

Not in front of the children

A short book about shouting at your kids, regretting it by
bedtime, and doing it again on Thursday

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit. You ask your child to do something. You ask again. You ask a third time, louder. Then you shout, and they do it, crying or sullen, and the evening is spoiled. At bedtime you look at them asleep and feel wretched. You promise yourself that tomorrow will be different. On Thursday it happens again.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that shouting makes sense from the inside. It works, in the moment, and you've usually tried everything else first. The second is that it works for a reason that makes it worse over time. A child who's asked three times and then shouted at learns that the first three asks aren't real, so the shout becomes the only instruction they answer, and you have to shout more. The shout isn't fixing the not listening. It's teaching it. The third is practical. You ask once, close and quiet, you follow it through, and when you do shout, you put it right the same day. Chapters 17 to 21 cover how.

This book doesn't say that you're a bad parent, that children should never be told off, or that you should never raise your voice. A child about to step into the road needs to be shouted at. It says that shouting as the routine way of being obeyed costs more than it gives, and that most of the cost lands on the child.

Four cautions.

If you hit your children, or you're frightened that you might, that's beyond this book. The NHS says smacking doesn't have a lasting positive effect and teaches children that hitting is acceptable, and the research on physical punishment points the same way. Please talk to someone. Your health visitor, your GP, or the free Family Lives parents' helpline on 0808 800 2222.

If your temper frightens your partner as well as your children, or there's violence or threats in the house from anyone, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline is free and open day and night on 0808 2000 247.

If the shouting is new, or has become much worse, and you're also sleeping badly, feeling low most of the day, or finding no pleasure in anything, treat that as a change in your health. See a GP. Parents of small children are often exhausted and sometimes depressed, and the shouting can be the first sign.

And if your child's behaviour is far outside what you see in other children of the same age, at school as well as at home, that's worth raising with the school or a GP, because there may be something to understand before there's anything to fix.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Tuesday, ten past six

It's ten past six on a Tuesday evening. Tea is nearly ready and you've asked your eight-year-old to put the tablet down and lay the table. You said it from the kitchen. Nothing happened. You said it again from the doorway, a bit sharper. They said "In a minute" without looking up. The pasta is boiling over. You said it a third time, with their full name in it, and they did the sigh that you can't stand, and something in you went.

You shouted. Not words you'd choose. The tablet was taken and put on top of the fridge, and there was a speech about how you're sick of asking, sick of it, and how nobody in this house does anything unless you scream. Your five-year-old, who'd been drawing at the table, went quiet and small. The eight-year-old cried, then laid the table with the cutlery banged down, and tea was eaten in a silence that the youngest tried to fill.

At half past eight you did bedtime and were gentle, to make up for it. At nine you stood in the doorway and looked at them asleep and felt the thing you feel, which is shame and love and a tiredness that goes to the bone. You said, out loud, to nobody, "I'm not doing that again." On Thursday, at ten past six, you did it again, about shoes.

This isn't every evening. Most evenings are fine. But it's most weeks, and it's been most weeks for a couple of years, and each time the promise afterwards is a little less convincing, even to you.

I'll use a few terms throughout. **The shout** is the raised voice used to get something done. Not a shout of warning or fright, which this book leaves alone, but the shout that arrives at the end of asking. **The ladder** is the sequence that leads to it. Ask from another room, ask again, ask louder, use the full name, shout. **The instruction** is what you actually wanted, which on Tuesday was the table laid. **The regret** is what you feel at nine o'clock in the doorway. **The repair** is going back to the child afterwards and putting it right, and chapter 20 will argue that it matters more than you think. And **the quiet ask** is what this book will offer in place of the ladder, which is one instruction, given close and low, and then followed through.

The habit has some regular features. This list is my own observation and not a research finding.

The shout comes at the end of a ladder. You rarely shout first. You shout fourth.

It works. The table gets laid. This is the thing to hold in mind, because it explains everything else.

It's about small things. Shoes, the table, teeth, the tablet, coats. Not about anything that matters in itself.

It happens at the same times. Mornings before school, the hour before tea, bedtime. Almost never at eleven on a Saturday morning.

And the regret arrives at bedtime and is gone by the next flashpoint. It never seems to be there at ten past six, when it would be useful.

Try one thing before reading on, and don't change anything yet. For a week, each time you shout, write down the time, what the instruction was, and how many times you'd asked before the shout. Don't try to shout less. You're finding out what's true, and the third column is the one that matters.

Why shouting seems sensible

I don't want to start by telling you that shouting is bad for children. You know that, you've read it, and it's the reason for the regret. It hasn't stopped the shouting, because knowing it's bad doesn't tell you what to do at ten past six with the pasta boiling over. There are real reasons why you shout, and they deserve stating before anything is said against them.

It works. Three quiet asks produced nothing. One shout produced a laid table. If you were designing a way of getting things done in a house, you'd keep the thing that worked.

You've tried everything else first. Nobody could say you didn't ask nicely. You asked nicely three times. The shout is what's left when nice has failed.

You're at the end of yourself. Ten past six is the end of a day that started at half past six. You've worked, or been with them all day, or both. There's nothing in reserve.

You were shouted at, and you're all right. Your parents shouted, and you turned out fine, and you love them. It's how families are.

They should know by now. An eight-year-old has been asked to lay the table several hundred times. The fact that it still needs asking feels like defiance, and defiance seems to call for force.

And it feels like the only lever. You can't reason with a child who won't look up. You can't wait, because tea is now. Volume is what you have.

I think the shout is trying to meet four needs, and this list is mine. You want the thing done. You want to be listened to. You want some relief from the pressure of the hour. And you want your child to understand that you mean what you say.

All four are reasonable. My argument is that the shout serves them badly. The thing gets done, tonight, at the cost of it being harder to get done tomorrow. You're listened to only at volume, because the shout has been teaching them which asks to ignore. The relief lasts until bedtime and is replaced by regret. And what they learn about whether you mean what you say is that you don't, until the fourth time. The rest of this book is about getting all four things another way.

"It's the only thing that works"

Start here, because it's true, and because it's the truth that keeps the habit going. The shout works. If it didn't, you'd have stopped years ago.

There's research that says so plainly. Daniela Owen, Amy Slep and Richard Heyman reviewed forty-one studies of what parents do to get children to comply, with children from eighteen months to eleven years. Reprimands, meaning telling a child off, and negative responses like a stern face consistently produced more compliance. Praise and positive responses had mixed results. So the evidence agrees with you. In the moment, a telling off gets the shoes on more reliably than a "well done" does.

I'm not going to argue with that. I'm going to ask what the shout is working on.

Go back to Tuesday. You asked from the kitchen. Nothing. You asked from the doorway. "In a minute." You asked with the full name. The sigh. Then the shout, and the table. Four instructions, one result. From your side, the shout was the one that worked. Now look at it from the child's side. They received four signals, and three of them, by experience, could be ignored without consequence. The only one that was ever followed by anything was the fourth. A child who's lived through that sequence a few hundred times has learned something precise, and it isn't that they should lay the table. It's that laying the table becomes necessary at the shout and not before.

So the shout works because the ladder has made it the instruction. The first three asks aren't instructions any more. They're the run-up. Your child isn't being defiant when they ignore the first ask. They're responding accurately to what the household has taught them, which is that the first ask is information about your mood and the fourth is the one that counts.

This is my reading, but there's a large body of research behind the general shape of it. Justin Smith and colleagues followed seven hundred and thirty-one families from when the children were two until they were eight, observing how parents and children dealt with each other. Where parent and child fell into what the researchers call coercive interaction, each escalating to get the other to give way, the child's non-compliance grew over time. The coercion amplified the not listening. It didn't reduce it. And the children's own difficult behaviour didn't consistently predict more coercion, which is to say that the pattern was more driven by the exchange than by the child.

So the shout works tonight and makes tomorrow harder. That's not a paradox. It's a training programme, run by accident, in which the reward for ignoring the first three asks is that nothing happens, and the signal for action is a parent losing control. You've been running it for years, and it works exactly as designed.

"They don't listen until I shout"

This is the same fact from the other side, and it's worth a chapter because it's said as a complaint about the child when it's a description of the ladder.

They don't listen until you shout. True. Why would they? Consider what the first ask has going for it. It's delivered from another room, to a child absorbed in something, in a normal voice, with no consequence attached and a track record of being repeated. There's no reason for a child to act on it, and children are economical. They act on what has to be acted on.

Think about who in your child's life gets listened to the first time. The teacher, usually. The swimming coach. Perhaps a grandparent. It's not because those people shout more. It's usually because they shout less, and because with them the first ask is the only ask. The teacher says "pencils down" once, and pencils go down, because in that room "pencils down" has always meant pencils down, and nothing has ever come after it except a consequence. Your child can do the thing. They do it every day at school. What they've learned at home is that the rules are different.

That's the awkward and hopeful part. The not listening isn't a fixed trait of the child. It's a fact about the ladder, and the ladder is yours. If you take out the rungs, so that there's one ask and then a consequence, the child will learn the new arrangement in the same way they learned the old one, which is by finding out what happens. It'll take a few weeks. It won't take years.

I'd add something about what the ladder does to your own voice. By the third ask, you're already annoyed, and the annoyance is in the ask, and the child hears it. So the third ask isn't a request. It's a warning of the shout, and it's heard as one, and some children, at that point, dig in, because being warned makes people stubborn. The sigh on Tuesday was your eight-year-old digging in. You then confirmed that the warning was real by shouting. Everyone did what they'd learned to do.

The quiet ask in chapter 17 removes all of this at once. There's one ask, so there's no warning stage. It's delivered close, so it can't be ignored the way a voice from the kitchen can. And it's followed by something, so it's real. Your child will listen the first time, because the first time will have become the only time.

"They need to know I mean it"

There's a belief that volume conveys seriousness. A quiet ask can be taken or left. A shouted one means business. If you don't raise your voice, how will they know that this time you mean it?

Look at how a child actually learns whether you mean something. Not by how loud you say it. By what happens next. What follows is my reasoning.

Suppose you said, quietly, "Shoes on, please, we're leaving in two minutes," and in two minutes you picked up the shoes and the child and left, with the shoes going on in the car. You've said nothing loud. Your child has learned, from one experience, that "two minutes" meant two minutes. Now suppose you shouted, "Get your shoes on NOW," and then stood in the hall for four more minutes while they finished the game. You were loud. And the child learned that "NOW" means four minutes.

Meaning it is shown by following through. Volume is what people use instead of following through, because following through is effort and volume is free. The shout is what a parent does when they haven't decided what will happen if the instruction isn't obeyed, and so are trying to make the instruction itself frightening enough to do the work of a consequence. It doesn't, because a shouted instruction with nothing behind it is still an instruction with nothing behind it, and children are good at noticing what's behind things.

This is also where threats live. "If you don't lay that table I'm taking the tablet for a week." The tablet comes back on Thursday. A threat that isn't carried out is a lesson that threats aren't carried out, and each one lowers the value of the next. Most shouting households run on a stock of threats that everyone knows are empty, and the shouting is what's left when the threats have stopped working. The way out isn't bigger threats. It's smaller consequences that actually happen, and chapter 18 is about them.

So "they need to know I mean it" is right. They do. And the way to show it is to say the thing once at a normal volume and then do what you said. After a couple of weeks of that, your quiet voice will carry more weight than your shout ever did, because it'll have a record.

"I tried being calm and it didn't work"

You may have been here before. A book, or a friend, or your own regret told you to stay calm, and for a fortnight you did. You asked nicely, and nicely again, and kept your voice level through the fourth and fifth ask, and the table still didn't get laid, and you ended up shouting on the Friday anyway, with the added bitterness of having tried. Calm, you concluded, doesn't work with your children.

I'd look at what you actually tried, because I think it was the ladder with the volume turned down. What follows is my reasoning.

Calm asking, repeated, is still repeated asking. The child still received five signals, and the first four still had nothing behind them. The only thing that had changed was that the run-up was quieter, which from the child's side made it less clear when the real instruction was coming, and so there was even less reason to act on any of them. You'd removed the shout, which was the one rung that worked, and replaced it with nothing. Of course the table stayed unlaid. Calm was never the part that was missing. Follow-through was.

This is why the advice to stay calm fails so many parents and leaves them feeling worse. It treats the shout as the problem, when the shout is the last step of a structure. Take away the last step and keep the structure and you have a parent asking five times in a level voice while the pasta boils over, and then a shout that feels like proof that calm is for other people's children.

The quiet ask isn't calm asking. It's one ask, made close, with a small consequence that happens if it isn't done. The calm is a by-product. You're not gritting your teeth through repetitions, because there aren't any repetitions. You said it once and now you're either watching it get done or doing the small thing you decided on. Neither of those needs a raised voice, and neither of them needs you to feel serene. You can be irritated and still walk to the child, say the thing, and put the tablet on the fridge.

If you tried calm and it didn't work, that's useful evidence. It tells you the volume was never what made the shout effective, and it tells you what was. The shout had a consequence in it, which was the parent losing control, and that was the only consequence the ladder ever had. Replace it with a small, boring one that you can deliver in an ordinary voice, and the calm looks after itself.

"Everyone shouts at their kids"

You've seen it at the school gate and heard it through the wall. Every parent shouts. It's part of having children, and a book that treated it as a problem would be treating being human as a problem.

Murray Straus and Carolyn Field asked a nationally representative sample of nearly a thousand American parents about what they called psychological aggression, which covers shouting, yelling and screaming at a child, along with threatening and name-calling. By the time the child was two, nine in ten parents had done at least one of these in the past year. By five, nearly all of them had. The rates stayed in the nineties right through to seventeen. The researchers describe it as near universal. There were no real differences by family type, income or anything else. Severe forms were rarer, with about one parent in ten to one in five of toddlers' parents and about half of teenagers' parents reporting them in a year.

So yes. Everyone shouts. You're not unusual and you're not a monster, and if the shouting is once a month, in the way most people mean it, you might reasonably close this book. The question is frequency and heat, and that's where the research stops being reassuring.

Ming-Te Wang and Sarah Kenny followed nearly a thousand two-parent families with a thirteen-year-old. They measured what they called harsh verbal discipline, which is shouting, yelling, swearing at or insulting a child as a way of correcting them. Where mothers

and fathers used it more at thirteen, their children showed more conduct problems and more symptoms of depression at fourteen. It ran the other way too. A child's misconduct at thirteen predicted more harsh discipline from the parents at fourteen. And parental warmth, which you'd hope would soften it, didn't. Children of warm parents who shouted at them fared no better than children of cold ones. Chapter 9 returns to that.

That study is about teenagers and about the harsh end, with swearing and insults in it. It doesn't say that raising your voice once a fortnight damages a child. What it suggests is that shouting as a routine tool of correction, at the level that the ladder produces when it's run several times a week, goes with children doing worse, and that the being-worse feeds more shouting. That's the loop from chapter 3, measured over a year in a thousand homes.

So the fact that everyone does it tells you it's normal. It doesn't tell you it's free, and it doesn't tell you that the amount you're doing is the amount that everyone means.

"I was shouted at and I'm fine"

Most of us were. And most of us are fine, in the sense of having jobs and relationships and no obvious damage. The argument is that since you survived it, your children will, and the fuss about shouting is a modern indulgence.

I'd look at two things. What "fine" includes, and what was learned.

Start with what you remember. Not the shouting in general, which has blurred, but the particular times. The occasion your father lost it in the car. The thing your mother said on the stairs that you've never repeated to anyone. I'd guess you can picture them, forty years on, with the light and the words. Children don't remember the four hundred ordinary evenings. They remember the ones with a shout in them, and they remember them for good. That's what "fine" contains. It contains a small set of vivid scenes, each of which carries a lesson about what adults do when they're pushed.

Then look at what you learned, and I'll say what I think it was. You learned that the person you depended on could turn, briefly, into someone frightening. You learned to read a mood from a footstep. You learned that being asked nicely was optional and being shouted at was serious. And you learned, from watching, how a person gets what they want when they're at the end of their rope, which is that they shout. You're now doing it. That's not a coincidence, and it's not a character flaw. It's the lesson, learned well.

The NHS makes the point about smacking, that children learn by example, and if you hit your child you're telling them that hitting is acceptable. The same applies to shouting. A child who's shouted at when they don't comply learns that shouting is what you do when someone doesn't comply. You'll hear it in how they speak to a younger sibling. You may hear your own sentences.

None of this means you were damaged, or that your parents were bad. It means that "fine" is compatible with having learned some things you'd rather your children didn't learn, and that you've been passing them on in the normal way, which is by demonstration. The fact that you're reading this book suggests that you've noticed. That's the part of you that isn't fine with it, and I'd trust it.

"They know I love them anyway"

This is the belief that lets the regret pass by morning. You shout, but you also cuddle, read to them, turn up to everything and tell them daily that you love them. The shouting is a small part of a warm home. Surely the warmth outweighs it.

The warmth is real and it matters. Jennifer Lansford and colleagues followed nearly twelve hundred children in eight countries and found that mothers' warmth went with falling anxiety and aggression over time. Warmth protects children from a good deal. I'm not going to argue that your love doesn't count.

But look at what the research says about whether warmth cancels harshness. Wang and Kenny, in the study from chapter 7, tested exactly this. They expected that shouting would do less harm in warm homes. It didn't. Parental warmth made no difference to the link between harsh verbal discipline and the children's conduct problems and depressive symptoms. Lansford's study asked the same about physical punishment and found, in some countries, something worse. Children whose mothers were both warm and used physical punishment showed increases in anxiety over time. The researchers' advice to clinicians everywhere was to counsel parents against it even inside otherwise loving relationships.

I'd suggest a reason, and it's my reasoning. Warmth and the shout aren't on the same scale, so one can't be subtracted from the other. Warmth tells a child that they're loved. The shout tells them that the person who loves them can, without much warning, become

frightening. Both lessons get learned. The second isn't erased by the first. If anything, it's sharper for the contrast, because the child has no way to predict which parent is coming through the door.

There's also what the shout does to the warmth itself. Tuesday's bedtime was gentle, to make up for it. Your child may have felt that, and may also have felt that the gentleness was an apology, and that the two go together. Over years, that pairs love with the aftermath of fear, which is not a pairing you'd choose for them.

So your children do know you love them. That's the good news, and it's the reason the rest is worth doing. It isn't a reason to leave the shouting alone. The love and the shout are both being learned, separately, and you can only remove one of them.

"It's them, they're impossible"

Some evenings you'd defend yourself. It isn't that you have a temper. It's that they're impossible at six o'clock. They whine, they ignore, they fight each other, they can't do the simplest thing. Anyone would shout.

Two things are true here, and the book needs both.

The first is that the child's part is real. Wang and Kenny found a child effect. Children who behaved worse got shouted at more the following year. Children aren't blank, and some are harder than others, and the six o'clock version of most children is the hardest version of them. The NHS page on difficult behaviour puts the reasons plainly. Often it's because they're tired, hungry, overexcited, frustrated or bored. At ten past six an eight-year-old has been up for twelve hours, hasn't eaten since lunch, has just been pulled off a screen, and is being asked to do a chore. Every one of those conditions makes a child less able to comply, and you've got all of them at once.

The second is that the same conditions apply to you. You're tired and hungry and at the end of a day too. So ten past six has two people in it, both depleted, one of whom is holding a pan of pasta. That isn't a child being impossible. It's an hour in which nobody is at their best, meeting a ladder that turns not-at-their-best into a shout.

There's a thing to notice about what "impossible" expects. An eight-year-old is eight. A five-year-old is five. They aren't small adults who've decided to be difficult. They have the attention, the self-control and the sense of time that their age allows, and the tablet is more interesting than the table to anyone, at any age. Some of the fury at six o'clock is fury at a child for being the age they are. I don't say that to scold. I say it because it's a mismatch you can fix in your own head, this evening, and it takes the personal insult out of "In a minute."

So the answer to "they're impossible" isn't "no they're not". It's that six o'clock can be made less impossible, for both of you, by changing the conditions rather than the volume. A snack at half past four. Screens off by a timer and not by a parent. Tea a bit earlier. You eating something too. Chapter 19 lists these. They're dull, and they remove more shouting than any amount of resolve.

"They shout at me too"

Some readers have a child who gives as good as they get. You ask, they ignore, you ask louder, they shout "I SAID IN A MINUTE," and now there are two people shouting in a kitchen and one of them is eight. It seems to you that the child is the aggressive one, and that your shout is a response.

It is a response. It's also, in most homes, a lesson coming back. What follows is my reasoning, with the coercion research from chapter 3 behind it.

A child who shouts back has learned two things. That shouting is what people in this house do when they're not getting what they want, and that volume is how a disagreement is settled. Both were taught by demonstration, over years, at ten past six. The child isn't being aggressive out of nowhere. They're using the tool they've watched work. Smith and colleagues' finding, that coercive back-and-forth between parent and child amplifies the child's non-compliance over time, is a description of exactly this exchange, observed in hundreds of families. Each side escalates to make the other give way, and each side gets better at escalating.

So the child's shout is the ladder, learned. And the worst thing you can do with it is climb it. If they shout and you shout louder, you've confirmed that louder wins, and next time they'll start higher. If they shout and you go quiet, walk to them, and say the instruction once in a low voice, you've demonstrated something they haven't seen before, which is that shouting doesn't move you. The first few

times, they'll shout more, to check. Hold the low voice. It takes a few weeks, in my expectation, for a child to stop reaching for a tool that's stopped working.

There's a second part, and it's the follow-through. A child who shouts at you needs to learn that shouting at a parent has a consequence, and it needs to be a small, calm one, delivered without a matching shout. "You don't shout at me. Tablet's on the fridge." Then nothing more. Not a speech about respect, which is a speech delivered at volume about the wrongness of volume, and children hear the contradiction perfectly.

And a third part, which is the one people skip. When you've stopped shouting for a few weeks, the child's shouting usually falls away on its own, because its model has gone. If it doesn't, and your child is routinely shouting, hitting or losing control in a way that's out of step with other children their age, at school as well as at home, that's the last caution in the preface. It may be nothing. It's worth a conversation with the school.

Your child learned to shout from somewhere. The good news is that the same place can teach them something else, and you're already standing in it.

"I can't help it, it just comes out"

The shout can feel like something that happens to you. One moment you're asking about shoes, the next you're shouting, and there was no decision in between. On that view, the only cure would be a different temperament, and you haven't got one.

I'd question the "no decision" part, and I'd do it with the evidence you already have.

You don't shout at everyone. You didn't shout at the shop assistant who got your order wrong last week, or at your friend's child who was being just as difficult on Sunday, or at your manager. You were annoyed with all of them. The annoyance didn't turn into a shout, because the conditions were different. There were witnesses, or consequences, or a person you needed to keep on side. So the shout isn't a reflex that fires whenever you're annoyed. It fires when you're annoyed and there's nobody to stop you and the target can't retaliate. That's not a temperament. That's a set of conditions, and conditions can be changed.

The shout also has a run-up, and you can learn to see it. The NHS lists the body's signs of anger. A faster heartbeat, tense muscles, clenched fists, tightness in the chest, feeling hot. These arrive before the shout, usually somewhere around the second ask, and they're the last quiet moment. The ladder itself is a run-up you can watch. By the time you're using the full name, you're one rung from the top, and you know it, because you've climbed it a hundred times.

What follows is my suggestion. The thing to catch isn't the shout. By then it's out. The thing to catch is the third ask, the one with the edge in it. That's the moment you're still deciding, whether you feel it or not, and it's the moment to do something else. Go to the child instead of calling again. Or leave the room for thirty seconds. Or drop your voice to a near whisper, which is odd enough to get a child's attention and impossible to do while shouting. Chapter 19 sets these out.

There's also a plain fact about the pasta. Most shouts happen when two things need doing at once, and one of them is on fire. You can't deal with a child properly while a pan boils over, and so you deal with the child badly from across the room. Turn the hob off. The pasta can wait two minutes. The two minutes are what the quiet ask needs, and they're usually available if you take them.

"It just comes out" is how it feels. What's actually happening is a sequence with several points at which a different move is possible, made by a person who's decided not to shout at the boss. The same person can decide not to shout at the child. It's harder, because the child can't make you, and that's exactly why it matters more.

"At least I always say sorry"

You do, and it's to your credit. Some parents never do. You go in at bedtime, or the next morning, and say you're sorry you shouted, and you mean it, and your child says it's OK, and you both feel a little better.

I want to keep the apology, because chapter 20 will argue it's the most important thing in this book. But I want to look at what a repeated apology teaches, because it isn't only what you intend.

An apology has a promise in it. "I'm sorry I shouted" carries "and I'll try not to." When it's followed by the same shout on Thursday, and the same apology on Thursday night, the child learns that the promise doesn't bind. After enough cycles, "sorry" becomes the sound the evening makes when it's over, rather than a change in anything. Children are quick to learn this, and some come to say "it's OK" in a flat voice that should worry you more than tears would.

There's a second thing. If the apology is what makes you feel better, it can become the thing that lets the shouting continue. The regret is discharged at bedtime, and by morning you've been forgiven, and the pressure that might have driven a change has been released. I've seen this pattern in adults with each other, and it's my observation rather than a finding, but I think it applies here. An apology that comes with no change is a way of managing your own feelings, paid for by the child having to grant it.

So what makes an apology worth something? It's short. It names the thing. It doesn't put any of it on the child, so there's no "but you weren't listening". It asks nothing of them, not even forgiveness. And it's rare, because the shouting is rare, so it still means something when it comes. Chapter 20 gives a form of words.

The apology also matters for a reason beyond the child. It's how you teach them what adults do when they've got something wrong. A child who's seen a parent shout and then, an hour later, come back and say plainly that they were wrong has learned that mistakes can be owned and put right. That's a good lesson and it's worth a great deal. It's just not worth enough to cover a shout a week, because at that rate the lesson turns into a different one, which is that sorry is what you say instead of changing.

Keep the apology. Make it real by making it rare.

"A bit of fear keeps them in line"

Not everyone will say this out loud, but a good many parents believe it. Children need to be a little afraid of you. Not terrified, but wary. It's what stops them running wild, and a parent whose children aren't at all afraid of them will be walked over.

I'd separate two things that this mixes up. Respect and fear. What follows is my reasoning.

Respect is when a child does what you ask because they've learned that what you ask happens, that you're fair, and that you're on their side. It's built by following through, by consistency, and by being the same person on Tuesday as on Saturday. Fear is when a child does what you ask because they've learned that not doing it makes you frightening. It's built by the shout. They look alike at ten past six. They come apart everywhere else.

Look at what a frightened child does. They comply when you're there and not when you're not, because the fear is of you, not of the consequence. They hide things. A broken ornament goes behind the sofa rather than being brought to you. They lie, because the truth brings the shout. And as they get older, they stop telling you things. The child who's afraid of your reaction at eight is the fifteen-year-old who doesn't tell you where they were. That's the fifteen-year-old you most need to be told by.

Wang and Kenny's finding from chapter 7 sits behind this. Harsh verbal discipline at thirteen went with more depressive symptoms at fourteen, not just more misbehaviour. A child who's routinely

shouted at doesn't only learn to keep in line. They learn something about their own worth from the person whose opinion counts most, and it shows up as low mood. I'd keep that in mind whenever "a bit of fear" seems like a small price.

Then there's what fear does to the parent. If your authority rests on being frightening, you have to stay frightening, which means the shout can never be retired and has to get louder as the child grows and fears less. By fourteen you're shouting at someone as big as you who isn't afraid any more, and there's nothing behind the shout at all. A parent whose authority rests on following through has something that still works at fourteen, because a consequence doesn't depend on your size or your volume.

You're right that children need to know that you mean it. Chapter 5 was about how they learn that. It isn't by fearing you. It's by finding that you're reliable, which is a thing a child can respect without ever flinching from.

"It's always the same three times of day"

If you did the exercise in chapter 1, your list has times on it, and I'd expect the times to cluster. Before school. The hour before tea. Bedtime. Perhaps the moment a screen has to go off, at whichever of those it falls. Almost nothing at other hours. The habit looks like a temper. It behaves like a timetable.

That's the most useful thing on the list, because a timetable can be planned for. What follows is my own suggestion.

Each flashpoint has the same structure. There's a transition, from one activity to another, which children of all ages find hard. There's a deadline, the school bus, the tea, the bedtime, which is real and which you can feel. There's a depleted child, tired or hungry or overexcited. And there's a depleted parent, doing two things at once, with the deadline in their chest. The ladder runs fast under those conditions because each ask is made while doing something else, from across a room, with the clock going.

Now think about what changes if you treat the three flashpoints as fixed features of the day rather than as ambushes. Mornings will be hard. So bags are packed and clothes are out the night before, breakfast has no screen in it, and you leave ten minutes earlier than you need to, because the ten minutes are where the shout lives. Six o'clock will be hard. So there's a snack at half past four for everyone, the screen goes off by a timer at a quarter to six rather than by a voice, and tea is at ten past six sharp because the table was laid at half past five, by a child who was asked once, close,

before they were absorbed. Bedtime will be hard. So it starts fifteen minutes earlier than the target, there's one instruction at a time, and the last screen went off an hour ago.

None of that is clever, and all of it is boring, which is why it works. Most shouting comes from a few predictable collisions, and the collisions can be moved apart. You'll still have evenings when the pasta boils over. There'll be fewer of them, and you'll be less depleted when they come.

There's one more thing about the timetable. If you know the shout is likely at ten past six, you can decide at five past what you're going to do instead. Chapter 19 calls that catching it early, and it's far easier with a clock than with a feeling.

What the shouting costs

You may think of the habit as costing a bad evening now and again, followed by a bad feeling at bedtime. I think it costs more, and most of this chapter is my own reckoning. I'll say where a study comes in.

The next evening. Every shout teaches the ladder a little more firmly. Smith's coercion finding, from chapter 3, is that the pattern amplifies not listening over time. Tonight's shout is tomorrow's third ask ignored.

What they learn about instructions. That the first three aren't real. This will follow them to places where the first one is the only one, and where the person giving it won't climb a ladder before acting.

What they learn about adults. That the people who love them can become frightening without much warning, and that this is what love looks like from the inside of a home. They'll carry that into their own homes.

What they learn to do. Shout. Chapter 8. You'll hear it first with a sibling.

The volume that stops working. Each shout raises the level at which the next one registers. At some point you're shouting at full volume at someone who's stopped hearing it, and there's nowhere left to go.

The child who was drawing. The five-year-old at the table on Tuesday wasn't being shouted at and went quiet and small anyway. Children who watch a sibling shouted at learn every lesson above without having done anything.

Their mood. Wang and Kenny's link between harsh verbal discipline and depressive symptoms a year later. That's the cost that shows up last and matters most.

The hiding and the not telling. Chapter 14. The teenager who doesn't come to you.

Your partner. Who is either shouting too, in which case the house has two ladders, or isn't, in which case they're watching and not saying, and that's its own strain on the two of you.

Your view of yourself. You know the parent you meant to be. The regret at nine o'clock is the gap between that parent and the one at ten past six, measured every week. Years of that erode something.

In return for all that, you've had the table laid on Tuesday. It would have been laid anyway, by a quiet ask made at half past five, without any of it. That's the trade, laid out. I'd take the other side of it.

The quiet ask

The first practical step is to replace the ladder with one instruction that's built to be heard. Everything in this chapter is my own method, and the reasoning behind it is in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Parts of it echo advice on the NHS page on difficult behaviour, which I'll mention where it does.

Go to the child. Not from the kitchen. Not from the doorway. Walk to where they are, get down to their level, and wait until they look at you. If they're on a screen, it's fair to say "Pause that a second" and wait until it's paused. An instruction given to the back of a head isn't an instruction. It's background noise.

Say it once. One thing, in a normal voice, with the words you'd use to another adult. "I need you to lay the table now, please." Not "Can you lay the table?", which is a question and invites a no. Not "How many times have I asked you?", which is a complaint. One clear thing.

Say when. "Now" or "when this episode ends" or "before you go back to that". Children need the edge of the instruction to be visible. The NHS suggests explaining why when it helps, and with older children a short reason is fine. "Tea's in five minutes."

Then wait, and don't repeat. This is the hard part, and it's the whole change. You've said it once. If you say it again, the first time wasn't real, and the ladder has started. Stand there. Count ten in

your head. Most children, faced with a parent who's come to them, said one thing, and is now silently waiting, do the thing. It's much harder to ignore a person than a voice.

If they do it, say so. "Thank you. That was quick." The NHS advice is to be specific about what pleased you, and I'd second it. Not because praise is magic. Owen's review found its effects mixed. But because a child who's just done the thing the first time needs to know that the first time is now the arrangement, and a quick, plain thank you is the receipt.

If they don't, follow it through. Chapter 18. Not a second ask. Not a louder one. The thing you'd decided would happen.

Two things about the voice. Keep it low. A low voice carries seriousness better than a loud one, once the loud one has been retired, and it's physically hard to be furious in a whisper. And keep the ask short. The longer the sentence, the more of your annoyance gets into it and the less of the instruction gets through.

This will feel slow at first, because walking to the child takes twenty seconds and calling from the kitchen takes two. The twenty seconds replace four asks and a shout. It's the best exchange in the book.

Following it through

The quiet ask works because something happens after it. This chapter is about the something. It's my own suggestion, and it draws on the NHS advice about consistency, rewards and not giving up.

Decide in advance. Before you give the instruction, know what happens if it isn't done. Not a punishment you'd have to invent in anger. A small, boring, immediate thing you can actually do. If the table isn't laid, the tablet goes on the fridge until it is. If the shoes aren't on in two minutes, you put them on the child, or carry the shoes and the child to the car. If teeth aren't cleaned, there's no story. That's all. Small, immediate, and certain.

Do it calmly, and do it every time. The consequence works because it's reliable, not because it's big. The NHS puts it as be consistent, and don't give up once you've decided on something, because solutions take time. A small consequence that happens every time teaches more than a large threat that happens once in five. And it can be delivered in a normal voice, which is the point. "Right, tablet on the fridge until the table's done." No speech.

Help, don't shout. With younger children, the follow-through is often physical help rather than a consequence. "I'll help you." Hand over hand with the cutlery. Lifting them towards the bathroom. It's not a punishment. It's the instruction happening, with you making it happen, which is what "I mean it" looks like to a five-year-old.

Retire the threats. You have a stock of them, and none of them get carried out. Stop making them. If you catch yourself starting one, replace it with the small thing you'll actually do. "If you don't stop that I'll" is the beginning of a ladder. "Tablet on the fridge" is a consequence.

Rewards, if you use them, come after. The NHS draws a line I'd keep. A reward given after the thing is done is a reward. A reward given before, to get it done, is a bribe, and bribes teach a child to hold out for the bribe. If there's a sticker chart, it's for tables laid, not for tables about to be laid.

Expect a fortnight of testing. Your child has years of evidence that the first ask isn't real. They'll test the new arrangement, hard, for a week or two, and the testing can look like things getting worse. That's the ladder being dismantled. Hold the small consequence steady, every time, without heat, and the testing stops when they've learned that the first ask is the only one.

What you're doing here is moving the force out of your voice and into the arrangement. The arrangement is what makes the quiet ask real. Once it's in place, you'll find you almost never need to use it, because a child who knows the consequence is coming does the thing at the ask, which is what the shout was trying to achieve and never could.

Catching it early

The quiet ask and the follow-through take most of the shouting out of the week. This chapter is for the rest, the evenings when you're depleted and the ladder starts anyway. It's my own list.

Know the times. Chapter 15. If the list says ten past six, then at five past six you say to yourself, "This is the hour." Knowing it's coming is half of not being ambushed by it.

Change the conditions first. A snack at half past four for everyone, including you. Screens off by a timer, not a voice. Tea earlier. Bags packed the night before. Ten minutes' extra margin in the morning. The hob turned off while you deal with a child. These remove the collisions, and it's far easier to remove a collision than to stay calm inside one.

Watch for the third ask. The one with the edge. When you hear it in your own voice, you're one rung from the shout. That's the signal to stop calling and go to the child, or to leave the room.

Notice the body. The NHS list of what anger feels like. Heart faster, jaw and shoulders tight, hot face, chest tight. These come before the shout. Learn what yours are. For most people, in my observation, it's the jaw.

Take thirty seconds. "I'm going to the kitchen for a minute." Say it and go. The NHS suggests counting to ten and slow breathing before reacting, and thirty seconds out of the room does the same job with a door in between. The pasta can wait. So can the shoes. Nothing at ten past six is as urgent as it feels.

Drop your voice. If you can't leave, go the other way from the shout. Speak more quietly than usual, almost a whisper. It's strange enough that children attend to it, and it's nearly impossible to do while furious, so it acts as a brake on you as much as a signal to them.

Say what you're doing. "I'm getting cross, and I don't want to shout, so I'm going to stop talking for a minute." This is not weakness. It's a demonstration, in front of the child, of a person noticing anger and handling it, which is a lesson worth more than anything about tables.

Leave the speech out. If you do lose it, lose it in one sentence and stop. "I've asked you to lay the table and I'm angry that it's not done." Then silence. The shout that does the most damage is the speech that follows it, the one about how nobody in this house does anything. That's where the insults live, and insults are what Wang and Kenny's harsh discipline was made of.

These are small tools and none of them is reliable on its own. Together, with the conditions changed and the ladder gone, they cover most evenings. The ones they don't cover are what chapter 20 is for.

Putting it right

You'll shout. Not as often, but you will, because you're a person at the end of a day. What happens after is the part of this book I'd most like you to keep. This is my own suggestion, and the reasoning is in chapter 13.

Same day. Before bed, or as soon as you're calm. Not in the morning, when it's faded. A child who goes to sleep after a shout with nothing said sleeps on it.

Short. Three or four sentences. "I shouted at you earlier. That wasn't fair on you, and I'm sorry. I'm working on not doing it." Then stop. A long apology becomes about you, and the child ends up comforting the parent, which is the wrong way round.

No "but". Not "I'm sorry I shouted, but you weren't listening." That isn't an apology. It's the ladder, restated in a quieter voice. If there's something to say about the table, say it separately, tomorrow, at a calm moment. The apology is for the shout and only the shout.

Nothing on the child. Not "you made me so angry". They didn't make you. You were angry, and you shouted, and both of those are yours. Children who are told they cause a parent's anger learn to manage the parent, which is a job no child should have.

Ask nothing back. Not "do you forgive me?" and not "give me a hug". The child may want to, and that's lovely, and it's theirs to offer. An apology that requires a response isn't finished until the child has done something, which makes it another instruction.

Mean the last sentence. "I'm working on it" has to be true, and this book is how it's true. If you say it every week and nothing changes, chapter 13 said what the child learns.

Then let it go, in front of them. Don't be extra gentle for the rest of the evening to make up for it. That pairs the apology with a reward and teaches the child that a shout gets followed by treats. Be ordinary. The apology was the repair. Ordinary is the proof.

I'd add one thing about what the repair does for you. The regret at nine o'clock is heavy because it has nowhere to go. The apology gives it somewhere. It's said, it's done, and the weight is smaller, which means you go into Thursday with less of it, which means Thursday is more likely to go well. A parent carrying a week of unrepaired shouts is a parent one rung from the top before the first ask.

And it's the lesson. A child who has seen you shout and then come back, plainly, and put it right, has seen something that many adults never learn to do. They'll do it too, with their siblings, with their friends, and one day with their own children. That's worth every awkward minute at the bedside.

The decision

This chapter asks you to decide something. It comes late because at the start it would have sounded like the advice you've always been given, which is to stop shouting. By now you've seen why that advice never landed, which is that the shout works, and why it's right anyway. The shout works because the ladder has made it the only real instruction, and every shout makes the ladder longer. Meaning it is shown by following through, not by volume. Warmth doesn't cancel the shout. Six o'clock is a timetable, not an ambush. And the apology is worth keeping and only worth something if it's rare.

Here's the rule I'd suggest. Put it in your own words if you like.

I ask once, close and quiet, and I follow it through, and when I shout I put it right the same day.

It has five parts, and each answers a chapter.

I go to the child. Down to their level, eyes on me, one instruction, once, with a when. No calling from another room.

I don't repeat. If it's not done, the thing I decided on happens, calmly and every time. No second ask, no threats.

I change the conditions. Snack, timer, earlier tea, bags the night before, hob off. The three flashpoints are planned for, not walked into.

I catch the third ask. When I hear the edge, I stop, go to the child, or leave the room for thirty seconds.

I repair the same day. Short, no "but", nothing on them, nothing asked back.

It helps to plan for the moments when the habit will try to restart. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran pooled ninety-four tests of plans in the form "when X happens, I'll do Y" and found that they make people more likely to follow through. A plan like this works because you've decided what to do before the moment comes. Three are worth writing down.

When I notice I'm about to call an instruction from another room, I'll stop, walk to the child, and say it once.

When I hear my own voice sharpen on a repeat, I'll say "I'm getting cross, I'm going to the kitchen for a minute," and go.

When I've shouted, I'll go to the child before bed and say the three sentences, and nothing else.

I'll be honest about what to expect, and this is my expectation and not a finding. The first fortnight will be worse in one way. Your child will test the new arrangement, because the old one lasted years, and the testing can look like more defiance rather than less. You'll shout at least once, and you'll have to do the repair, and it'll feel strange. Your partner may not be doing any of this, and chapter 22 says something about that.

Against that, you should find within two or three weeks that the first ask starts being answered, because it's the only one now. The evenings should have fewer collisions in them, because you've moved the collisions apart. The regret at nine o'clock should be rarer and, when it comes, smaller, because you've done something with it. And at some point a child who's used to being shouted at will do the thing at the quiet ask and look at you slightly surprised, and you'll know the arrangement has changed.

Teenagers, toddlers, the other parent and when it's more than shouting

When they're teenagers. Wang and Kenny's study is about thirteen-year-olds, and it's the age at which the shout does the most measurable harm and works the least. Teenagers aren't managed by instruction. They're managed by arrangement, which means fewer instructions, agreed in advance and at calm moments, with consequences you'd actually apply. And more listening than talking, because the fifteen-year-old who tells you things is the one you didn't shout at when they were thirteen.

When they're toddlers. A two-year-old can't do many of the things they're told, and the NHS page is clear that difficult behaviour at that age is usually tiredness, hunger, overexcitement, frustration or boredom. The quiet ask still applies, at their level, in short words. The follow-through is nearly always physical help. And the conditions matter more than anything, because a tired two-year-old can't be reasoned with and isn't being naughty.

When it's siblings fighting. Two children at each other is the flashpoint most likely to produce a shout at both of them, which teaches both that shouting is how conflict ends. Separate them, calmly, without a verdict on who started it. Consequences for both if you can't tell, delivered flat. Then leave it.

When the other parent shouts. You can't do the method for two, and a house with one quiet asker and one shouter is confusing for a child. Talk to your partner at a calm moment, about the ladder, not

about their character. Show them the chapter 1 list. Agree the three flashpoints and the small consequences together. If they won't, do your part anyway. One reliable parent is better than none.

When grandparents or others undermine it. They'll do it their way. That's all right. Children learn that different adults have different arrangements, and what matters is that yours is consistent.

When it happens in public. The shout in the supermarket is the one you feel worst about, because of the audience. The method is the same. Go to the child, get down, one instruction, low voice. The audience is far more impressed by a quiet parent than an angry one, and if they're not, they're not your concern.

When you hit, or fear you might. The first caution in this book. If it's happened, or if the shout is starting to have a hand in it, please talk to someone this week. Your health visitor, your GP, or the Family Lives helpline on 0808 800 2222. This isn't a matter for a book.

When the house is frightened of you. If your partner is afraid of your temper, or you've been told you're frightening, that's beyond shouting at children and it needs help. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 is for anyone in a household where someone is afraid.

When you're the one who's struggling. Exhaustion, low mood, a marriage under strain, money, a job that's eating you. All of these arrive at ten past six as a shout. If you've felt low most of the day

for a couple of weeks, or the shouting is new and out of character, see a GP. The shout may be the symptom.

When you'd like help with all of it. Parenting programmes exist, and they work. A Cochrane review of thirteen trials found that group-based parenting programmes reduced children's conduct problems, improved parents' mental health, and reduced harsh parenting, at modest cost. Ask your health visitor, your GP or your child's school what's available locally. There's no shame in it. It's what the evidence recommends.

When you slip. You will. Do the repair, that day, and go back to the quiet ask on Thursday. One shout doesn't rebuild the ladder. Not repairing it does.

Thursday, ten past six

It's ten past six on a Thursday evening, some weeks on. Tea is ten minutes off. The tablet went off at a quarter to six because the timer said so, and there was grumbling about the timer, which is a thing that can't be argued with and doesn't get cross. At half past five you went into the front room, crouched down by your eight-year-old, waited for them to look up, and said, "I need you to lay the table now, please, tea's at six." You stood there. After about four seconds they got up. You said, "Thanks, that was quick," and went back to the pasta, which you'd turned off.

The table's laid. Nobody has shouted. Your five-year-old is drawing at it, which is a thing they can do because the cutlery's already there.

It wasn't always like this. The first week your eight-year-old tested it hard. The table didn't get laid, twice, and the tablet went on the fridge, twice, without a speech, and there was a tantrum about the fridge that you rode out from the kitchen. On the Wednesday you shouted, about shoes, from the hall, and at bedtime you went in and said the three sentences and nothing else, and your child looked at you oddly and said, "OK," and you didn't ask for anything back. The second week was better. The third week they laid the table on the first ask four nights out of five, and on the fifth you went to them and said it once, and waited, and they did it.

You've shouted since. A morning when the bag hadn't been packed the night before because you'd forgotten, and there was a shout about a coat on the doorstep at twenty past eight. You repaired it in

the car. Your partner has started going to the child too, after a conversation about the ladder that went better than you expected, and the house now has one arrangement in it rather than two.

The five-year-old, last Sunday, told their brother to give the crayon back "now, please" in a low voice, and waited, and got the crayon. You noticed.

At nine you stand in the doorway and look at them asleep. There's no regret in it tonight. There's just the tiredness, which is ordinary, and the love, which was always there and is now not paired with anything.

If you've read this far and changed nothing yet, try one thing. The next time you're about to call an instruction from another room, don't. Walk to your child, get down to their level, wait for their eyes, and say it once. Then wait, and see what happens.

Notes

This book gives general information about an everyday habit. It isn't medical advice or a parenting programme, and it's no substitute for a health visitor, GP or family support service that knows your family. The NHS guidance and helplines I mention are for England as I found them in September 2026.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 15, 16, 20 and 23. The family, the pasta, the tablet on the fridge and everything else in the running example are invented.

Before you start. The advice to avoid smacking, that it doesn't have a lasting positive effect and that children learn by example, is from the NHS page "Dealing with child behaviour problems", which also gives the Family Lives helpline number. Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor, "Spanking and child outcomes: old controversies and new meta-analyses", *Journal of Family Psychology* 30, 2016, pages 453 to 469, pooled 111 effect sizes from studies of 160,927 children and found spanking linked with worse outcomes across nearly all of them. The domestic abuse helpline number is from the NHS page on getting help for domestic violence and abuse. The two-week guide for low mood is from the NHS pages on depression.

Chapter 3. Owen, Slep and Heyman, "The effect of praise, positive nonverbal response, reprimand, and negative nonverbal response on child compliance: a systematic review", *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 15, 2012, pages 364 to 385. Forty-one studies. Compliance was measured in the short term, which is the sense in which the chapter says the shout works. Smith, Dishion, Shaw, Wilson, Winter and Patterson, "Coercive family process and early-onset conduct problems from age 2 to school entry", *Development and Psychopathology* 26, 2014, pages 917 to 932. Seven hundred and thirty-one families from a prevention trial, with coercion observed rather than reported. The reading of the ladder as a training programme is mine.

Chapter 7. Straus and Field, "Psychological aggression by American parents: national data on prevalence, chronicity, and severity", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65, 2003, pages 795 to 808. Nine hundred and ninety-one parents, American, reporting on the previous twelve months. Wang and Kenny, "Longitudinal links between fathers' and mothers' harsh verbal discipline and adolescents' conduct problems and depressive symptoms", *Child Development* 85, 2014, pages 908 to 923. Nine hundred and seventy-six two-parent families, followed from age thirteen to fourteen, with harsh verbal discipline including shouting, yelling, swearing and insults. The extension from that to routine shouting at younger children is mine, and the chapter says so.

Chapter 8. The NHS page as above, for the point about learning by example. What I say about what was learned is my reasoning.

Chapter 9. Lansford and colleagues, "Corporal punishment, maternal warmth, and child adjustment: a longitudinal study in eight countries", Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology 43, 2014, pages 670 to 685. One thousand one hundred and ninety-six children aged seven to ten, followed for two years. The moderation by warmth varied by country. Wang and Kenny as above. The account of why warmth and the shout don't cancel is mine.

Chapter 10. Wang and Kenny as above, for the child effect. The NHS page as above, for the reasons for difficult behaviour.

Chapter 11. Smith and colleagues as above, for coercive escalation. The reading of the child's shout as a learned tool is mine.

Chapter 12. The NHS page "Anger", for the physical symptoms and the advice to count to ten and breathe before reacting. The argument from not shouting at the shop assistant is mine.

Chapter 14. Wang and Kenny as above, for depressive symptoms. The distinction between respect and fear is mine.

Chapter 17. The NHS page on difficult behaviour, for talking to your child, explaining why, and being specific in praise. Owen and colleagues as above, for the mixed findings on praise. The method is mine.

Chapter 18. The NHS page on difficult behaviour, for consistency, not giving up, and the distinction between a reward and a bribe. The method is mine.

Chapter 19. The NHS page "Anger" as above. Wang and Kenny as above, for what harsh verbal discipline consists of. The list is mine.

Chapter 21. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule and its parts haven't been tested together, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 22. Wang and Kenny as above. The NHS pages as above. Furlong, McGilloway, Bywater, Hutchings, Smith and Donnelly, "Behavioural and cognitive-behavioural group-based parenting programmes for early-onset conduct problems in children aged 3 to 12 years", *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2012, issue 2, CD008225. Thirteen trials, 1,078 participants, children with conduct problems, effects measured in the short term. Everything else in the chapter is my own suggestion.