

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Not Letting Your Kids Push Your Anger Button

from the American Counseling Association

We all love our kids. And we all have moments when they drive us crazy. That's perfectly normal. What isn't normal is to react to such incidents with out-of-control anger.

Parents soon learn that their children, even when very young, will try their patience and get them upset at times. But being upset or frustrated isn't the same as real anger, an emotional response that can only cause problems.

Anger raises your blood pressure, supplants rational thought and has you acting in ways that accomplish no good and solve no problems, such as yelling, swearing, insulting, shaking and hitting. Anger can actually do real harm.

It's vital to realize that anger can be controlled. It's not an outside force, but rather something we manufacture on our own. You, not someone else, are responsible for your anger.

It helps to understand why we get angry. It's usually connected to a loss of control. When a toddler isn't listening to you, or a teen comes home past curfew, we can feel that our authority and control over our children has been seriously undermined.

A first step in managing anger is to give up some of that need to control. While we certainly need to set limits and teach our children, we also have to acknowledge that they will often make mistakes. Accepting that, and using the mistake to teach a lesson, is a positive response. Becoming angry and violent is not.

It also helps to look at your angry response from your child's point of view. Experiencing an angry tantrum from a parent isn't going to fix the problem or change that past behavior. Instead, it's more likely to truly threaten, scare and traumatize a young child, and bring about a negative, angry, rebellious response from an older child. Either response makes it harder to learn a lesson from the mistake that was made.

One method for controlling an angry response is not to react immediately. Yes, counting to ten and taking deep breaths does work. So does pausing to consider what your child will experience if you fly off the handle. Will your anger do any good, or just set a bad example for your child to model?

If controlling your anger is difficult for you, talk to a professional counselor. A counselor specializing in anger management can offer a variety of ways for getting anger under control.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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