

## Twelve Ways To Get Their Attention Without Yelling

When children become loud and seem to be out of control, teen leaders (and adults!) often respond by yelling. If you have ever tried yelling to get and keep the attention of children, you probably noticed that it didn't work well. In fact, sometimes the children just become louder to overcome your yelling, making a bad situation worse.

There are a variety of strategies that are more effective. Not all of them may work in every situation but at least 1-2 should work well. So try these instead of yelling:

- *Blow a whistle or ring a bell.* Start a collection of bells and whistles so that you can vary the sounds. Be sure to use the noisemaker that is appropriate to the setting (e.g. a slide whistle for outdoors but a soft bell for indoors).
- *Use a hand signal.* Choose a signal that everyone knows, such as a hand symbol for timeout (a T made with two hands). Let the children know that when you make this signal they must stop talking and follow your lead. Don't start any more activities until everyone is quiet and making the signal.
- *Praise attentive behavior.* As kids quiet, try saying these phrases in your "regular" voice: say these things:
  - "I like the way (insert name) is ready to listen."
  - "(Insert name) is ready to listen, too."
  - "Thanks for listening (insert name)" and so forth until they all quiet down.
- *Throw a small, soft ball to the first person who pays attention.* As you throw it say "Thanks for paying attention." Have him/her throw it back. Keep tossing it to those paying attention until everyone is quiet.
- *Talk very softly so they must be quiet to listen.* You may be surprised but talking

softly will actually quiet a room down faster than yelling. It is especially effective if you go to a small group of children and begin talking softly -- the others will strain to listen thinking it is a big secret they do not want to miss hearing.

- *Flash the lights on and off like in a theater.* This usually only works once or twice per day but some children are used to this from school so will quiet immediately.
- *Try the magic handkerchief trick.* Approach a small group. Ask them to clap hard when you throw a handkerchief into the air and to keep clapping just until it lands.
- *Initiate a physical routine.* Touch head, shoulders, knees, toes, and get a few others to join in. Keep going until all are participating. Then stop, praise them for participating and say, "Now we are ready for the next activity."
- *Initiate a "freeze" game.* Whenever you say "freeze" they must stop, frozen in place without talking. You can give your directions and then unfreeze them to carry on.
- *Walk around and whisper nonsense in their ears.* Most children will quiet down to hear the nonsense.
- *Place yourself alongside the chatterboxes.* During circle times and while giving directions, sit next to the chatterboxes. If they start talking excessively, quietly remind them that they need to listen without talking.

Just as there are effective methods of getting their attention, there are others, besides yelling, that just don't work. Some teens have been known to have the children run laps or do push-ups. Often the noisiest children are those who want attention so this just gives them more attention and reinforces their negative behavior. Plus, running laps puts the children in an unsupervised situation which is not acceptable.