

Discipline and Parent Anger: How to separate your anger from your discipline

By Judy Arnall

If you are like most parents, you've probably made several parenting resolutions for the new school year. Yelling, spanking and issuing empty threats are common discipline methods that parents want to reduce. Now that it's way past September, how are you doing? If you find you are making no progress, it's easier to understand by examining why we use those methods to discipline.

Most parents discipline when they are angry. When children do things that make us mad, we want to relieve our hurt, often by hurting them, which may not be the best tool to teach them anything or help them solve problems. And it leaves us feeling very guilty. If we are supposed to be teaching them self-control, why can't we display it?

It's far better if parents separate their anger from their discipline measures. We make better discipline decisions that way, and use more moderate, respectful, thoughtful tools. A time-out is an example. A time-out is often used to cope with a parent's anger than to teach the child anything. And when the child doesn't cooperate with the time-out, the ensuing power struggle just adds to the parent anger. It's better for the parent to remove herself from the situation to take a breather than to make another person take the time-out.

How can you separate your anger from your discipline?

Think Ahead...

1. Relax. A stressful life combined with the normal trials and tribulations of parenting can lead to many angry outbursts. Try to prune your life of unnecessary stress. One of the most common ones for parents of young children is getting out the door on time. Instead of yelling, "Hurry up! We are going to be late!" change your attitude to "That's okay, take the time you need." If you are late, will it really matter five years from now?

2. Take a lot of "me" breaks. Take little chunks of time during the day to nurture you. Read the newspaper, have a cup of tea, work on a craft project for five minutes. Nurturing yourself increases your patience level.

3. Knowledge. It is essential to read a book on child development. Knowing that children are naturally messy, noisy, self centered, excited, clumsy, etc. and that they are not just acting that way to get your goat on purpose, can really help reframe your anger at their behaviour. Especially learn about temperament and children's developmental needs, and how some children and babies

can't help being more needy. Also learn about developmental stages and how it's very normal that children go through "annoying" stages to order to develop and grow.

In the heat of the moment...

1. Take a parent time-out. When your child does something that needs a disciplinary response, no one says that you must react immediately. Take the time to calm down, think, deep breathe, and come up with a disciplinary solution that you will commit to and is reasonable, related, and respectful. Discuss it with your partner if you wish. Then, get back to the kids about it. You can always say, "Mommy is so mad right now, I need to take a time out! I will get back to you on what we are going to do about this..." What terrific anger management skills you are modeling, instead of yelling, hitting, or forcing a time-out!

2. Use self-talk to moderate those trigger thoughts that get your anger boiling. A handy list of coping thoughts (about normal child development) on your fridge might help to calm your anger. These are adapted from the book, "When Anger Hurts Your Kids," by M. Mckay, P. Fanning, K. Paleg, and D. Landis.

- **It's just a stage. Kids have to go though these stages to develop.** (From knowledge of child development)
- **This is natural for his or her age.** (Again, knowledge of development)
- **Don't take it seriously. Keep a sense of humour.** (Stops magnification of the behaviour)
- **Pick your battles. Keep positive and save your ire for the really big stuff.** (Again, stops magnification)
- **This is just natural frustration for him/her.**
- **He/she is NOT really trying to stick it to me. It's just how they are coping right now.** (The focus is on the child's needs, rather than parents' perception that they are being manipulated)
- **He or she can't help crying,.. feeling angry,... interrupting,... needing attention...** (Focuses again on the child's needs rather than the child having malicious intent.)
- **Just get through it. You can cope. You don't have to get angry.** (Stops magnification)

3. When you and your child is calm, think about the problem and possible solutions. When heads are calm, brainstorming ideas to solve problems become easy.

Separating your anger from your discipline is a learned skill. With practice, it becomes easier and easier.

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