

Understanding Why The Volume Is So High

Teachers are under constant pressure to improve test scores and to create a positive learning environment. The work related stress can impact how they relate to their students and deal with student behavior. In other words their stress can create student stress and affect the classroom climate. Often when someone doesn't know what to do the first thing that happens is frustration develops and they become what I call situationally reactive. A person who is situationally reactive doesn't have enough equity to deal with situations that they may not have had enough experience with, and haven't had the time to rehearse an appropriate response. Most times this reaction takes on the form of angry outburst that sets the stage for a power struggle between the teacher and the student. This struggle results in a lose-lose situation where both the teacher and the student have trouble getting off the battlefield with dignity. The teacher and the student both begin raising their voice and the question is who can yell the loudest.

Last fall, the journal *Child Development* published some headline-grabbing research with an alarmist message: Yelling at your kids can be just as bad as [corporal punishment](#), and it could cause behavior problems and emotional development issues. Even Dr. Phil went on the morning shows to tell parents to turn down the volume, because, he said, yelling will just cause your kids to go into "shutdown mode." According to the study, researchers at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor determined that severe verbal discipline from parents is particularly destructive to tweens and teens. Adolescents whose parents had been using yelling as a discipline method were more likely to have [behavioral issues](#) and to act out (including with vandalism and violence). The effects of frequent verbal discipline and insults were comparable to those of physical discipline (like spanking and hitting) over the course of the two-year study.

This topic has long been explored by child psychologists. A study published back in 2003 in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that in families where there's 25 or more yelling incidents in 12 months, children can end up with lowered [self-esteem](#), an increase in aggression toward others and higher rates of [depression](#). In these families, the researchers noted that the kind of yelling categorized as verbal or emotional abuse is more than simply shouting at your kids. It's a constant form of "[psychological aggression](#)," and often escalates to insults or words of humiliation. Considering how often parents can lose their temper—for some of us, it's way more than twice a month—these findings are good reason to cut out the bad communication habits now, before our kids reach their teen years.

Toronto father-of-two Douglas O'Donnell* believes yelling works in his home, as it gets his point across in a "no-nonsense manner." His biggest ongoing issue with daughters, Hannah,* 5, and Autumn,* 2, is when they aren't listening to instructions. "If I have to repeat myself more than two or three times, I tend to crank the volume up to 11," he says. "It doesn't even have to be anything serious. I just have very little patience for it." He's noticed that his shouting has affected his oldest daughter. "She has started to anticipate it, and will occasionally cringe because she thinks she's about to get yelled at. That makes me feel bad."

Identifying the discipline patterns in his own household is a good first step for O'Donnell. Yelling isn't a constructive discipline technique, it's a reaction, explains Stephanie Cristina, a

child psychologist in Ottawa. While it will likely get a child's attention and might stop naughty behavior in that instant, yelling—like spanking—“does not teach the child anything about how to behave appropriately,” she says. “It may also send a confusing message if we, for example, spank children for being physically aggressive, or yell at them for screaming at their siblings.”

Yelling also causes a physiological reaction in both the parents and the kids. When we get frustrated, the brain releases cortisol (the stress hormone), and too much of it causes us to go into fight, flight or freeze mode, explains Kylee Goldman, a child and family therapist in Aurora, Ont. “The cognitive centre of the brain shuts down and the emotion centre takes over,” says Goldman. “Kids' brains follow the same pattern. Their cortisol levels go up because they're stressed, their emotions take over, and they either freeze and do nothing, or respond by screaming back, or end up having a [tantrum](#).” If this kind of stress persists during the formative years, a child's emotional functioning can be affected as he or she grows up.

After reading this information consider the findings and answer the following questions:

1. Do you set your boundaries in anger?
2. When you discipline a student does it end up affecting the relationship between the two of you?
3. Are you aware of what frustrates you and have you taken steps to overcome the problem?
4. Are there kids that you just don't like?
5. Do you raise your voice (yell) in the classroom more than you would like; and do you feel guilty after you blew your top?