



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

Managing Anger, Your and Theirs

Even in the most loving of families, parents and children get angry at each other. Anger is a fact of life. We all experience anger, we get frustrated and disappointed with loved ones. However during the teenage years, anger can become an issue in the parent-child relationship; as young people challenge authority, push boundaries and experience intense emotions. Name-calling, door-slamming and screaming tirades can occur on a daily basis and in more extreme cases, cursing and violent outbursts can take place.

The goal for young people as they mature is to learn ways of managing their anger. Anger is not in itself a problem, it is a feeling. However it is what a young person does when they become angry that can create difficulties for them in their relationships and in their lives. Therefore, the main aim when helping young people to manage their anger is to support them in identifying and understanding their feelings of anger so that they can make responsible decisions about their behaviour in challenging situations.

To do this it is important for parents to be able to manage their own emotions. Many adults find it difficult to deal with anger and to express it in a healthy way. Some have learnt that it is not nice to express anger, that expressing it leads to trouble, while others can express it more aggressively. Therefore it is important for parents to learn this skill so that they can teach it to their children.

Let's now look at an example of a teenager who cannot manage their feelings. You tell your fifteen year old son that he cannot go on his laptop for the rest of the evening. His reaction is to scream, shout and curse at you because he is not getting what he wants. In response you may shout and roar back, which results in a full blown screaming match, saying things you regret later and leaving the relationship somewhat strained.

In this situation your own emotional response is key, remember the aim is to teach them how to manage their emotions. Therefore as difficult as it may be, it is important for you to remain calm in the situation. Take a deep breath so that you can think about how you wish to respond to your teenager rather than reacting from your own feelings of anger and frustration. Acknowledge the teenagers feeling of anger (this also helps them to name their own feelings), while at the same time redirect their behaviour. So in the above example, a parent could say something like *'I can see you are angry and we can talk about it when you are calm'*. This is a statement that can be repeated in a calm way as calmness in a parent can often trigger calmness in the teenager.

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