



Kinship Link

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April is Child Abuse Prevention Month Controlling Our Own Anger

Pro Kinship for Kids

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Parenting is hard work, surrounded by many myths. Some of these myths include the beliefs that you can be a perfect parent, that parents always feel love and tenderness toward their children, that your family gets along in harmony, that your children are very well behaved, that children always obey their parents, that parents are in charge of the situation, and in control of how they feel. The list goes on.

Let's talk about reality: babies do cry, you don't get enough sleep, toddlers say "no", kids disobey, and siblings fight. When you add in the stresses many adults feel in their daily lives, it's normal for many parents to sometimes feel overwhelmed, out of control, and sometimes angry. Anger is a normal reaction. It's also an emotion many parents don't know how to deal with when it comes to their children.

What Triggers your

Anger toward your Child?

As children grow, there are predictable stages of both terrific and not-so-terrific behavior. Some of these behaviors can try a parent's patience and make the parent feel at a loss for an answer. It's difficult to feel calm and collected when the baby cuts teeth and cries for hours, the 2 year old says "No", the 3 year old insists on "doing it herself" when you want her to hurry up, the 4 year old tells you he "hates you", and the 5 year old after being asked over and over, refuses to pick up his clothes. The key to dealing with your anger is to understand what normal behavior is for your child's age and stage of development, and to learn ways to deal with misbehavior that work. When you recognize that most kids go through stages and behave in similar ways, you won't take the behavior as personally and you probably won't be as angry. It's also

important that the way you, as a parent, see the child's behavior may be very different from the way your child views their activities. Ask yourself if you are expecting your child to do something they aren't ready to do at their stage of development. A 2 year old who is expected to sit still in church probably can't do it. They aren't fidgeting, talking loudly during prayer, or crawling under the pews simply to embarrass you. Instead they are curious, need to move their body, and want to share their thoughts with you, but don't know how to whisper yet.

Power Struggles and Defiance

It's normal for children, especially toddlers and adolescents, to test their limits. They do this in many ways: by not listening, by ignoring you, by doing what they want even when you told them not to, by not giving a parent credit for knowing anything, by talking back, being a

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wise guy or using bad words. Testing limits is how children learn the rules. Parents faced with this behavior, on the other hand, may feel helpless, and pushed up against a wall. The solution isn't punishment. Spanking, washing mouths out with soap, and other punishments don't teach children what to do instead. Rather, punishment creates resentment and most likely will make the power struggle worse. It's important for parents to keep their beliefs about their roles as parents in perspective. Do you believe: You have wisdom your child should pay attention to? You expect to be in control of your child? You love your children and the rules you have established are for their own good? Your children should be grateful for all you have done for them? If your children don't learn how to behave now, they will be in big trouble later?

These beliefs and others often are behind parents' anger. Keep in mind that parents sometimes have to say "NO", set reasonable limits, let a child know how they expect the child to behave, and sometimes cut short a child's fun. Don't expect your child to be grateful. The payoff comes later, because setting and enforcing limits helps children to control their own behavior.

The power struggle that often come when children test limits may make you feel angry. Remember: You and your child may have different perspectives about the situation, based on the assumptions listed above. Don't take most of what your child says or does personally. It's okay to be firm and enforce limits. The key is to do so when you are calm. If you operate out of

anger, most of your efforts will be useless, because your anger will add to the intensity of the problem.

Anger From Other Parts of Your Life

Everyone has had a "bad, bad day". Often the frustration, oppression, and stress we feel in other parts of our lives "spill over" at home. If you find yourself yelling at your kids because you felt belittled at work, are having difficulty with the IRS, or have a problem getting an appointment with your caseworker, you are experiencing "spill-over anger". Parents need to realize how much the tensions they feel outside the parent-child relationship add to their frustrations with their children. Do you let the stresses you feel add to the building of a "pecking order" in your family? Remember, children are usually at the bottom end. Their normal behavior, while frustrating, has no part in the stress-related anger you may feel.

To avoid making your children the victims of your anger from other parts of your life, try to create a break between the tensions of work, your other relationships, and dealing with "the system", and your home life. Recognize that both you and your children experience spill-over anger and that there may be more conflicts at certain times of day, such as when you all arrive home in the evening.

Children's Temperaments

Every child is a unique personality. Some children have characteristics that make them easy to live with. Other children may be more challenging for parents. They may have characteristics - such as being more demanding, impatient, emotionally explosive, energetic, or needing more care due to a physical

or mental disability - that can bring out a parent's anger. The key is to view each child's uniqueness in a positive way through understanding and accepting who he or she is.

Strategies to Help Parents Deal with Anger

Anger. It is real. It is normal. Everyone experiences it. However, you can find ways to express your anger that don't hurt, belittle, or insult your children. It's important to make anger constructive in working with your child's behavior, not destructive by creating in children a desire for revenge or a feeling of rage. Anger in its destructive form can make a child's misbehavior worse. If you control your reaction to something your child does, the behavior will stop sooner, won't last as long, or be as severe, and both you and your child will feel better about how you handled the situation.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't get angry when your child misbehaves. Children need to understand that their behavior upsets you. Most importantly, they need to understand why you are upset. For example, if your child lost a pair of scissors, you need to say, "I'm upset because I need those scissors for my sewing project". Rather than, "You idiot! Where are those scissors!" Because children will misbehave and anger is inevitable, here are some suggestions to help you keep calm and plan your reaction to their behavior.

Stop and Think Before You React.

When your child misbehaves, follow these steps.

- Stop! Pause for a moment and

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cool off. When something occurs that makes you angry, step back, go into another room, be silent, take control of your feelings. This is not the time to discipline a child.

- Look and Listen. Read the situation quickly. Try to determine what is really happening. How are you reacting to the misbehavior? What is really causing the child to misbehave?
- Think. Form a plan.
- Evaluate the problem: Does a problem exist? Whose problem is it - yours, the child's, or both of yours?
- Have a purpose: What do you want your child to learn from how you react?
- Set Goals: What do you want to get done right now?
- Consider Alternatives: How many different ways could you respond to this problem?
- Act. Carry out your decision.

Calm Yourself

When you sense yourself getting angry, try these strategies for calming down.

- ◆ Count to ten very slowly. Concentrate on the counting, regardless of what your child is doing.
- ◆ Put your hands in your pockets. This will help you resist the urge to use them to threaten or hit your child. Most parents spank their children when they are angry, not when they have cooled off.
- ◆ Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Pretend you are releasing steam from your body.
- ◆ Get away from the situation. Go into another room or take a walk. This gives both you and

your children some time to cool off.

- ◆ Talk about the situation with your partner, a close friend, or a relative. Talking it through will help you develop creative ideas for dealing with the situation.
- ◆ Take time to think about how you are reacting to the situation. Why are you angry with your child? Is it because you think your child is trying to make you mad by deliberately doing something bad? Is the child misbehaving because he or she wants attention, is angry themselves, feels discouraged, or is looking for revenge?

Talk to Your Child About the Problem

After you have calmed down, talk to your child about the problem, following these tips.

- ⇒ Use "I" not "You" statements: "I am very upset about this!" not, "You terrible child, how could you have done this!"
- ⇒ Keep in the present; talk about the current issue, not past mistakes or possible future problems: "I want your room picked up now!" not, "You slob! This room is proof that you will never amount to anything."
- ⇒ Focus on the behavior instead of what you think might be the reason for the misbehavior: "I want you to stop making that noise now!" not, "I know you are just making that noise to get me angry!"
- ⇒ Keep it short and to the point. There is no doubt that your child needs a reason, but don't get bogged down in long explanations or too much reasoning.

⇒ Be specific: "Pick up all the bath toys and put them in the container on the counter", not "It's time to clean up the tub".

Don't take Everything Your Child say Personally

Children learn the power of words at an early age. They also learn what things they can say to hit your "hot" buttons. Keep in mind young children have less skill than you in dealing with anger and frustration. Your best strategy is not to react when your child calls you a name or tells you you're a lousy parent. Let the words and negative comments slide off. Your child may mean it at the present, but won't feel the same way in five minutes if you don't react. Remember, your words are powerful too. When a child says something hurtful, let her know how you feel and give her another way to say it. For example, Tim was angry that his father wouldn't let him go out to play after supper. "You idiot!" he said. "I hate you!" Tim's father said "I don't like being called an idiot and it makes me feel bad to hear you say you hate me. Why don't you say "Dad, I don't like your decision, because I really want to go out and play. It makes me feel like not liking you." Then it would be easier for us to talk.

Figure Out What your Rules Really Are

If you find yourself engaged in endless struggles with your child over rules, maybe it's time to step back and ask yourself, "Is the problem my child, or is the problem the rule?" Every parent needs to decide what the bottom line expectations are in the family. As you examine what your basic rules are, ask yourself:

- ◆ Does it teach my child

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something, such as responsibility or a skill?

- ◆ Is the rule a tradition from my own childhood? Is it still important today?
- ◆ If the rule is broken, will it really matter a week from now?
- ◆ Is the rule non-negotiable, or is it flexible? It's okay to have both types of rules.
- ◆ Is it difficult for my child to follow the rule because of his skills, level of development, etc.?
- ◆ Did my child have any say in making the rule?

It is a good idea to determine what the rules are as a family. Then everyone can agree together on what is expected in a particular situation. Rules that make sense and that a child can abide by will be the limits our child needs for support, and will encourage good behavior. Fewer rules are better than too many rules. This gives parents flexibility and reduces the

endless power struggles between parents and children.

Say You're Sorry

There is no doubt you will get angry. There may be times you say something you really regret saying to your child. If your child said something similar to you, you would expect an apology. The same expectations also applies to parents. Many parents worry that apologizing will undermine their authority with their children. Perhaps their parents never apologized or admitted they were wrong to them. The fact is apologies can help build a stronger relationship between parents and children. The ability to say you're sorry, to forgive someone, and to apologize is important in helping people get along better. An apology serves several purposes. It helps restore good feelings between you and your child. It reduces the amount of resentment a child may feel, because of your outburst. An

apology gives parents and children a chance to talk about why everyone was so upset, to understand what caused the behavior, and to discuss what is expected instead. Most importantly, it teaches children how to behave when they make a mistake. Children learn that everyone make mistakes and it's best to admit it and try not to let the same thing happen again.

Find Something to Laugh About

Nothing is more effective in getting rid of anger than laughter. If you can find the humor in the situation, you will often be able to quickly move from rage to giggles. Parents get furious over many situations that are really minor. If we could see ourselves in the mirror we would know how ridiculous our reactions are. Laughter is contagious. Children can be persuaded to give up a power struggles when the humor of the situation is brought out.

What Should Parents Do When a Child has a Temper Tantrum?

Many children go through a period of having temper tantrums at some point in their life. Here are some strategies to explore if your child is having a temper tantrum. Avoid physical punishment. Hitting or spanking a child for acting aggressive, or doing something wrong is guaranteed to backfire. Don't demonstrate behavior you don't want your child to imitate.

Accept your child's anger. Let your child know his feelings of anger are appropriate. Make sure your child knows you are there to help him or her with the problem when they are ready. If the anger is being expressed in inappropriate ways, suggest other ways the child can express their feelings.

Teach a child how to express anger with words. Talking is a good way to get rid of feelings of anger and frustration. When your child becomes worked up, encourage them to use their words rather than hitting, grabbing, or using some other physical action. Respond to temper tantrums with care and concern. When your child resorts to a tantrum to express his needs, your response is critical. This is the time your child need you most. They need you to remain calm (not an easy thing to do), they need to be comforted, and they need your help to regain control. Some keys include:

- * Ignore the tantrum if you can.
- * Use a time out to give your child a chance to calm down.

- * Take a time out yourself.
- * Remove your child from the situation.
- * Hold your child closely.
- * Talk softly to your child.
- * Try to figure out what your child wants and needs.

Tantrums are powerful tools for children to use to get their needs met. Parents need to help children find other ways of expressing their needs. If you give in to tantrums, whining, and other negative methods of expressing anger your child will find it hard to understand other points of view, to develop assertive ways of dealing with anger, and to relate well to other people.