

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL

PRESENTS:

PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC

Special Thoughts on Raising Kids

Isn't It Ever OK to Be Angry?

As a general rule, the decision on whether or not to use anger as we deal with our children, hinges on the issue of who owns the problem. Children's problems should always be met with empathy, sadness, or understanding. Empathy and sadness drive the pain of life's natural consequences deep into people's minds, so that real learning takes place.

If their mistakes only hurt **them**—if they trip and fall, or throw their fists and come home with a black eye, or skip half-a-dozen classes at school then our anger only makes the problem worse. Youngsters concentrate on our anger to the point that they soon forget what they have done wrong. They become tied up with emotions such as guilt, or fear, and they have little time to think about ways to solve their problems.

When our kids do something that affects us directly—leaving their bikes in the driveway or failing to put our things away after using them—they will recognize that we're angry because their misbehavior has affected us. Anger, at this time, is a healthy emotion, as long as it is expressed in a healthy way. Many people use anger in an unhealthy way by accusing, threatening, and intimidating.

Mom: "Jerry! What is the matter with you? How many times have I told you to keep that bike out of the driveway? What do I have to do to make you understand how stupid that is? If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times. Keep that bike out of the driveway, or I'm just going to drive right over it. I'm tired of this nonsense!

Jerry: "I'm sorry."

Mom: "Well don't do it again! I mean it this time!"

Compare this to the healthy way another mother describes her anger:

Mom: "Jerry, I'm mad! Every time you leave your bike in the driveway it makes a problem for me! I have to stop the car and get out! Today I had to get out in the rain! I don't want that to happen again!"

Jerry: "I'm sorry."

Mom: "That's what you said the last three times. It even makes me more angry to hear you say that you're sorry when it doesn't change how you act. If I see the bike out there again, I'll know that you want me to take it away until you are more responsible."

This mother's anger is effective because she is letting Jerry know how his actions affect her and how she is prepared to take care of herself if the behavior doesn't change. Jerry has not been personally attacked. He still had the chance to think about how he is going to solve the problem. He is not being told how bad he is, or how to correct the situation. This youngster is especially motivated at this point, since mother is setting up a problem for him in the event he doesn't solve it.

The decision whether or not to use anger must be considered carefully. Generally speaking, it should be used only when our children's behavior directly affects us.

One note of caution, we should not use anger so often that it becomes an expected emotion. All of us, including children, love emotion. Once our child gets used to a particular emotion - be it shame, anger, guilt, or love - he/she finds ways to get us to express it often. This helps us understand the parent who says, "I don't know what's wrong with that kid. He just delights in making me mad!"

Use anger only when your child's behavior directly affects you and you can do it without losing control