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What not TO DO when the kids are mad
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My teenager came home angry with a really poor report card. He's a gifted kid. He should be pulling 90s and 100s. The teachers all say he's quite brilliant in class: intelligent, participatory, and it can be challenging to keep up with him at times. How could he bring home 50s and 60s? And he was angry. He was angry with me. He was angry with his brother and sister.

How do most parents respond?

"It's your own fault. If you'd buckle down and get to work, you'd pull your marks up. Life isn't a bed of roses, you know. I didn't get where I'm going by dragging my feet. Blah. Blah. Blah."

That is the perfect response to create big problems!

Anger is not an emotion. Anger is our defense mechanism of attacking others. We only defend ourselves when we don't feel safe. The feeling is fear; the action or intent to attack is our anger.

He was angry. That means he was scared or HURT. So, he walked in angry-I understood that he was feeling really hurt because he had gotten poor marks.

Yes, it was his own fault. Yes, he could easily have changed that if he'd had only turned in his assignments. And, Yes, if I attack him at this point, respond in the same old way, I'll have continued a vicious cycle.

Instinctively, when someone is angry (attacking) we get defensive. It's automatic. They're attacking you. Defend yourself or get hurt.

So you get angry and attack back. They were already defending themselves because they had identified something to be scared of-poor marks. Then you attack them. Now they have to defend themselves from you, as well. They get angrier-you get more

defensive and angrier-they get more defensive and angrier-how far has it gone in your house?

Right from the time they're babies, we react to their anger with our own.

A baby who has colic and hasn't stopped crying for two days.

A two-year-old has a temper tantrum.

A three-year-old throws a toy.

A young child now hates a friend.

They slam the door.

They yell at their siblings.

The teenagers shout at you.

Angry because they don't want to go to soccer practice.

Hate being on that team.

Hate school.

Hate a particular teacher.

Hate a particular subject.

They storm away from the table.

Every single one of these incidents, and all others you can think of; it's because they are scared and defending themselves.

Sometimes the fear is easy identify. With my teenager, I said, "You must feel really hurt with those marks." BINGO. This macho teenager let the tears come.

A two-year-old is often frustrated because he or she can't do something. They are scared because their feelings are overwhelming. They lash out to defend themselves. Teach them to recognize their feelings. "You must feel really overwhelmed."

Sometimes, the catalyst is not so obvious. If a child is just angry, it becomes an exploration on your part to dig out the problem. It may be friends, school, a project, a coach, or even that they're being bullied.

One parent had a child who was bullied at school for three years. His behavior during that entire time was atrocious. He caused all kinds of problems at school, trying to avoid the bullies. He had seen the administration at that school do nothing about the bullying, even though it was widely known within the student body. So, he knew the teachers and principal wouldn't help him. When he finally told his parents about the bullying and they asked why he hadn't told them, "I knew you wouldn't do anything about it!"

In fact, he was moved to a different school and put in the "Behavior problem program." He was a delight to have in that program, because he didn't have to be scared of the bullies. He was calm, worked hard, and cooperated.

It took three years to figure out where his angry, defensive behavior was stemming from.

They are defensive and attacking for a reason. Ask questions. And more questions. Identify the fear, and the anger will disappear. Once they start talking, and maybe crying, don't try to 'fix' the problem for them. Just listen.

In the instant that something goes wrong, and you are tempted to jump in frustrated, it's better to use

Like best. Next time.

What I like best about you spilling your milk is you immediately cleaned it up. Next time, put your glass above your plate.

What I like best about your driving is you always shoulder check. Next time, look in the rearview mirrors as well.

What I like best about this report card is you got one. Next time higher marks would be nice.

None of us like feeling defensive. We can force them to get defensive, and create conflict by getting defensive ourselves, and attacking; or we can remain calm and help them talk through their hurt and fears.

Kids of all ages want to have loving relationships with their parents. Someone has to lead the way. It helps if the adult starts.

Calgary author Jeanette Kasper is an acclaimed professional speaker who's Canadian BEST SELLER, Anger is NOT an Emotion, is revolutionizing how we deal with others. This unique perspective on human behavior gives us an understanding of how people relate to each other that leads naturally to using the over 300 solutions Mrs. Kasper gives in her book.

As a best-selling author, international professional speaker, and syndicated columnist, Jeanette is always willing to answer your questions, give interviews, and do a training session with your company, association, or parenting group. Jeanette concentrates on helping others create harmonious relationships at work, home, and play.