

According to Dr. Ross Campbell Author of “Kids at Risk” and winner of the presidents award in pediatrics the greatest problem all parents face and the greatest single danger to your children is their own anger. Not only does it lead to violence, multiple health problems, drugs, crime and prison it cripples your families ability to relate to each other...to be happy. The causes are many; growing up in an angry home, divorce, losing a parent, poverty, school bullies, financial stress etc. etc. In today’s world very child and every family is affected. The good news is that there are solutions.

First is deal with your own anger. I once had the opportunity to ask Dr. Karl Menninger, founder of the Menninger clinic and widely recognized as the father of mental health in America, what was the most important thing he had learned about anger in his many years of work and study. He gave me two answers. *First* that anger is a secondary emotion. There is ALWAYS something underneath it...usually fear or hurt. *Second is that it is far too easy to let anger become a habit, something we USE to keep problems and people as far away as possible.*

The problem is that most of us (parents) don’t have the time or money to put ourselves through years of therapy and reliving our childhoods etc. Fortunately we can turn to Christ. He is an expert at being hurt, at forgiving, and at trusting his father in heaven. A simple daily prayer can make a miracle difference “Father I have been hurt again (am still hurting) help me to know when I get angry and when that anger is affecting my children unfairly.” Asking your church to join you in praying for help with anger makes a lot more sense than waiting till you get sick and having to ask prayer for healing.

If we ask and keep asking God DOES come and live in our hearts and give us a new nature...fills us with the Holy Spirit. Laying hold of this new nature however requires *persistence*, asking God daily for more of Him; more faith, more hope, more love.

Second is learning and teaching self control. Self control starts with rules. It is probably best to start with a very simple set for everyone in your home, no assault, no slander, no vandalism, no disturbing the peace . In child’s words no hitting, no name calling, no breaking things, and no yelling. No home can survive without sticking to this very basic set of rules. But even the best rules don’t get people out of trouble they get you in trouble. Self control gets you out of trouble, and no child learns that with out adult help and lots of it. The following toolkit can be a big help to both you and your children. They have grown out of a talk I first gave ten years ago to the Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children at Kansas State University.

1. *Be a listener.* Talk don’t hit is the cardinal rule for all of us. The Catch is that it doesn’t work if no one listens. Once a child knows he has been heard the temptation to give in to anger is much less. A good rule is that children should always have their SAY but not their way.

2. *Share what you do when you get angry.* Then ask your child to ask five other people what they do when they get angry. How is a child to learn wisdom if he does not ask questions of the wise?? When he is finished he will have five people he can talk to about his feelings...the first best most sure protection he could hope for.
3. *Visit your local library.* Ask the librarian to do a computer search for books on anger age appropriate to your child. I ran a list for five year olds here in Topeka and came up with nine very excellent books. Reading about anger helps a child understand what the problems are and to BE PREPARED.
4. *Pray at the beginning of the day instead of the end.* Scripture is very clear on this point "Pray lest ye fall into temptation." Just the act of praying together before your child leaves for school will give him strength.
5. *Teach your children to refocus.* Turning your head is a very easy way to avoid getting angry. You simply choose to look at something else. A good place to look is up. It is the one place there is nothing to threaten you. Another physical trick is to tighten every muscle in your body as hard as you can as long as you can. When it has had all it can stand your brain will flood your body with chemical that MAKE YOU RELAX. Try it now? It really works and it is kind of fun even if you aren't angry. One key element to self control is learning to REFOCUS. Turning your head is a good first step. Carrying a cross in your pocket can also be a help in refocusing.
6. **Get Involved. Last year one in five high school boys brought a weapon to school. (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2003.) EVERY YEAR one out of four of America's high school students are a victim of violent crime, assault, robbery or rape. Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman). Even their music overflows with a rapidly deepening rage. Our only hope as parents is to get MORE involved in the lives of our children and their schools.**
 - a. Volunteer as a classroom aid or after school monitor.
 - b. Do everything possible to promote after school programs. Most violence occurs during the two hours immediately following school.
 - c. If the problem is serious and you can afford it consider a Christian School

If we are not involved in the social lives of our children how can we hope to help them keep anger out of relationships. Mark two nights a month on your calendar and keep them as friends nights. A child's only real hope of dealing with anger is adult involvement...be involved.

Valuable as these tools are in helping a child develop self control it would be a mistake not to recall that self control is also a fruit of the spirit. One of my personal hobbies is writing blessings for children. Reading the following blessing can open your child's mind to believe that God is real and that if we ask his spirit will take up residence in our heart. Simply place your hand on the child's head or shoulder and read the words of the blessing.

Blessing for an Angry Child

Father I bring _____ for your blessing. Bless h__ in h__ anger before it harms h__ soul. Bless h__ with friends who will listen to h__ feelings and keep h__ company. Remind h__ Jesus when h__ anger is leading h__ to sin against others or against h__ own soul, to turn to you. **WHEN HE WANTS TO HIT, HIT, HIT, HELP HIM TO TALK, TALK, TALK,** to you, to me , to anyone you send to walk with h__ thru the cloud of anger into the **LIGHT** of understanding and compassion. Bless h__ father with strength to face the pain that is causing the anger and faith enough to share that pain with you. **Most of all Father fill him so full of your Holy Spirit that the anger is washed away and REPLACED with the fruit of the spirit and the joy of having you deep deep in h__ heart.**

Be ye kind to one another. Ephesians 4:3

Blessing your children once or twice a week can be the one thing that keeps you connected to one another... in touch with them and their problems.

Third is “be ye tenderhearted”. I think of a story told by Pastor Charles Stanley. He was riding in the car and the kids were quarreling. He raised his voice, swatted one with a newspaper and delivered an ultimatum to shape up or else. His youngest, the one struck by the newspaper, didn’t get swatted very often and it surprised him. The child’s response was to say “Dad, that’s not be ye tenderhearted.”

The natural tendency of us all is to pass our stress on to those around us. We get busy and forget that our children are not baggage but fellow travelers. We get in a hurry, we get worried, we get irritable and before we realize what is happening we are flat out angry and the whole family is upset...so we turn to television so we won’t have to look at each other. If your family is watching a lot of tv lately it could be that too much anger has infected you all. Find a game you all like and make it a point to play at least once a week. It could keep anger from becoming a habit that you can’t get rid of.

About the Author: Charles white is a freelance Christian writer and editor of www.ddiggs.com a website dedicated to helping public school teachers involve their children in anger management and violence prevention activities.