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## HELPING YOUR CHILD MANAGE THEIR DYSREGULATED ANGER

Many parents who have consulted with me over the past many years and decades have reported to me the gist of what the research findings are finally highlighting, and which psychologists are playing catch up on: that **dysregulated anger plays an enormous part in children's development challenges.**

Here is what parents have told me about their children's struggles with anger:

- 1. Their kids, with a few exceptions, spend lots of time being angry, frustrated, protesting, pouting, angrily refusing to cooperate, sticking out their tongues, pushing chairs, pushing siblings, and generally letting the world know that they are angrily upset. They spend lots of energy blaming parents, crying "unfair," telling us we are "mean" for imposing rules or saying 'no.'*
- 1. Parents also report that helping their children moderate their intense anger and tolerate not getting their own way all the time is critically important to their children's healthy development.*
- 2. Parents share with me their concerned observation that demanding children get lots of negative reactions from the world. This motivates parents to want to help children alter their way of thinking about their place in the world – to understand that parents and siblings and other kids have needs and rights too. Parents teach their children that the universe does not revolve around them, nor do parents revolve around their children at all times and in all*

*demanded ways.*

- 3. Parents report that children can get angry because they feel psychologically threatened by criticism or blame. Most parents do their best to correct without blame. Parents learn to apologize quickly and sincerely when they do screw up by blaming and criticizing their child.*
  
- 4. And parents suspect that children who hold a grudge stay miserable longer, so they try to coax the child into a more forgiving, "let's move on," attitude.*

What does the research teach us about how to help children with their anger issues?

Unfortunately, **only 2% of psychological research has focused on anger, and only a tiny fraction of that is focused on the problem of anger in childhood development, and only a tiny fraction of that tiny fraction explores useful ideas for parents.** That's nuts to everyday parents who know that kids get angry at least as often as they get depressed or scared. Everyday parents understand that their kid is much more likely to get derailed in their all-important family relationships by anger than by fearful or demoralized/depressed feelings. Yes, kids do get scared and depressed. **But anger can lead to just as many or more dysfunctional patterns and attitudes as anxiety or depression, and therefore deserves just as much attention as anxiety or depression.**

**And in adulthood, without the protective and compensating love of a parent, dysregulated anger makes a mess of relationships and lives. It is imperative that we parents find ways to help our children with their dysregulated anger before they leave our homes.**

What can a parent do to help their child learn to notice, understand, regulate and moderate their anger in preparation for life both within and beyond their family?

Here are a few ideas for helping your child with their intense, dysregulated anger:

- 1. Validate and understand your child's anger.** (*"I understand that you are just furious you cannot go to your friend's house; I know it's difficult for you to hear me say NO."*);
- 2. Make sure you do not say a word until you are calm and emotionally well-regulated.** Do not argue or even speak with your child until you are emotionally "settled."
- 3. Before any discussion with your child, expect them to calm themselves and help them to do so.** (*"I am willing to discuss this with you and to hear your feelings and objections about this, but not until you have found a way to calm yourself down. Would you like my help with this or would you rather just go to your room and find your own way of calming down?"*);
- 4. If the anger is about someone other than you, help your child see the other person's point of view.** (*"I know that she really hurt your feelings. What do you think led her to speak as she did?"*);
- 5. If the anger is about a limit rather than about another person, help your child tolerate their own angry feelings over something that isn't going to change.** (*"I know it stinks and feels unfair that you got sick on the very day you were supposed to go on the ski trip. Sometimes life*

*stinks and sometimes life is unfair. It's really hard, but that's just the way life is sometimes.”);*

**6. When you are the angry person in the parent-child equation, attend to yourself first.** When you get angry with your child and yell at them, check yourself as quickly as you can. Then once you and the child are calmer, re-approach your child. Own up to your angry outburst. Make sure the child is told that you were TOO MUCH even if the child's behavior was wrong, and that becoming angry and yelling is not something you feel good about. Do tell your child you are sorry for yelling at them even if you add that you also are not too happy about the bad behavior which prompted your outburst. Tell them that getting angry and yelling is not the right thing for either of you. (*“I'm really sorry for yelling at you and calling you selfish. That was wrong of me. I didn't like what you did, but I should have found a better way to talk with you about it.”*);

**7. When your child does something egregiously wrong, settle, communicate and problem-solve.** Make sure you first settle yourself. Then turn to your child, have a conversation and practice “communication, reconciliation, and problem-solving.” (*“What you did and said was wrong, but I now understand better why you did it. I am asking you to not do that again. I also want to make sure you know I love you and believe in you. I just want you to be the kind of boy I can be proud of.”*)

**When you regularly do these things and speak this way with your child, you are modeling and teaching your child how to tolerate, regulate, and moderate intense, dysregulated anger so it does not come out in dysfunctional ways which make a mess of his or her life.**

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