

Using an inside voice

Teaching your child volume moderation

By Andrea Morris, M.Ed.



Have you found yourself repeatedly reminding your child to “use your inside voice” without seeing a change? It’s not unusual for children to have difficulty moderating their voices to be appropriate for the setting. A helpful tool to assist your child to moderate their volume is a voice meter. This tool can easily be made with minimal materials, and is appropriate for children ranging from 3 to 18+ years of age, depending upon their level of functioning. It provides a visual way to help children understand that voice levels can and should change depending on the situation/setting. To make a voice meter, you will need: paper, coloured

markers, pencils or crayons, clear packaging tape, and laminate or a sheet protector.

Voice meters

One example of a voice meter is a rectangular strip of paper with the numbers 1-5 vertically aligned in squares on the paper. Numbers are placed in the squares with 1 on the bottom, and progressing to 5 on the top. Each numbered square is colored gradient shades of blue, with 1 being the lightest color and 5 the darkest shade. Each number represents a volume level: 1 = silence, 2 = whisper, 3 = normal conversational volume, 4 = loud talking, 5 = yelling or screaming.

This visual support will assist your child in moderating their voice to adjust to the appropriate level in a variety of settings. Once you’ve made your voice meter, here’s how to introduce it to your child and help them to use it: 1. Introduce the voice meter to the child prior to using it. 2. Explain the meter and model the voice volume represented by each number; encourage your child to imitate your voice level with each number. 3. Have the child look at the voice volume meter, hold it and practice making their voice louder or quieter according to each number / color level on their own. Role play different situations and model/practice the appropriate loudness and corresponding number/color.

For example:

- 1 = When someone else is talking,
 - 2 = Library,
 - 3 = Sitting around the dinner table,
 - 4 = Attending a sibling’s sporting event and talking,
 - 5 = Cheering on their sibling’s team at a sporting event.
- 6 After the child has experienced using the meter in practice situations, take the voice volume meter into community settings with you.
 - 7 Praise and/or reward your child when they use the appropriate volume.
 - 8 If your child’s voice is too quiet or too loud, you may tell them and show them the number they are using and tell/show them the appropriate volume level on the voice meter.



A voice meter is an easy way to practice using the appropriate voice volume in everyday situations and settings. Give it a try!

Sample voice meter

Sounds like...	
5 Yelling, screaming	5
4 Loud Talk	4
3 Normal Talk	3
2 Whisper	2
1 Silence	1

A sample voice meter shown here. You can adjust and adapt the voice meter to include your child’s favourite colours, as well.

Try a social story

You can also use a social story along with the voice meter to help your child to understand the concept of voice volume. A social story provides a child with an understanding of their perspective, as

well as the perspectives of others related to the behaviour of concern. You can create a social story that includes the behaviour of concern and how the behaviour may make the child’s peers feel.

In this social story example of “Talking and Friends,” you could use the voice meter to accompany the story.

- I go to Elementary School. I like my school! I have friends at school, too.
- In my school we have some rules that kids in kindergarten know. One of the rules is to use an inside voice.
 - Inside Voice means in the middle (point to 3 on the voice meter). Inside Voice or middle voice is a good rule. If we talk higher than 3, then it is too loud and no one can hear the teacher who is leading the class.
 - If we talk higher then it could hurt someone’s ears or make them uncomfortable.
- Sometimes I forget because I get excited and I go higher than in the middle (point to #3 on the meter). If I forget I can just say it again in an inside voice.

Understanding impacts

If I remember to use an inside voice in the middle (#3), my teachers and friends will be so proud of me. I’ll be happy too!

The voice meter, especially when paired with a social story, helps your child to engage with you in learning the concept of volume. The visual cues provided by the voice meter, along with the social story assisting them to understand the impact of loud voices, are highly effective strategies when used in combination.

Have fun practicing your “voice lessons”—together!

Andrea Morris has more than 20 years of experience in special education and currently works as an educational consultant for the Watson Institute.

Thumbs Up... a new virtual toolkit aimed at confronting and preventing hate in Canadian schools. The toolkit exists as a virtual document that dives into hate-promoting movements and ideologies, the role social media plays in luring youth into these movements, digital literacy skills, and approaches for parents and educators to confront harmful scenarios inside and outside the classroom. Source: thestar.com



Thumbs Down... to Nanaimo, BC teachers who left five-year-old Luca, who has autism, behind while the rest of his kindergarten class was enjoying a field trip at a bowling alley. His mom says the school decided his disability would make it too difficult to include him without telling her. In the end, his family took him bowling so that he could have been successful on that trip and he had a blast... Go Luca! Source: bc.ctvnews.ca



Thumbs Up... U of Finland researchers exploring digital gamer range in children. Working with kids themselves, they identified emotional triggers including toxicity within the gaming community, noisy games, choice of game and outrage caused by their own mistakes or annoying opponent behaviour. Interestingly, kids self-regulated by quitting the game or switching to another game as a way of reducing anger. Source: phys.org

