

**Parents who yell**  
**Ruth A. Peters, Ph.D.**

If you find yourself having gotten louder over the years (yelling, threatening, and nagging) that's a good indicator that whatever you're using for a discipline system is just not working. Kids who are raised on a steady diet of being yelled at tend to get used to it, feel badly about themselves and their abilities, and basically ignore or resent the screaming. Generally, parents who resort to constant yelling do so out of habit---it's either what their parents used in their own childhood home, or it seemed to work initially when the child was very young, but no longer has the desired result—*behavior change*. If screaming at a kid really worked, we would all be doing it; kids would become nice and compliant and no longer need to be yelled at. Make sense? Yes, but the problem is that yelling rarely has a long-lasting effect. It may temporarily scare, startle or embarrass the child into ceasing the inappropriate behavior, but it really hasn't taught the youngster a competing more appropriate response.

For example, instead of barking out an order, calmly tell the child that she has five minutes to clean up the dirty clothes on the floor....set the countdown timer, and if she "beats it" give her praise and perhaps a "good point" using a behavioral system of some sort. ("Earn 15 good points and you can pick out the movie rental this weekend" may be enticing). Or, if the dirty clothes have not been picked up, give a demerit ("If you get more than 4 demerits per day you'll lose all of your electronics privileges for the next 24 hours" just may get the kid's attention and a change of behavior in the future.)

Also consider that screamers generally feel lousy about their parenting ability. They consider themselves to be out of control and often find themselves yelling at their own spouses, which only encourages more fear and screaming within the household. So, if you'd like to avoid the nightly threatening, screaming nagging drama develop an effective behavioral system to use with your kids....and stick to it. The consequences should be interesting, intense, inviting, and convenient and something that you, as parents, can live with. And, if you feel like screaming—take it into the bathroom, turn on the shower and hoop and holler 'til your hearts content—just try to keep it from the rest of the family!