

The best ways to get and keep kids attention

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The main purpose of all attention getting techniques is to connect and create an atmosphere to effectively communicate.

Breathing is the quickest and easiest way to refocus a group. These techniques will not only help you manage groups better, it will also give kids a direct experience of how to manage their own personal energy.

Basic Arm Breath:

The basic breath is a quick refocus, like refreshing a web page on a computer. Loosening up our bodies and taking a few breaths at the beginning of an activity helps gather the group energy together. The first thing I have the kids do at every concert is take a couple deep breaths. It is good to slowly raise your arms with them on the in breath and slowly lower arms on the out breath. This helps kids learn how to pace their breath and more importantly you can visually see that everyone is breathing together. It is breathing together that harmonizes the group. I teach this right at the beginning so when the energy does go up the kids will already know how to do it. I use this through out the show whenever we need to refocus and settle down.

Kids love to do this in “Slow Motion” and even super slow motion. Kids will specifically ask to do this quiet relaxing game.

Yes Clap Video of Yes Clap with Arm Breath <http://tinyurl.com/gobx5ql>

When breathing is used successfully to integrate energy there is the opportunity to generate more energy safely. The yes clap is something I use to quickly focus the energy of a group. I teach this at the beginning of a concert to bring the group together and use it to complete activities. There is a yes clap at the end of the song Adalena Madalena on my *All The Best* album.

I usually introduce it as *“I like to start with one of my favorite words, the word (pause for suspense)Yes!* Then have the kids say yes together a few times and a little louder until they start to say it together. Then I add a clap to the word yes. We clap yes a few times and then I say *“Ok now really quite’* and clap extremely slow and softly while still saying yes. You can keep it soft until all the kids are doing it quietly and then gradually speed up. The kids will naturally get louder as they speed up and at the peak I say *“and then we go”* opening my arms wide while saying *“Ohhhhhhhhhh and then clap on yes”* Then I will do it a couple more times to make sure they have it. It is like having the reins of a horse, you can stay in control of how fast the clapping speeds up by holding your beat steady. There may be a slight delay but the kids will follow you.

This can generate a ton of energy. It may be a bit wobbly to begin with but by the middle of the show the kids are usually entrained and can do it exactly on the beat with each other. Once the kids know the yes clap you can skip the intro. Then it becomes a useful tool to focus and close high energy moments. It captures the excitement and makes a clear distinction that the activity is finished. It also works well as a way to draw attention. Just start with the Ohhhhhhhh! And sustain it, until the kids join in and the clap infers that I now have your attention. It only takes a little praise when they get it all together right on the beat and they will have an expectation of how to do it in the future. A yes clap can also be used effectively as a reward for accomplishing something remarkable or a job well done.

Silent Yes Clap

This is a variation on the Yes Clap **with no sound**. There is increased attention with less energy and a softer calming tone. I use the story that sometimes you are really happy and want to say Oh Yes! But you may be at the library or a store and it could be disruptive or look silly. So you can do the yes clap quietly, with no sound. You can even make the clap smaller. Still internally saying Oh yes! silently.

Then there are variations like the micro clap which was created by a bunch of kids. The micro clap is a silent yes but “clapping” by bringing your index finger and thumb together. You can use both hands, get fancy behind your head, all while being extremely quiet. There are countless variations to this and kids love to invent their own personal quiet claps.

1-2-3 Breath Game

After wildly jamming on air guitars this is the best way I have found to bring kids back in balance quickly.

This is how I do it:

“Ok we are going to play a really quick game. I’m going to count to three and I want to see who can hold their breath really long.”

“Ready? 1-2-3-go” speak and count quickly, take an exaggerated big breath and hold your nose. After a little bit let it out and say *“take another breath if you need to.”* Hold a bit longer and smoothly and quietly let out your breath and say *“Good”*

Talk quietly to preserve the atmosphere. You will have a fertile opportunity to give directions at this point or continue to do various quiet chill out activities.

It is very important *not* to make this a contest to see who can hold their breath the longest. Don’t worry if all the kids don’t seem to be paying attention to the directions. As soon as they hold their breath, entrainment will automatically happen. A sense of urgency in giving the directions is helpful to make it clear, if you don’t pay attention you are going to miss a fun opportunity.

Four things the kids don’t know and you’re not going to tell them:

1. No one can hold their breath and talk at the same time.
2. Holding a deep breath helps integrate scattered energy.
3. You can feel your heart easier when you hold your breath and it helps to naturally bring your body back into its natural rhythm.
4. There is absolutely no need to understand this process. It works automatically.

Would you like to know a simple way to take kids from high active energy to quiet attentive listeners in under 30 seconds?

I can teach it to kids once and a second practice is all it usually takes for them to have it. I call it a *Peace Pause* and you can easily learn how to teach it to kids without taking decades of trial and error to master it.

This is very specifically the way I present it. There are reasons this works which you don't need to fully understand for it to work beautifully. You can adapt it to fit your style and the energy of the moment once kids have a solid understanding of how it works.

To teach the "Peace Game" the first time I excitedly invite the kids with ***"Let's play a really quick game that is super fun."*** Part of speaking enthusiastically builds suspense to pay attention or you might miss something really fun. Taking a couple deep arm breaths before starting is helpful to regain focus even if the energy is a bit scattered. *"First let's loosen up, take a big breath, good – one more breath all together."*

"Here is how it works, I say the word Peace! and then you echo back the word Peace!" We practice it together, usually one or two practices is enough to get a loud clear response. I continue with the directions *"Then we count down from 10 to 1, starting really loud on ten and getting softer until there is no sound at one."* It helps to say "no sound" to avoid resistance to the word quiet. Sometimes it also works to say "no one talks"

Everyone starts counting down from 10 to 1, start fairly loud on 10-9-8, I will usually say and make an action to go *"Softer"* at 7 or 6, continuing to fade slower and more quietly until silent at one.

This is action is critical, At "zero" I silently wave my hands in front of my heart and may extremely softly say *"Peaceful"* this action grabs their attention in the silence and I can add more directions. *"and then we count to ten with no sound."* Holding up my hands, counting silently with my fingers, 1-5 on the right hand, continuing to hold up hands and count 6-10 with the left hand, speaking the numbers extremely softly or in silence. You can also suggest holding a "bubble" for ten if that is something you do. Counting with my fingers captures attention with their eyes and focusing their minds by silently counting along. Counting slowly can help bring down the energy. Holding our breath together is actually more important than being quite. The breathing and quiet attention allows the kids to integrate their personal energy.

Immediately after silently counting up to 10, I do "silent yelling" by waving my hands up in the air and silently pretending to yell. Possibly saying a soft "Yay." The kids are usually totally focused together at this point and just follow along without direction. After we finish I still add the direction ***"You pretend like you're yelling but there is no sound."***

Just because it's fun and so we can practice and reinforce quiet again.

Making the first couple times a "practice" helps in case it doesn't work perfectly the first time, but it usually does! If someone talks, restate the rules and try another practice. Treating it as a game like missing in jump rope helps reduce the perception of scolding and a little silent peer pressure can go a long way to reel in a few strays.

"That was excellent for a first practice!" is often my response if it was a bit wobbly and could use more practice, which we will do again later when I really need them to get quiet and refocused. If they did it perfectly it's more common for me to say *"Perfect!"* It confirms how you "win the game" so they know how to get it exactly right. Then I review the rules for another practice. The second time I usually say *"That was a pretty good practice, are you ready for a real one this time?"* *"Ok, so from now on, anytime I say the word Peace! You STOP! Whatever you are doing and yell back Peace! and we all count down together, Ok?"* *"Are you ready, here we go."* *Peace!* – and continue – at the end there will be a quite calm space to give the next directions.

It is highly recommended to practice the steps of this Peace Pause without the kids. One of the keys to success in using a Peace Pause is to make sure it is strongly anchored by practicing first when the kids are calm and it is “just for fun” so when you really need to regain control quickly you will have an immediate response. It’s common for kids to request it or ask to do it again right after I teach it the first time, so it is a perfect time to reinforce and anchor the game idea.

To keep your Peace Pauses effective, it will likely be necessary add variations to keep the game interesting. One way is to have a “silly test” where the kids “pretend” to be silly, noisy, talking to each other and not paying attention and then I say PEACE! and they followed right along with the echo.

It is important to call out Peace! randomly, not just when you want the kids to be quiet. Surprise them during all of your activities and it will keep the game unpredictable and fun. So try it during quiet times at play, low stress situations, during a story, during snacks or while running around on the playground. A Peace Pause is a great way to interrupt a pattern and practice refocusing attention super fast so it will work when you really want it to work.

In a few seconds a Peace Pause can grab attention and create a quiet receptive space to give direction. In building an atmosphere that can shift quickly between high activity and quiet we can harmonize the energetic spectrum of the day.

Instead of a time out let's have a peace in! Using quiet time as a game and reward instead of a punishment will bring much more balance into our daily experience.

Peace Pause Game – short sample

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdqHn3WREdA>

Bells

A loud voice can work to get attention but it is usually not effective. The best sound to gain attention is a bell. This may seem cliché but there must be a reason why bells have been used for centuries to gain attention. Think of all the ways bells are used. Town hall bell towers, churches, factory and school bells, telephones, meditation gongs and of course music.

One reason the ringing sound of a bell is so compelling is that it is a unique and rarely heard in nature. The resonance of the sound draws attention. It is a sweet sound that is different from a distracting sound like a thump of a dropped book.

A dinging bell works to get attention but a sustained ringing holds attention.

“Singing bowls” or bells that use a mallet to rotate along the rim to generate a sustained ringing sound work best. This is the same principle used to make a crystal wine glass sing by rotating a moistened finger around the rim. When I use a bell I start by gently striking it a few times to shift the kids attention. They are captivated when I begin to make the bell sing. Most kids have never seen a sound produced this way. Remember it takes more attention to listen to something quiet so I tell them they have to keep listening as long as they can still hear the sound. You can also get a similar gong tone from something as simple as a mixing bowl from a thrift store. Pots and pans work great as an affordable and fun option.

Thank you for your commitment to working with kids. It can be a challenging and extremely enriching experience. I know it can be difficult to learn techniques like these in just a written form so feel free to contact me anytime if you have comments or questions.

Will Hale Tadpole Parade www.willhale.com 651-307-3849 ©2020 Will Hale - Tadpole Parade

Give me a call if you are interested in having me lead a Professional Development Training with more of my fully kid tested original techniques you won't find anywhere else.

Will Hale & The Tadpole Parade

Rock Concerts for Kids

www.willhale.com web site 651-307-3849 mobile

Will Hale and the Tadpole Parade: Kids are the rock stars! When they clap, dance and sing with Will Hale. Will's kid tested, teacher approved concerts create a fun atmosphere filled with plenty of audience participation, excitement and energy. Kids will enjoy Will's captivating music performances which include a friendly mix of festive drums, guitar, mandolin, harmonica and spectacular air guitar jamming with the kids.

Will Hale is a Greatness Amplifier, Engagement Specialist and Experience Generator!

"Will Hale is a top notch performer. His music is pleasantly refreshing. Good fun for everyone!"

Christy Novak - Minnesota Children's Museum

"It's fun to watch kids engaged in a positive environment with Will and The Tadpole Parade.

His enthusiasm for music and children is contagious!" Brian Siverson-Hall - Past Executive Director
MN Association for the Education of Young Children (MNAEYC) MN School Age Care Alliance (MNSACA)

"Will Hale is a true kids rock star. I always call him first for all of our kids events."

Kelly Cochrane – President, SilhouettEvents

"Will Hale's concerts are amazing. We had a blast! A professional production, filled with exceptional talent." Kirstin Wiegmann - Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

"Your greatest gift is how you get kids attention. They are involved and captivated in an instant!"

Thomas Maiello – Event Coordinator

"Anyone who has brought kids to a Will Hale show knows they won't stay in their seats. The local musician is known for interactive performances where children, parents and grandparents dance, sing and play a little air guitar." Saint Paul Pioneer Press

"You made so many people smile tonight! Thank you for sharing your delightful songs with us!

It was so fun! Brit Borch – Parent

"We spontaneously burst into singing Will Hale songs in the car. Fun songs for kids and adults with inspiring messages worth listening to over and over!" Leah Skurdal – Parent

"Will's music is catchy and it is always the first CD the kids want to put on. It's the best kids CD we have. It is the kids #1 favorite. We listen to it all the time!" Crystal Vital-Schwartz – childcare teacher

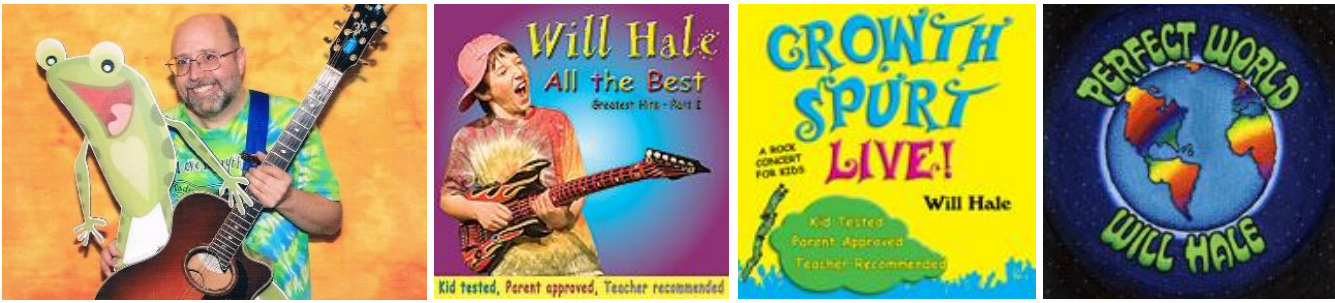
"The kids absolutely loved it! They never stopped singing all the way home." Kris Drury – Parent

"Engaging, absolutely fabulous!" Brenna Collins – Preschool Teacher

"Will Hale is the greatest singer ever!" Ryan age 4

"Better than awesome!" Danny age 7 ***"Thanks for teaching us fun!"*** Oliver age 6

"He's the coolest grown-up I know!" Jessica Buchta - age 12



Kid Tested, Parent Approved, Teacher Recommended

Will Hale performs for 1000's of kids every year. As a full-time kid's musician since 1990, Will focuses on engaging kids in direct personal experience to gain useful life skills. Will Hale offers exciting concerts for kids and families, festivals, community events, daycares, elementary schools, parks and recreation, concert series, churches, libraries, private parties and any kid friendly event!

Interested in scheduling a Will Hale concert for kids?

Visit <https://willhale.com/>

to inquire for availability, performance options and a price quote.



Rock Concerts for Kids

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