

Helping Your Teen Manage Their Anger

Following our article last newsletter about taming anger in children, we half expected the question, “What can we do about angry teenagers?” to be asked. Whilst the obvious answer is “train’ em while they’re young”, it must be said that issues change and it is never too late to start emotion coaching.

Although the guidelines for children do apply, there are other things to consider when dealing with angry teenagers, and while books have been written on the subject we would like to give a few extra tips in this regard.

It is the key task of adolescents to develop their own sense of autonomy. As they strive to do this it is quite common for them to feel aggrieved, or angry at adults (usually parents) who they perceive to be undermining their journey to independence. It is usually this struggle with authority figures which sparks feelings of resentment and injustice and manifests as anger.

The best thing you can do is do your best to “be the adult“ in these exchanges, by controlling your own anger and not taking things personally. Try not to over react. Teenagers feel all emotions very intensely, and think you feel the same. It might be helpful to state how you are feeling by saying something like, “I am not angry about this, but I do need to have some answers.” Or if you are feeling cross, say something like, “I need a couple of minutes to calm down so I can talk to you about this.” Not only does this help to keep the situation a little calmer, it models control...the very life skill you are wanting your teen to learn.

When the situation has calmed, encourage open conversation about the angry exchange. Don’t expect your adolescent to always be able to say why they were angry. It’s likely they don’t know. Often angry outbursts are not even about anger. For example, they could be about frustration, fear, confusion, hurt or disappointment. Many teenagers find it easier to express anger than to expose these more confusing and vulnerable feelings. It’s better to talk about the feeling itself (rather than the subject of the exchange) and how it can be managed so that productive communication can take place. Such conversations can take a lot of the force out of angry exchanges and create a space to find constructive ways to move forward.

Empower your teenager by asking for their opinion where appropriate such as, “What do you think the rules around this should be?”

Pick your battles. Figure out what really matters and stay true to those issues. For instance, obeying curfew may be a major issue; cleaning her room may be a minor issue.

No one knows your child like you do, but during adolescence you must expect some behavioural changes. Hormones, cognitive changes, normal teen angst, school stress, worrying about the future, body image, peer pressure are just a few factors that affect your adolescent daughter.

Significant adults in the lives of teens who model that it is okay to be sad or hurt as well as angry are on the right track. Encouraging young people to identify and suitably express negative emotions beyond just anger empowers and validates them

and helps them feel loved and supported during a most vulnerable period in their lives.

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