

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

Managing Anger As A Parent

from the American Counseling Association

We parents love our children, yet there are times when they really push our anger button. While anger almost never fixes problems, it takes planning to control anger and to react in an appropriate and positive way.

As parents we all have a very strong need to be in control. We have expectations for our children, especially about the way they should behave, and when they fall short of these expectations, sometimes in spectacular ways, we feel upset, disappointed, and often very angry.

Sadly, expressing that anger does nothing to strengthen the relationship we have with our child and seldom does it improve the future behavior of the child. Anger directed at a young child will most likely upset and confuse the child, but not necessarily change things for the better. With an older child, a show of anger is a good way to ensure that he or she will try hard to hide the next mistake rather than be comfortable with admitting a mistake.

To better control your anger with your child, it's important to recognize when that anger is suddenly building. This allows you to take steps to control your anger rather than simply lashing out at your child.

An immediate step might be to take some distracting action that gives you a moment or two to calm down. Taking a few deep breaths, counting to ten, or simply walking away for a few minutes are all ways to put a little distance between your anger and the subject of that anger.

You next want to try and feel some empathy and compassion for your child. Realize that whatever mistake was made, by now your child realizes it was a mistake and may be feeling upset or depressed or angry with himself or herself for what has happened. What the child doesn't need is an angry parent piling on guilt.

Instead, it's more helpful (and healthful) for both you and your child to let your anger take a back seat to a rational discussion of what has happened, why it happened and why you are upset. By limiting your immediate angry reaction you are allowing your child to recognize and assume responsibility for the mistake that was made.

Out-of-control parental anger signals a need for self-examination. If you can't control your anger, consider discussing the issue with a professional counselor specializing in anger management.

"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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