

Parenting through COVID-19: Managing Conflict: How to Express Anger Constructively

How can we express our anger AND strengthen or maintain the bond with our kids? This week I would like to talk about Anger. We all feel it and it can make parenting downright awful sometimes. If we let our anger build and then blow up, look out! We can erupt all over ourselves and our loved ones. During this pandemic, our household has waves of anger or little flare ups from each of us (kids and parents included). Why? Anger is a mixture of emotions and results when our system is overwhelmed. Staying at home can cause us to miss out on so many things we enjoy and in response we grieve. Part of grieving can be feeling angry. Angry at not being able to go out, financial stress, see our friends and extended family, not go on vacation, or just plain not get time to ourselves. If we can identify when we are feeling down, sad, overwhelmed, then we can try and take extra care of ourselves. Acknowledging how we feel (Identifying our feelings out loud) can be a big help.

The parenting program Guiding Good Choices (Catalano & Hawkins, 2002), spends a lot of time talking about anger. We shouldn't feel shame or guilt when we get angry, anger is ok. What we do with our anger is what is important. Here is an acronym for helping us think through our anger responses (Hawkins, D.J. "Preparing for the Drug Free Years: A Family Workbook", 1988):

STARR-

Stop: When you start to feel anger (Signs you are angry can include your chest tightens, face flushes, hands clench, blood pressure rises, etc.)

Think: Think about what your choices are, how can you react, how do you want to response? What are the possible outcomes of becoming angry? Do we want to blurt out something hurtful or start a physical confrontation? ("Ok, my kids broke my favorite vase, take a breath- they didn't do it on purpose- I am feeling really sad- talk to them and have them help me clean it up")

Ask: What are you angry about? Is it the current situation or something else? What is the REAL issue?

Reduce: Take a time out, a deep breath, do something to calm yourself and then come back to talk about what is bothering you later (it could be a minute, 30, or more).

Reward: Reward yourself for working on your anger and showing your kids how it is done. Great job you! Do something nice for yourself, you just maintained and strengthened your relationship with your family.

Homework: Trace your hand and write down the STARR acronym on it- post it in your home and teach it to your whole family.

Anger is OK- what we do with it matters a lot.

Manistee Substance, Education, & Awareness (SEA) Coalition was started in 2016, formed as a work group of the Human Services Collaborative Body (HSCB). The SEA uses the Communities That Care framework that looks at local data to determine priorities for programs in our community. For more information you can visit www.communitiesthatcare.net. The SEA is funded with Public Act 2 (Liquor Tax Funds) through the Northern Michigan Regional Entity. Sarah Garthe is the program facilitator of the SEA and is a Certified Prevention Specialist. Anyone in the community can join the SEA Coalition, please send an email to Sarah Garthe @ sgarthe@centrawellness.org for more information.