

## **Yelling at Your Kids**

I really hadn't meant to yell. But the aftermath of it lay before me. My son was a whimpering mess on the floor and my daughter sat statue-like on the chair in front of me.

As I sat there considering my next move, it occurred to me that I needed to do something quickly. The deafening sound of silence reminded all of us that an ugly moment had just occurred. And a voice inside me continued to insist that my kids were at fault.

"OK, you two, I'm sorry I yelled like that, what a dumb thing to do!" As I moved toward my son, it became evident that he wanted no part of me. "Get away from me!" he shouted.

I thought better of telling him not to yell at me, so I did the only thing I could think of doing. "Crabby Daddy is back," I proclaimed as I transformed my hands into pincers and crawled in crab-like fashion towards them. "I love to yell at children, then eat them!"

My son continued to yell at me to go away, but now he was laughing and crying simultaneously. My mission to undo the damage my yelling had caused was underway. I'd been able to recover quickly this time, but I knew that this moment would be remembered for awhile.

Most importantly, I wanted to remember what had really happened. What happened was that I wasn't disciplined. I failed to control my emotions in a way that my children could emulate.

Were my children misbehaving? Absolutely. Is there a part of me that wants to blame them and let them know how badly they were acting? No question. But this is the part of me that serves my ego. It shows my children how to avoid responsibility and blame others. It's not my "best self."

And it's our best self which we must always search

for when we're with our children.

Our kids don't need perfect parents, and they won't get them. But they do need parents who strive to get better. I'm reminded of the words of Emerson, who said, "When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn."

If in our lifetime we could speak to our kids with a voice this sweet, it would be enough.

But until we reach this level, what should we do after we yell at our kids?

Here are five ideas:

1. Recover quickly – Recovering emotionally (or faking your recovery) will make it much easier on your children and show them how to be resilient themselves.
2. Apologize, but don't overdo it – It's important to say you're sorry, but don't dwell on it and don't show signs of pity. This will help create a victim of your child faster than the drop of a hat.
3. Avoid finding ways to blame them – It's incredibly easy to blame your kids when you're angry. It's OK to say, "When I saw you hit your brother I felt angry," but avoid saying, "You made me angry." You're responsible for your own anger—teach this to your children.
4. Process the incident with them – Children can be traumatized by yelling, and it helps to talk about what happened for each of them. Ask them questions about it and allow them a chance to talk about it if they'd like.
5. Don't beat yourself up about it – You don't have to envision your kids twenty years from now telling their therapist how you screwed up their life! Kids are pretty resilient and they'll recover, especially if you follow these steps and

keep working on yourself.

While we're not perfect, we can still search for the voice as "sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn."

It might even keep your kids out of the therapists' chair.

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