

Peaceful Parenting

Elementary kids can make parents proud one minute and frustrate them the next. Without strategies to handle trying behavior, some parents resort to yelling, and wish they could find a way to stop.

The good news? There are many techniques you can use instead of shouting. Here are 10 programs and strategies that offer alternatives to raised voices. Try them and see what works for you.



1. Put behavior in perspective.

Knowing what's "normal" for elementary children can keep frustrations in check. Their push toward independence and their growing knowledge of words may lead to unacceptable behavior, like back talk. When you respond, show by example how you want your youngster to act. For instance, instead of shouting at him, let him know in a calm voice that he hurt your feelings.

2. Count to three.

The next time your youngster whines, throws a tantrum, or behaves in a way you want to stop, try using the "1-2-3" system developed by child discipline expert Thomas Phelan. Without lecturing or showing emotion, simply say, "That's one" for the first offense. If the behavior continues for a few seconds longer, say, "That's two." The third time, state, "That's three. Take five," and send your child to her room for a break (try one minute per year of age). Decide in advance which behaviors will warrant using "1-2-3."

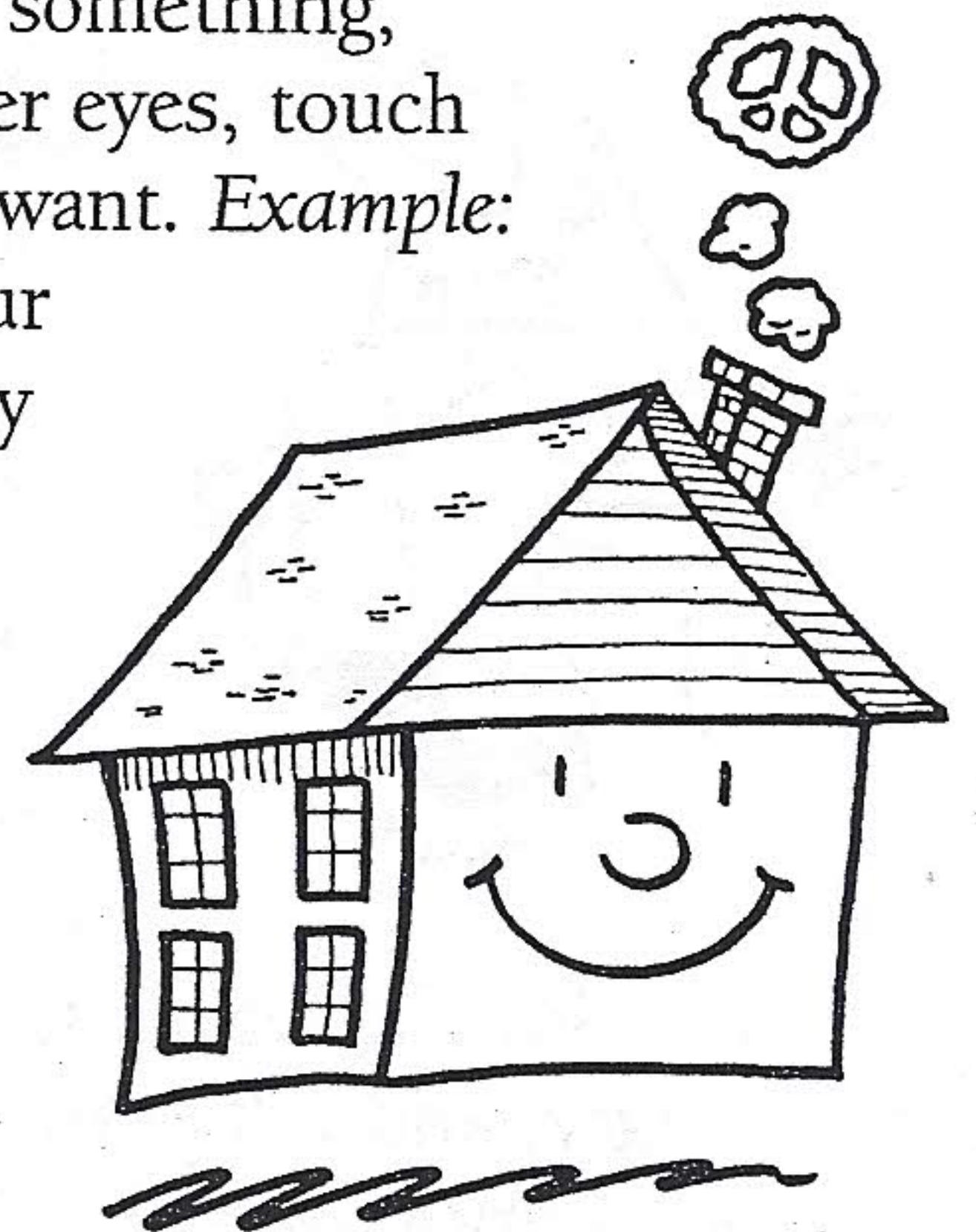
3. Put it in writing.

Child psychologist Ruth Peters suggests putting a behavior plan in writing. Start by listing daily expectations, such as brushing teeth and doing homework. Next, write down unacceptable behaviors like tattling. Finally, list rewards, which can be as simple as extra computer time. Decide how many tasks your youngster must complete—and the limit on the number of violations he can have—to receive rewards. Post the agreement where he can easily see it, and help him check off the list throughout the day.



4. Ask effectively.

When you ask your child to do something, bend down to her level. Look into her eyes, touch her gently, and clearly say what you want. *Example:* "Jenny, please sit down and start your homework." As you speak, gesture by pointing to the chair, then her textbook. Notice her efforts when she does what you've asked ("Great! You've started your homework. Now you'll have free time after dinner").



5. Be clear.

Whenever possible, instead of simply refusing your child's request to do something, tell him specifically when he will be allowed to do it. For example, if he asks you if a friend can visit, don't just say, "No, Mike can't come over to play" or, "Not until you've picked up your things." Try explaining, "You may invite Mike over after you've put your coat and shoes in the closet."

6. Give notice.

Imagine how you'd feel if you were talking to a friend on the telephone and you suddenly got disconnected. That's how your child might feel when she's asked to stop an activity without warning. Try to give advance notice when she needs to shift her attention. *Examples:* "Ten minutes till we eat. Finish that stage of your video game"; "We have to leave the amusement park in a half hour. Which ride do you want to go on again?"

