

Yelling at Kids in Anger

by Kathy Slattengren

Have you ever become frustrated with your children when they are begging you for something? If so, you can probably relate to this mom's story.

Begging for Ice Cream

One mom told me how exasperated she was while driving her 10-year-old son to Baskin Robbins to order cake for his upcoming birthday party. Her son started pleading with her to get an ice cream cone at Baskin Robbins. Mom said he couldn't have one since he had just had ice cream yesterday.



He didn't give up hope and instead kept asking her if he could please have an ice cream cone. Completely fed up, she pulled over and stepped out of the car for a few minutes explaining she needed a break from his behavior. After getting back in the car, he soon asked her again about the ice cream!

Feeling quite angry now, she yelled at him for continuing to ask after she had already told him no. By the end of her rant, he was crying. Needless to say, this wasn't exactly the pleasant outing she had envisioned.

Alternative Parenting Responses

We don't always do our best parenting in the heat of the moment. The good news is that when we realize we haven't handled a parenting situation in the ideal way, we can reflect on what happened and figure out what we would like to do differently in the future.

Sometimes we're too close to the situation or still too upset to see any alternatives. If this is the case, it can be helpful to ask other parents for ideas. It's always easier to see choices when you're not the parent involved!

What suggestions might you give this mom? Here are some possibilities:

- Repeatedly respond to each request for an ice cream cone with *"What was my answer?"* By using the same response, it is easier to remain calm and avoid becoming angry by arguing.
- Pull over and stop the car. Let her son know that she will be happy to continue driving just as soon as he can ride without asking for an ice cream cone.
- Give him a conditional yes: *"I will be happy to buy an ice cream cone for you next Saturday if I'm not worn out from hearing you beg today."*
- State what you are going to do: *"I'm feeling hassled by your begging for an ice cream cone. If you beg again, I'm going to turn around and go home."*

Ideally we are looking for a response that models both self-control and treating others with respect. We also need to be able to follow through with whatever we say we are going to do. For example, if he begs again after we said we would turn around and go home, then that's what we need to do.

The Power of Apologizing

When we realize we've handled a parenting situation poorly, we can always apologize. Some parents are reluctant to apologize to their children fearing that it will make them appear weak. However, heart-felt apologies can actually increase children's respect for their parents.

By apologizing we are teaching that when we make mistakes we try to make amends for those mistakes. We are also modeling the process of making an apology:

- Recognizing what we have done that has hurt someone
- Expressing our regret
- Describing how we plan to handle it differently next time

While apologizing is never easy, it is an essential skill for maintaining close relationships.

When a parenting situation doesn't go quite as well as you would have liked, try apologizing. Next, look for a chance to try out your new parenting response!

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