



Make Prevention a CHOICE

Anger And Child Discipline

Very few things try a parent's patience more than problems with child discipline. At every age, conflicts with children over their behavior can be a serious source of stress. Expressions of anger by children often bring on angry responses by parents. In some cases, these responses do nothing to correct the child's behavior and can cause even more harm. This tip sheet offers some pointers on how to maintain control of yourself as you parent your child through difficult situations.

Be angry over the right things!

Misplaced anger by parents happens for two reasons:

We take what children say or do too personally. This means we sometimes give more meaning to a child's actions than they intend. Harsh words or refusal to do chores can be seen as a personal rejection when in fact it has nothing to do with how a child feels about us. In addition, we must remember the emotional capabilities of children at different ages. A three year old will not give us the same attention as an older child or an adult. Keeping expectations at the right level to suit a child's age will help us maintain control of our feelings.

We allow anger from other situations to spill over onto our children. This could happen when we arrive home from work after a long day and a long wait in traffic. Our frustration on the road could cause us to lose our temper with our child in a way they do not deserve. There may also be some other ongoing problems, perhaps with our marriage or other family issues, that cause us to be short tempered over small things that are totally unrelated. Two suggestions that might help are:

- 1) Give ourselves some "decompression" time between work and home so we can clear our heads before dealing with the family. Set up an agreed amount of time with your family, even if it is only a few minutes after you get home, to adjust yourself.
- 2) Try to be aware of other things that are bothering you and seek support from a good friend or other family member. Anger that spills onto our children is confusing to them and can make them afraid to approach us over important things.

The Use of Physical Punishment

If you wonder how well physical punishment works, think back to when it was used on you. Most adults remember how their parents punished them, but usually cannot recall why they were punished. Physical punishment usually takes care of our need to release frustration, at the expense of our child. It usually results in

more resistance and rage in them. The urge to hit our child means we are close to losing control of ourselves. It is time to stop and take a “time out” and then go back and try again with our child.

Teach Discipline by Teaching Consequences

Clearly outline to your child what behavior you expect and what consequence will follow their failure to comply with your expectations. The consequence must effect something that has importance to your child, such a television privileges, or permission to visit a friend’s house or talk on the phone. You must be consistent in applying the consequence and have great patience in waiting out a change in behavior. Some examples:

Dad allows his son to drive the family car as long as his son works and pays for additional insurance. The son does not keep his job and does not attempt to get another one. Dad revokes the driving privilege until his son fulfills his end of the bargain.

A boy is constantly late getting ready for school and frequently misses the bus, causing his mother to have to drive him to school. Finally, on a day when he misses the bus, his mom continues to do her regular chores and takes him to school mid-morning. He misses seeing his friends before school, and must go to the office for a late pass. He begins to get ready for school on time after that.

Listen For and Reflect Feelings in Your Child’s Complaints

Many parents will handle conflicts by trying to reason with a child. In public settings when a child can cause embarrassment, many parents tend to take care of their embarrassment rather than their child. Tell your children you understand their feelings rather than argue over their demands. It is less important to solve their problem that it is to address their feelings. For example:

Dad: Teri, you are so upset! What’s wrong?
Teri: I left my doll at Kelly’s house.
Dad: You really feel bad about leaving it at her house?
Teri: (Crying) I want to go get it right now!
Dad: You want to go get it, I know.
Teri: I want it now! Please, Daddy! (big sobs)
Dad: (hugging her) I know, I know.
Teri calms down after a little while.

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