

"You Make Me Sick" and other things Parents Say in Anger

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By Patricia Gatto

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Maryann is so focused she's blind. She's slipped over the edge of responsibility and forgot the real reason she is working so hard. It's for her daughter.

Being a single parent isn't easy. Between working, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and homework, there isn't much time left in the day. It's a heavy burden to be the sole supporter of a young child. But when pressures and tensions are so great that harmful words spill out like bitter pills, isn't it time to stop and take inventory?

"Clean your room or I'm gonna kill you!" "If you don't do your homework right now, I'll break your neck!"
"Just leave me alone, I've had a rough day."

These statements came from a woman who loves her daughter and she's working hard to provide for her. If you asked Maryann, she'd say she would do anything in the world for her child. But why can't she see that respectful communication conveys love more than a new pair of shoes ever will? And why does she have to be reminded to treat her child with respect?

Maryann isn't alone. Life is frustrating. We've all heard parents, married, single or otherwise, speak to their children in anger. As adults, we've all rolled our eyes at the dramatic threats, knowing full well they have no intention of being carried out. But does a child know these are simply dumb words spoken in frustration? Does a child know that the violent threats of bodily harm are hollow?

Whether over the top displays of drama are blurted in anger, or merely used to snap a child to attention, the results are unhealthy and damaging.

When little Billy tells a classmate he is going to kill him over a broken crayon, where do you think he learned that response from? And in today's climate, do you think anyone would consider it just an innocent statement from an innocent child? Billy would be sent to the principal's office on the spot. And

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if not, he would certainly be called down after the victim of his harsh words went home and told his parents and they reported it to the school.

What happens when your child gets a little older and has a real problem? What if he needs to talk about drugs or alcohol? Or she has a problem in school, or a question about boys? Repeatedly belittling your child with angry words and intimidation will break down the barriers of communication long before you even reach this point. If you threaten to "kill" your child over a messy room, what would you do if she told you she was having sex?

Anger has a way of creating very colorful and exaggerated statements. Parents and caregivers need to make a concerted effort to remove these damaging phrases from their vocabulary by controlling anger. Save the drama for a time when it is really needed. On occasion, shocking statements do have a place in parenting, but used on a daily basis, they will only serve to create fear or simply numb your child to your words.

Search your vocabulary; are you unintentionally damaging the relationship you have with your child? Here are some steps to help you take control when you feel frustration and anger rise.

Take a deep breath, not from your chest, but pulling from your diaphragm. Slowly exhale. As you do this, picture your words evaporate into the air.

Lift your hand, palm out, in a stopping motion. This will indicate to your child that you need a moment and serve to remind you that you are stopping yourself from anger.

Calmly tell yourself to relax as you continue to breathe deeply.

Wait until you feel in control. When you speak, intentionally bring your voice down, not to a whisper, but to a soft, paced level.

Then logically explain the reason for your anger to your child, voiding threats and harsh criticism.

It's okay to say you are disappointed or upset about a messy room or a bad grade, but focus on the problem and offer a solution or deliver a fair ultimatum.

If punishment is necessary, make it realistic. I don't know of a single parent that took away television privileges from their child for the rest of their life.

Follow through on your words.

If you do get angry, offer your child an apology, not an excuse. Take blame for your actions.

Closely examine the situation that triggered your anger. Was it really your child? Is there an underlying factor? If so, what can you do to correct the situation or avoid it in the future?

Anger is a natural emotion. It can't be completely controlled or removed from our lives, but you can

change the way you handle things. In doing so, you gain an invaluable gift, a respectful relationship with your child. Healthy communication is a parent's weapon against the outside world. A child should turn to his parent in times of trouble, not run away in fear.

Patricia Gatto and John De Angelis are the authors of MILTON'S DILEMMA, the tale of a lonely boy's magical journey to friendship and self-acceptance. As advocates for literacy and children's rights, the authors speak at schools and community events to foster awareness and provide children with a safe and healthy learning environment. For more information, please visit Joyful Productions at

Are You Addicted to Anger?

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

Michael was raised in a home where anger was used to control. His parents used their anger to attempt to control each other as well as their children. Sometimes the anger erupted into violence and Michael and his siblings would get physically hurt. Michael never knew when one of his parents would suddenly become enraged, so the threat was always there.

Michael was the oldest of four children and was often put in charge of taking care of his siblings. He often took out on his siblings his fear and rage at being abused by his parents. While some part of Michael didn't want to be like his parents, this was all he knew.

As an adult, Michael struggles with his frequent anger at his wife and children. His wife threatened to leave him if he didn't get some help, which is what led him to consult with me.

"Michael, anger is often used to cover up another, more painful feeling. What do you think you are covering up with your anger?" I asked.

"I don't know. I just get so frustrated and then out comes the anger."

"What did you feel as a child, besides scared, when your parents were angry and violent with you?"

"I guess I felt pretty much alone."

"You must have felt very alone and uncared for and also helpless over what was happening."

"Yes, I felt so helpless! I hated feeling so alone and helpless. It was so scary. I couldn't wait to get bigger so I wouldn't feel so helpless."

"What triggers that helpless feeling now?"

"Humm...I guess it's when my wife and kids don't do what I want them to do or what I think they should do."

"So rather than feel and accept your helplessness over them, which is the reality but is a difficult feeling

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to feel, you avoid feeling that old helplessness by trying to control them with your anger, just as your parents did. Is that right?"

"I guess so. I guess I try to control them rather than feel helpless. But why should I feel helpless? It's an awful feeling.

"Michael, when you were a child, you were helpless over your parents brutality, and you were also helpless over yourself in many ways. You couldn't just leave and go live with someone else. You couldn't walk away without further punishment. However, today, while you are still helpless over others,

you are not helpless over yourself. You can walk away from a situation that doesn't feel good, or you can speak up for yourself. You can also explore difficulties with your family. You didn't have any of these options as a child. But unless you accept your helplessness over others, you will try to control them, and anger is the way you've learned to do it. Anger is your automatic controlling, addictive response to protect against feeling that old helplessness. You will continue to be angry until you accept your helplessness over others – over what they choose to do and who they choose to be."

Helplessness over others is a very hard feeling to accept. For many people, it feels like a life or death feeling, because as infants we were completely helpless and if no one came we would die. Some of us cried and cried and no one came and we felt helpless over living or dying. While today helplessness over others is not usually a life or death experience, the feeling can trigger our infant terror. Most people will do anything to avoid the feeling of helplessness, even though we are no longer helpless over ourselves. Yet until we accept our helplessness over others, we will try to control them, and anger is a major way many people have learned to attempt to control.

It took Michael time to learn how to take care of himself – how to embrace and accept his helpless feelings rather than ignore them or cover them up with anger. As he learned to take loving care of himself and his own feelings and needs, he became more accepting of other's feelings and needs. As a result of accepting himself and others, and of learning to feel and manage his painful feelings, his need to control others gradually diminished.

In the course of working with me, Michael learned to access a personal source of spiritual guidance to help him not feel so alone and to know how to take loving care of himself. Michael found that when he was connected with his spiritual guidance, he was much less likely to act out in anger. He found he could manage his difficult feelings of aloneness and helplessness far more easily when he felt the love and support of Spirit.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?" She is the co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding healing process. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course:

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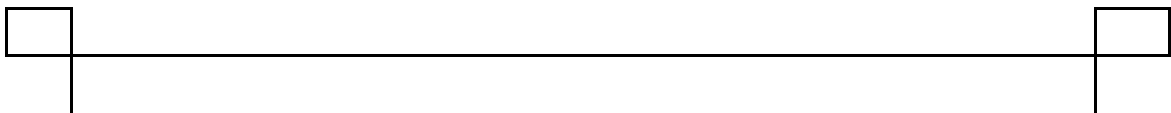
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