

# Vow of Silence: Lessons learned from laryngitis

I have been without a voice for five days. With very little warning, it was gone when I woke up Saturday morning. Instead, I was left with a coarse whisper and occasional bursts of pitchy, creaky utterances. I feel fine, but I sound terrible. I'm not sure when my real voice will return, but I've come to think of this time as a learning experience. I'll share my lessons with you:

**1. Without a voice, parenting becomes even more complicated.** Though I wouldn't say I "yell at" my children, I do from time to time raise my voice at them from across the room, particularly if they are at risk of hurting themselves or each other. Leo finds one of Collin's Legos and puts it in his mouth. Frank jumps off the back of the sofa. No matter how childproof I try to make my home, they always find trouble. For that reason, until my "mommy voice" returns, I keep Frank and Leo at arm's reach, literally. I don't get done everything I normally would accomplish, but at least they're safe. Collin seldom finds himself in danger, but at 5, he's still needy. Unfortunately, he doesn't read fluently yet, so writing notes to him is out of the question. Instead, I croak out responses to his questions and demands. He keeps asking where my voice went. Wouldn't I like to know.

**2. I've become very selective about choosing when to speak.** What I have to say must be important, as should be the recipient of my message. I've just about abandoned the Bluetooth that enables me to hold phone conversations through my car's audio system. I'm more focused on the road now. When I'm not in the car, I count on text messages and social media to speak for me, unless I'm in a quiet, one-on-one conversation - the briefer I speak, the better.

**3. I'm becoming a better listener.** At Patrick's surprise birthday party, I didn't talk about what was going on in our lives, I got some organization tips from Alex as she discussed her new built-in cabinets in the den, discovered the benefits of Melissa's interesting new "cruelty-free" diet, and learned how Ms. Joan's grandkids got their names - a topic I've always loved. At Mass, I concentrated on every word of the Apostle's Creed, rather than mumbling along as I tend to do. I also have a better appreciation for nuances in music and have even come to love the whir of the ceiling fan as I fold laundry.

**4. I've had a taste of what it must be like to have a disability.** I got frustrated within a few hours of whispering Saturday morning. There were so many words in my head that I wanted to get out, but I couldn't. This must be how Frank feels, I told myself. No wonder he bites! On Sunday, we spent some time with our friends and

their two children, one of whom is deaf. She and I were frustrated because we could not communicate unless our faces nearly touched. It made me wish I knew sign language. I also faced challenges handling customer service phone calls, making requests of Siri, ordering my lunch (Pita Pit because Chipotle is too noisy), and yelling "Stop!" at the woman who was about to back into the grocery cart containing my children. Thank God for Good Samaritans.

You may be familiar with the phrase, "Let your voice be heard." In many instances, this is true, such as standing up for your faith or protecting your children. But, I know I tend to overuse my voice and underuse my ears. When my vocal cords finally decide to return from their summer vacation, I'll remember what I've learned during this time of silent reflection.