

I GET TOO ANGRY AT MY KIDS

Several years ago, I counseled a woman with a 12-year-old son who was having academic as well as behavior problems at home and in school. None of my suggestions seemed to work. The mother had trouble setting up chore charts, she could not find fun things to do with her son, she had trouble praising him for appropriate behaviors, and she had trouble listening to his problems. Nothing seemed to work. Then one day, she said, "I say every hateful thing to my son that I would like to say to my brother!" In her family of origin, her brother was the one with all the problems, the one that made life miserable for everyone. At that moment, I became aware of the hidden factors that can keep parents from applying their parenting tools calmly, effectively and consistently.

UNRESOLVED RESENTMENT

If you have unresolved resentment toward anyone in your past, you may bring that old anger into the present, and become too angry at your children. Over many years of counseling experience, I have noticed that fathers often tend to feel that their childhood

has not affected their ability to be a good parent; mothers tend to look more at their childhoods, but may think they have dealt with all the issues in their pasts, when, in reality, they have not dealt with the issues sufficiently.

The Bible is very clear on the importance of forgiving others. In fact, God states that if we do not forgive others, we will not be for-



given. One common problem is that we may say we have forgiven someone, but we may not actually spend enough time discussing, crying about and sharing our pain in order to really heal the hurts of the past. If you have not forgiven people that hurt you in the past, you may reassign all that anger to someone in the present, and consequently overreact to his or her

behavior. Working through unresolved resentments and forgiving those that have hurt us can take a lifetime, but it is extremely important. Your happiness and the well-being of your child is at stake.

FAMILIAR PATTERNS

Some parents overreact and become too angry at their kids because that seems normal to them. They are doing to their children exactly what was done to them. Often, these parents tell me that they do not want to yell, scream and nag like their parents did to them. Simply recognizing what they are doing is a major step toward creating a more positive home climate and using parenting strategies effectively, consistently and calmly.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Another cause for parents' anger: Most children and teenagers do not live up to their parents' expectations. In this case, the anger may have little to do with the child and more to do with unrealistic expectations; nevertheless it can create real problems in parenting. If you have unrealistic expectations, expecting all As

(Continued on next page.)

(Continued from previous page.)

when a child's potential is *B-* or *C*-level work, then you may tend to overreact when low grades are received.

GRIEF

Whenever one experiences a loss (your child gets a *C* average, not the *A* average you expected; he goes out for football instead of band, she gets suspended from school, etc.) a parent needs to work through the stages of grief. The stages of grief are: confusion, denial, anger/guilt, depression, understanding and acceptance. Acceptance does not mean that you allow negative behavior to remain, but only when you reach understanding and acceptance will you be able to help your child. If you get stuck at the stage of anger or guilt or depression, or never move past denial, then you will not be able to parent in a healthy way, and your child will suffer.

Usually one only considers

grieving as needed when a person dies. However, it is important for parents to identify their feelings of sadness, anger, hurt and guilt about their children's losses and failures, as well, and to discuss their feelings, and realize the importance of working through these feelings.

INTERPRETATION

Another factor that will cause parents to become too angry and overemotional has to do with how they interpret their child's misbehavior. If your child misbehaves and you think he or she did it deliberately to make you mad, then you will probably get mad.

If you think or say the word "should" regarding your child's behavior, then your resulting emotion will usually be an overreaction when the desired behavior does not happen. For example, if you say to yourself, "My son should do his chores," and the

chores do not get done, then you will probably be too angry to deal with the misbehavior in a healthy, positive, calm fashion. When one commands someone to do something and the behavior does not occur; one tends to become overemotional.

God gave us all choices. He has spelled out the consequences to our not following the Commandments, but has allowed us to make the choice. So it is that parents need to spell out consequences, but allow their kids to make choices. It would be healthier to state or feel, "I would like it if my son would choose to complete his chores, but he may test me, or simply decide that it would be more fun to play." If the child does not complete the chores, parents need to invoke the consequences, or change the consequences to something more severe so that the child will make the more appropriate choice the next time.

A CHALLENGE TO YOU:

1. Which of the reasons above best describes why you might overreact or become too angry when dealing with your child?
2. Take some time to deal with that explanation. Talk about it with others, grieve losses as needed, and work actively to forgive anyone who has hurt you in the past.

