

When Is Just A Little Anger OK?

Have you ever started a home project, go to reach for a tool, and find that one of your kids has "borrowed" it without putting it back? Have you thought that maybe your kids need to see you freak out just a little in situations like that? Or possibly turn it into a good thing by keeping your cool?

Anger is a natural human response. Sometimes, of course, things happen that make us angry. Can you think of anything off the top of your head? I can...well, let me say, I bet my two boys can! I find as I talk to men that one of the top issues we face is anger management. It is not only with our kids but also with our wives, with a co-worker, or maybe that fool who just sat through a green light talking on his cell phone. Duh! Get the heck out of the way! Where's my wrench?! I can't believe you said that! And maybe a little screaming and cursing! Sound familiar? That was the case in my house and my dad's house. I had to face up to the reality that I had a quick temper, and I blamed it on work, long hours, no one understanding just how tough my life was, and the list goes on. I bet you have your list. When the temper flares up, you have a choice. Turn it into a bad thing by losing it.

To Think About ...

If you lose it -- by stomping, cursing, accusing, wailing -- you lose a little piece of yourself. You surrender a small portion of your authority and credibility as a father. If your kids are small, they may actually be frightened by your loss of control. If your kids are older, you will be giving them permission to lose their cool when they face moments of frustration in their own lives. Plus, in the future when you tell them to "calm down" about some minor issue, they will always have this thought in the back of their heads: *Sure, old man, why don't you practice what you preach! Ouch.*

Still, your socket wrench is missing. You are frustrated. Your kids need to learn to respect other people's property. Something has to be done! Here's my suggestion: **Proceed to begin the freak-out process. But just a little.** No swearing. No throwing things. No yelling. To be clear, under these circumstances it is perfectly acceptable and even expected for you to walk (not stomp) around the house and ask in a firm, but controlled manner, 'Has anyone seen my socket wrench set?' or 'Who was using my socket wrench set?'"

For Faithful Fathers ...

The key for faithful fathers is to change our perspective on anger. Ephesians 4:26 tells us: "In your anger do not sin." The getting angry part is a given. How we handle it is the issue; we must not let anger drive us to sin. Even when we're angry, we can treat our children with respect, speak calmly to them, and correct them without demeaning them. Does our heavenly Father have reasons to be angry with us? Just as he shows us kindness, compassion, and forgiveness, we can express that to our children.

ACTION POINTS for Committed Dads

- Talk to your kids about the Golden Rule: "Treat others like you want to be treated." Ask, "How should that affect things what typically happens in our household?"
- Ask your child to help you with a simple household project or repair -- and expect it to take twice as long. Enjoy it!
- Practice accepting your child just as they are. Create an environment where he/she can discuss any issues (s)he may be facing without fear of how you'll react.
- When your kids are missing something, empathize with them and use it as a teaching moment to revisit the frustration you or their mom experience when missing something they've misplaced or are without.
- Could your anger be related to misplaced priorities? Is a socket wrench more important than your child's spirit?
- During a time when you're calm, practice a short prayer that you can repeat to yourself at times when you feel like you're about to blow a fuse: "Please help me, Lord. God, I need Your wisdom here."

My story is one of dealing with a hot temper and a lot of anger, and like many, I would justify it as my own "passionate way of expressing myself," or that it was just how I was made. How has that worked for you? In my case, one son left my home and one son was scared of me. Hmm? Zero for Two. You look up and your wife really does not respect you very much, your sons are basically afraid of you and you keep saying, "It is just the way I am." I would challenge you to take a deeper look at yourself. I always said if my family could have really told me what they felt about me and would not get rocks hurled at them from me, they would say (as they do now as we travel and teach) that they feared me and sought other ways to find peace, assurance and understanding. Not pretty. My wife always tells me that "words do break my heart and my spirit." They did and the trauma resulting from my anger had a lasting effect on my family. It has taken me years to replace the moments of anger and verbal and emotional abuse. Big regrets. What are yours? In all things,

It is like my younger son says on the introduction of our CD, "The Father's Cry":

"Old man take a look at my life - I'm a lot like you."

The quote comes from a song by Neil Young. "Old Man" is not meant as an insult; rather, it is a song of common ground. I've known this song for at least ten years now and have sung it for as many years. I am, at twenty-seven years old, the young man singing to the old. I am the son saying to the father, "I'm not so different than you, you know." "Look into my eyes, you can tell it's true." And it is true. Fathers, your children are more of you than you sometimes care to know.

Guy, Be very careful with your words and actions. There is always a "little boy or little girl" in the ones you love that gets hurt with your anger.