

## **Angry parents = confused kids**

If your relationship as a couple is not healthy it's all-too-easy to let it affect your attitude towards your children. At a time when you want to do nothing more than shut out the world and try to work through your problems, you're having to care for young children who need you to operate at Def Con 3 all day every day to meet their practical and emotional needs.

Your anger affects the way you parent. It affects the way you talk to and discipline your kids. If you're not seeing eye-to-eye over family issues then you're not presenting a united front when it comes to discipline. You might drift into the 'good cop, bad cop' routine, where one of you mutates into a drill sergeant and the other lets discipline go entirely. How do your kids react? They get confused. They're not sure where their boundaries lie when one mom says yes but dad says no. They might even attempt to play you off against one another.

Above all, they see your anger and they think it's normal to react in that way when life does them down. They see mom or dad explode at the slightest thing and they think it's acceptable to do it themselves. And hey presto: you have a 'problem child' on your hands.

**Remember that your child learns by imitation and he will copy you when it comes to expressing his own anger**

## **Anger and discipline**

Angry discipline is wrong discipline. Discipline is about guiding your child towards the right behaviour and choices. Anger is about punishment – and if your anger comes out physically when you discipline your kids that's not positive discipline. Angry discipline is tied up with over-criticism – instead of picking your battles you'll ride your child for the slightest thing. It's about expecting more from your child than they are capable of at a young age and resorting to harsh measures to make them meet unrealistic standards.

## **Your anger and your child**

Kids don't see shades of gray – they don't realize your anger with them isn't personal, but is actually a projection of your anger and disappointment with each other. In this type of situation, they only see that mum and dad are angry with them all the time.

See it from your child's point of view. Maybe he can't do anything without hearing the words 'no', 'can't', 'don't', 'shouldn't'. His self-esteem and confidence suffer because he thinks mum and dad don't love him, and because he knows he can't match up to what they want, he becomes aggressive and destructive. Because mum and dad shout all the time he does; because they overreact to the small things, he does – and because they spank him when he misbehaves he thinks it's fine to hit out himself. His backchat may be a reflection of the way you speak to him – and because he starts firing it right back at you your anger raises a notch.

## **Breaking the vicious circle**

It's natural to get angry but the key is not to let it prevent you from responding to your child in a positive and constructive way when he misbehaves. How do you do it?

## **Face up to your anger**

Look at the ways in which you express your anger and frustration. Do you hold it inside until you explode in sheer rage? Do you let it out in an overcritical way that focuses entirely on your child's character? Do you express it in an aggressive way in order to dominate others and get control of difficult situations? Remember that your child learns by imitation and he will copy you when it comes to expressing his own anger.

## **Understand why you're angry**

When you get angry with your child it's often due to you misinterpreting your actions. Your child wants to please you and make you happy – but his attention span is short and he often has a totally different agenda from yours. Let's say you dress him in his best clothes for church. Then while you're getting ready himself he goes out into the yard and spends 15 minutes climbing trees and jumping in the ditch. Now he's all dirty and it's time to leave. You get angry because you think he's done it on purpose. But why did he really do it? He got bored waiting for you and went outside to pass the time. He didn't realize he was getting dirty and it would cause problems – he was just trying to find something to do while he waited.

## **Supernanny solutions**

- **Use positive discipline** Let your child know you don't approve of what he's doing, but communicate your feelings without focusing on him. Focus on the behaviour itself. Don't say, "It was so mean of you to hit your sister, Cody"; say "hitting isn't kind, Cody".
- **Understand why he acts up** Your child doesn't act out deliberately to make life difficult for you. He's at an age when he can't control his impulses and can't focus his mind on a long list of chores. He might be too young to express his own frustration verbally so yes – he hits his sister. But having you hit out at him or react to him with verbal

aggression won't cure him of that tendency – in fact it'll teach him the very behaviour you're trying to curb.

- **Don't punish your child in anger** Anger tends to overtake rational thought and if you discipline your child when you're not in control you'll be reacting out of emotion and not thinking logically. Don't let your anger result in harsh punishment – take time to cool off instead of doing something you might regret. Otherwise you won't be using discipline to guide your child towards good behaviour – you'll be using it to work off your anger.
- **Be consistent** If your relationship is fragile don't use your children to score points. Stay on the same page when enforcing the house rules so your child won't become confused about what behaviour is acceptable.

Anger does have a purpose in parenting. You can use it as a signal that something's wrong and a warning against danger. But expressing it in a positive way shows that you love your child and are committed to steering him Along the right path.