

_BEHAVIOR AND LIFE SKILLS

The Power of Silence and How to Help Kids Find More of It

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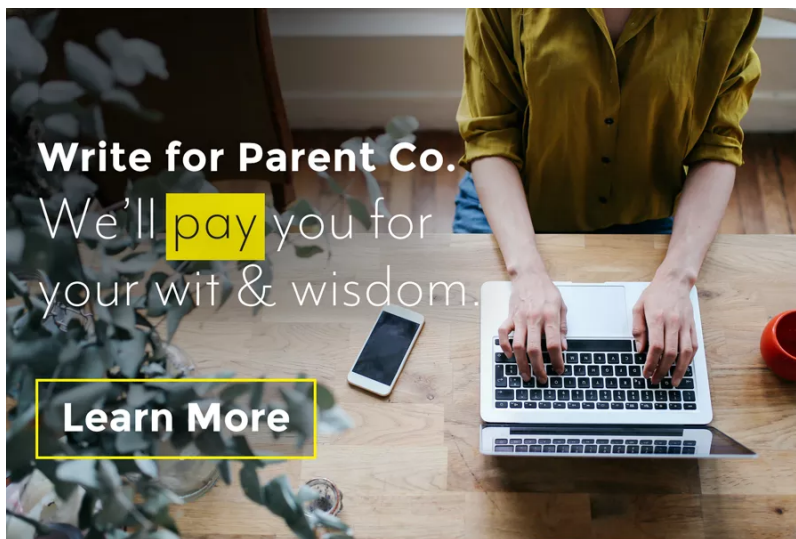
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A visit to a silent retreat is on my bucket list. It seems like the ultimate way to reach a mindful, relaxed, and introspective state. Science indicates that silence can be beneficial to us in so many ways, as it impacts our physical, mental, and emotional health. Given our increasingly loud lives with technology constantly buzzing in our ears, how can we give our children the gift of silence to make them happier and healthier?

Why too much noise is a problem

Noise pollution is considered a serious concern throughout the world. The [World Health Organization](#) ranks it as the second most critical environmental challenge after air pollution because excessive noise can seriously harm human health and interfere with people's daily activities. It can disturb sleep, cause cardiovascular and other physiological effects, reduce performance, and lead to changes in social behavior. As the world gets louder, we may be able to cope a little bit; however, our evolutionary biology has not kept up with the rapid technological innovation.



Noise affects our bodies in the following ways:

Physiological

Sudden jarring noises cause the body to produce cortisol, the fight-or-flight hormone that causes us to feel stressed and anxious. Some studies show how chronic exposure to levels of sound greater than 50 to 55 decibels can boost these stress hormones and increase blood pressure, hypertension, and heart rate.

Psychological

Sounds can change our mood. Constant or loud noises can shift our mood from happy and calm to stressed and irritated. When we are surrounded by these intrusive noises all the time, the impact can add up and crush our spirits.

Cognitive

The brain has a huge storage space, but the amount of noise that it can process is relatively limited. When we are bombarded by noises, it can impact our ability to focus and think clearly. Research shows that children studying in schools under flight paths have reading skills several months behind their peers in quieter places, simply because they are unable to hear well.

Behavior

Loud noises can lead to changes in how we act. We tend to move away from sounds that we don't like or that feel uncomfortable to us. In a recent experiment at a shopping center, speakers playing loud pop music were set up at one end of a store and calm, ambient music was played at the other end of the store. The results showed that many shoppers physically moved away from the pop music speakers.

Sound, therefore, can impact decisions that we make in our lives. What is most alarming is that researchers have noticed that children have become so used to constant noise that they are actually uncomfortable without it. Noise, essentially, has become a crutch for our children. This has led to habits like coming home and immediately turning on the television or iPad.

Benefits of silence

The best remedy for all of this noise is very simple: silence. Being silent may sound like an odd concept, but more research comes out every day highlighting the importance of quiet time for both us and our children.

Silence has a calming effect. It settles the many emotions that are activated by talking and listening. As our mental and emotional lives calm down in this quiet space, our bodies can relax. In a group of studies on silence for the magazine Nautilus, it was noted how participants were most relaxed during the moments of silence between pieces of relaxing music as opposed to during the music itself.

We need silence to bring us back to the present moment, helping us to calm down and not worry about what happened in the past or what may happen in the future. Silence is a wonderful way for us to take a step back, find peace, and recharge.

Silence also helps us more effectively connect to the world around us. Essentially, all of our senses are heightened when we are silent. We may notice sounds that we never did before, and view our surroundings with a fresh perspective. For example, we may notice how loud the traffic is from our backyard or how beautiful the birds are singing as we wake up in the morning.

Being able to hear more easily allows us to have greater clarity and helps us make better decisions, especially ones that we've been struggling with. Silence reduces the mental chatter that distracts us from being able to think clearly and to truly be in touch with our own thoughts and feelings.

Silence may also be good for our brain. In 2013, biologist Imke Kirst conducted an experiment in which she exposed four groups of adult mice to either various sounds or to silence to find out if it affected them. She discovered that the mice kept in silence were the only group that developed new brain cells. These cells were in the part of the brain connected to memory, emotion, and learning. Although these results have not yet been duplicated in humans, this study offers some insight into how our brain may change due to silence.

How to give our children more silence

The best way to combat the excessive noise that our children are exposed to daily is to teach them how to create a quieter environment around them. Here are 10 ways that you can bring more silence into your children's lives.

- 1 | Be a positive role model to your children. This means keeping your home free of excessive noise and showing your kids that you take time out of your busy day for quiet moments, such as meditation.
- 2 | Turn the television off when nobody is watching it. Do not use it as a background noise filler, especially when you are eating as a family or when your children are doing homework.
- 3 | Work on positive behavior shifts, which include limiting your child's computer time, television time, cell phone time, tablet time, etc.
- 4 | Offer ear plugs or noise-reducing headphones to your children if they're bothered by noise or just need to tune out sounds when they're having quiet time.
- 5 | Set aside quiet meditation time for your children, such as right after school to provide a break from their busy day before they jump into homework or extra-curricular activities.
- 6 | Make an effort to drive your children to and from school without the radio blaring. This allows everyone to have a moment with their thoughts before and after their hectic day.
- 7 | Go for a family nature walk to quietly enjoy the beauty around you. Challenge your children to be quiet so they can listen to all the natural sounds around them, such as the rustling of leaves and birds chirping.
- 8 | When you go for a long drive in the car, spend some of that time in complete silence. This will prompt your children to look out the window and soak in the world passing by.
- 9 | Create a quiet zone in your home where your children can go to when they feel like they need some silence. This can be a floor pillow in the corner of their playroom or bedroom where there are some books and stuffed animals to comfort them as they recharge.
- 10 | Teach your children stillness techniques like yoga, tai chi, chi gong, and breathing exercises.

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