

Pump Up the Volume

Molly Guy teaches her daughter the art—and the necessity—of sounding off.

RECENTLY, I CHAPERONED a field trip with my daughter's first-grade class. On the school bus, the girl sitting beside my child began berating her. She called her a copycat, alleging that my daughter had sneaked a peek at her worksheet. In response, my daughter looked out the window and cried. Hard. You should know a few things: (1) She is not a crier. (2) The girl just sat there, smug as a snake, and never said sorry. (3) I did not intervene. I thought if I did, it would make my kid look like a wimp.

I know why she was crying. My daughter prides herself on doing the right thing. Being accused of breaking a rule freaks her out to the bone. So her body reacted, not her brain. It was too much for her mind to bear.

At dinner that night, I said, "I know it sucks to be called a copycat. But if someone yells at you for something you didn't do, try to get brave. Breathe in slowly, make your chest big like a lion's. Use your bold voice. Tell the girl, 'That's not true. I don't like when you talk to me like that.'"

She climbed into my lap. She was listening.

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What happened on the bus was a small thing—but small things can become big things. Growing up, when I went to Supercuts and the hairdresser put the dryer on high, burning my scalp, I never said, "Please turn that off." I was worried I'd hurt her feelings. In eighth grade, I got my period all over my jean shorts while my dad drove me to tennis camp. Instead of asking him to pull over so I could change—which required saying something uncomfortable—I showed up at orientation looking like I'd partaken in a massacre. In college, I had one-night stands in which the sex was bad, rough, painfully so; as writhing frat boys left marks on my body with their hands, I pretended I was having fun.

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The next time someone tells my daughter, "You're doing it wrong," I hope she looks that person in the eye and says, "I'm doing it the way I want to do it." The next time someone hurts her feelings, I hope she says "You hurt my feelings" and walks away. I hope she says it loudly. I hope she says what she needs to. I hope she says what I didn't.

