

8 Ways to Stop Scolding

Many of us rebuke our children with the following phrases, perhaps because that's the way our parents talked to us. Isn't it time to think of a better way?

You're just tired.

He may also be genuinely mad. The child who whines and cries may indeed be tired, but that's no excuse for dismissing his feelings. "You're tired" is a patronizing remark which usually makes the child even angrier. A better response would be, "You seem very angry (or frustrated or impatient). Let's talk about it on my lap." Then you can put him to bed.

Look at this mess! Do you think I have nothing better to do than clean up after you kids?

Alternative: It's time to clean up your projects. I'll give you a broom and rags and we'll tidy up together.

It serves you right to get hurt. Now maybe you'll listen when I say not to (play where you're not supposed to, fight with your brother, play with the cat, etc.)

Alternative: "That bump must really hurt; let me hold you until the pain goes away." Later, after the crying is over: "I will have to put you in your room the next time you disobey. I love you too much to see you get hurt again."

Stop sulking. Get that angry look off your face.

This is as ineffective as saying, stop being hungry. When you're angry, you're angry. It is a normal, healthy emotion. Constantly making your child stuff her anger leads to emotional problems down the road. Leave the child alone with her feelings, or ask if she wants to talk about it.

Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about.

This is a cruel choice. It's an easy solution for the parent, but it serves only to build up resentment in the child. Few parents can tolerate the sound of crying; yet, crying is a natural expression of hurt and frustration. Giving a hug and being patient is hardly a big price to pay for building your child's self-image, rather than tearing it down.

Just wait until your dad comes home.

Passing responsibility for discipline to the absent parent is easy, but it's a cop-out. Learn to deal with behavior crises yourself. Your children will respect you for it.

You can't be hungry yet.

Don't deny your child's feelings. Surely your own appetite fluctuates sometimes – so try to respect that fluctuation in a child. A better response: You may have a piece of fruit or carrot sticks until it is time for supper.

How could you be so stupid.

If you call a child stupid, it won't be long before he will start to believe it. This demeaning remark is destined to crush self-confidence, instead of encourage the change of behavior or extra effort that you want. Try: I'm frustrated at what just happened. I bet you are too. Let's talk about how you could have done that differently."

By Ronene Anderson – Reprinted with permission, Parent Information Network, March-April 1989.