Ginott

Children desperately need to know—and to hear in ways they understand and remember—that they're loved and valued by mom and dad.—Paul Smally

When you give a little of yourself to a child, you give a little of yourself to their future.—Kevin Heath

Love and respect are the most important aspects of parenting, and of all relationships.—Jodie Foster

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.—Dorothy Law Neite

Praise your children openly. Reprehend them secretly.—W. Cecil

