

Tip Sheets

Let's Stop Yelling in Child Care



Early childhood teachers and providers know that yelling at children is not developmentally appropriate practice or positive guidance.

But sometimes it happens when a child is across the room about to throw a block

at someone and our day has been long and stressful. Yelling in this context is not about warning a child not to hurt another; it is about communicating frustration in a way that can be harmful to both the teacher and the child.

Why Do Adults Choose to Yell?

Child care is a stressful job. Stress that is not managed can influence how we react to challenges throughout the day, like a child who refuses to transition or who has hit a peer.

When we are under stress, we often divert to our easiest behaviors in order to solve a problem. Yelling at a child to “stop fighting” or “listen to me” might be more natural at times than pausing and thinking about how to more effectively guide the child and the situation.

How Does Yelling Impact a Child?

- A child can be frightened when we yell at them, which hurts the child/caregiver relationship. Healthy attachment is based on trust and security built through responsiveness to the child’s needs.

- A child who sees staff yell may model this behavior in their interactions with peers. Our rules for quiet or respectful voices apply need to apply to everyone if we expect children to follow them.
- A child’s sense of self is hurt when the adults they care about use negative interactions like yelling. Our goal is to build encouraging classrooms where everyone is built up, even when they make mistakes.

Strategies to Prevent Yelling and Encourage Positive Behaviors

Create a Calm and Less-Stressful Atmosphere

Play calming music when appropriate. Keep the overall noise level down with sound muffling techniques where possible like padded dividers.

Check Yourself

What is the volume of your voice? Intentionally bring your voice down. When we whisper, we often gain children’s full attention!

Build Relationships with Purpose

Purposely build relationships with each child by setting aside time to spend with each one every day. The stronger the relationship, the more likely guidance strategies will be effective when a challenge comes up.

Set Reasonable Expectations

Be sure your expectations are appropriate. If a child doesn’t understand what you want, they may refuse to act because they don’t know what to do. Use simple directions with one step at a time.

Set Children up for Success with Your Environment

Keep the child care environment organized with labels on storage cubbies where children can find everything on their own. Encouraging independence means children will need less guidance from adults.

Keep Your Routines Predictable

A picture schedule is a useful tool for routines. When a child knows what's coming next, they can transition easily without your direction.

Take Care of Yourself!

Find ways to reduce your stress and "fill your bucket." NAEYC suggests starting a gratitude journal or subscribing to encouraging blogs and newsletters.

As an early educator, you are in a position to positively impact both children and other adults you work with through your words and your actions!

Additional Resources

Zero to Three

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3144-new-year-s-resolution-no-more-yelling>

Using Positive Words: Creating an Encouraging Classroom

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/aug2019/using-positive-words>

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