

Thriving During the Elementary Years - Parenting and Anger

By Jan Hittelman

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Anger and parenting go together so well, don't they? Let's face it; it's impossible to parent and not get angry. At best, you can strive towards getting angry less frequently and less intensely. Particularly because your parental anger also functions as powerful negative attention and thus may reinforce the very behavior you're angry about. Consider the following techniques:

- **Mutual Time-Out.** The first thing to always do with parental anger is to calm down! This is also a good idea prior to determining negative consequences. Otherwise, you'll find yourself saying things like: "You're grounded for life!" or "No TV for a year!". After you calm down and realize you cannot enforce what you have just said, you'll commute the sentence to something more realistic. OOPS! Parents often think that they must make immediate decisions regarding consequences. There's great wisdom, however, to briefly postponing your decision and giving yourself a chance to think about it. You then have the opportunity to calm down and choose an appropriate and realistic consequence that you can enforce. It also gives you a chance to discuss it with your spouse. This allows you to avoid the other problem of rushing to disciplinary judgment; arguing with your spouse about the haphazard consequence you spontaneously determined, which makes both of you even angrier!
- **Asking vs. Telling.** Most parents encourage their children to speak in a polite respectful manner. One way that we try to do this is by our example. We call this modeling. Toward this end, we try to model appropriate language like using the word, "please". So when it's bedtime, we might say to our child, "Would you please get ready for bed now?" Sounds great doesn't it? The problem here is that we have unintentionally given our child a choice. We have asked our child, "Would you get ready for bed? It would follow then that our child could respond with something like, "Not right now, I'm busy." Technically speaking, this is a fair response to the question or request as it was worded, even though most parents would be, to say the least, dissatisfied with this response. Consider the significantly different meaning to this slightly altered statement, "Please get ready for bed now."
- **Nagging.** Another common complaint is having to repeat requests an inordinate number of times before the child complies. What makes it even more frustrating is that not only are you frustrated with having to repeat yourself over and over, but you're also viewed as a nag! Believe it or not, this is another example of a child discipline problem that we parents actually create ourselves! Children are smart. If we teach them that we are willing to repeat our requests ten times, why would they respond after the first or second request? It's as if your child is playing with a friend and you tell them it's time to clean up. As the friend begins to comply, your child might as well say, "We don't have to clean up yet; she's going to ask another 7 or 8 times. We still have plenty of time to play!" We accidentally train our children to ignore our initial requests! The solution to changing your child's behavior is to first change your own behavior of repeating requests over and over again. Minimize your repetition of requests and be clear with your child that their compliance is expected in a timely fashion.

The excerpts above are from Dr. Hittelman's book: "Parenting Essentials: Seven Steps to Parenting Success, available at no charge on the Internet at BoulderPsychologicalServices.com.

Upcoming PEN Event:

April 10th

What Kids Really Want to Ask

9am – 11am Recycling Center
(1901 63rd Street, Boulder)

Presenter: Margaret Pevec, MA

Life Educator, Coach, Author

Learn more about PEN by visiting their website at: www.parentengagementnetwork.com or by contacting Betsy Fox with the Boulder County Healthy Youth Alliance at 303-441-3981.

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