

Better Parenting: "Why is My Child So Angry and How Do I Deal With it?"

By Sonia Spackman MA, MFT

The quote in the headline is from a frustrated parent, expressing the feelings of many parents these days. More parents and teachers are frustrated and confused about the way angry, disruptive, and disrespectful kids are acting out. They bully other kids and easily take out their anger on their peers. Getting control of this problem is very difficult.

For example, a child who acts out may be expressing other emotions

through anger. A youngster may be experiencing a loss, a divorce or a move they can't talk about. The child may be trying to let the world know that his/her life is not what it ought to be. Regardless of the reason, it looks the same as a child that has mental health issues.

But how can we deal with this anger without a psychologist?

A Parent's Job is to Understand, Not to Fix Things.

Listening for understanding is impossible when a child is "drunk" on anger. Never try to reason with an angry child. Instead say, "It sounds like you're really mad. I want to listen and understand. And I will listen when your voice is as calm as mine. Come back then." If the child won't leave, you leave.

Be prepared to repeat your statement calmly if the child is continuing to yell out the anger without leaving, say, "Don't worry about it now. We'll talk when you're calm." You may need to say this several times. Be prepared to play "broken record" with "What did I say?" Use these phrases. Trying to reason will only fuel the anger.

"Thanks for Sharing That"

Once the child is able to discuss the anger, listen without reasoning. Try to avoid telling the child why he/she should not be angry. Avoid telling them that things will be okay and how to

make it better. Your job is to prove that you understand.

"It sounds like you get mad when I ask you if it is time to do your chores. Thank you for sharing that with me. I'll remember that. And if you think of a better way for me to remind you, let me know."

With kids that don't do their chores, don't respect other's property, swear, or steal you may try the following:

1. Name the behavior, *swearing*
2. Tell why the behavior is unacceptable ... *swearing is vulgar, and it is against our family rules, and the rules at school and church.*

Never reason with an angry child. Use empathy and understanding instead.

3. Ask your child to describe the more acceptable behavior that might work for them that they might try instead.

Another strategy that may help parents is the "I" Message. It will work with some children. For example:

1. WHEN, (share in one sentence what happened without blaming anyone.) *"When someone yells at me..."*
2. I FEEL (use one word) *"I feel scared"...*
3. BECAUSE (describe why you felt scared in one sentence)... *"because we might get in a fight..."*
4. WHAT I NEED/WANT FROM YOU IS, (state in one or two short sentences) *"What I need from you is to talk to me about what is making you so angry..."*

instead of yelling or screaming at me."

Parents Can Make It Worse

Parents who do not treat their kids with respect send a message that says, "You are not worth it." These parents more than likely yell and swear a lot at their kids. This teaches the kid to yell and scream back while the parents react by getting angrier. It's a vicious cycle that breeds constant anger in the child.

In place of anger, parents should work on listening to their children in a kind, honest and open manner.

Most children will talk openly only after they truly believe their mom, dad or caregiver are interested in what they have to say and understand their feelings.

When Anger Continues

If, despite your best efforts to understand your child's anger, there isn't a change in behavior after three months, parents should seek professional counseling for their child. In some instances severe anger is best helped by a professional.

Dealing with angry children is hard. We can get worn down and exhausted. But they will never handle their anger better than we do. Remember, they will grow up and be gone sooner than you think. We need to equip them for their future now.

Feel free to contact me if you have parenting questions or would like a column on something else you are interested in. soniaspackman@msn.com
References, Cline/Fay Institute, Inc., Parenting Skills Homework Planner, Sarah Edison Knapp

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Web: www.columbiahumane.org
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Throughout the holiday season many contributions were made to our community out of the generosity in the hearts of others. Vernonia Cares Food Bank would like to recognize the loved ones of our generous friends who made donations as part of our "Caring Tree" project.

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May this year bring peace
and health to all in our
great community!