



TRANSFORMATIONAL PARENTING

Be the change you want to see in your kids

Small Worlds Big Changes Talk

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DEALING WITH ANGER

The stage of divorce and grieving that people tend to struggle with the most is that of ANGER. If we don't know how to handle and work through our own anger, it is unlikely we'll be able to assist our kids. We need to both understand anger and find healthy forms of expression for it, so that we and our children can make it through to the other side of divorce without damaging each other or our precious relationship.

UNDERSTANDING OUR OWN ANGER SO WE CAN HELP OUR KIDS...

Most of us grew up in an era of repression. Negative feelings were to be controlled, ignored or removed. It's no wonder that we are the generation of Prozac. There is only so long that you can repress an emotion before it fights its way to the surface again. Drugs help us to repress without the fight. What they don't help us to do is to understand and process our emotions.

And if we don't know how to do that, how on earth are we going to help our angry kids? As life would have it, if you are repressing a lot of emotion, it is very likely that you will have a child who expresses it, and nowhere is this more evident than in a divorce situation.

So the first step to helping an angry child is to understand the angry adult.

Anger is a gift. It is a message from your unconscious mind that something in your life needs to be addressed.

You can group these messages into two categories:

- 1 The first is that you are expecting yourself, other people (perhaps your kids or spouse) or life itself to be one-sided. You want yourself to be always kind without being cruel. You want your kids to always be cooperative and never disobedient. You want your partner to be always attentive and never distracted.

You want life to be always supportive and never challenging. In this case your anger is there to help you to be whole – to see that everyone (including you) has all traits and that all are a necessary part of being human. Both support and challenge are necessary for you to grow and evolve. When you can allow life to have two sides, the anger dissipates.

- 2 The second message that anger may be trying to convey is that you are expecting yourself to do things that are not really important to you. Or, you are expecting other people to do things that are not really important to them (although they may be important to you!). In other words, not allowing yourself to be true to who you are or others to be true to themselves. In this case, anger is there to help you to get back on track – to walk your path, to live your purpose, to express the truth of who you are, and to allow others to do the same.



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There are a few basic steps that you can use as an adult, and that your child can use too, in order to figure out what the message is that the anger is trying to convey to you and to process it and move on:

- 1 Allow the emotion.** There is no point trying to pretend that you are not angry, to get rid of the anger or to try to calm down. This does not mean lashing out at others, but taking the time to feel your own emotion. What does it feel like? Does it feel tight or explosive? Is it an upward movement or an outward movement? Where do you feel it? In your chest? Your heart? Your head?
- 2 Find healthy forms of expression.** If you or your child feel that you cannot feel the emotion without lashing out, find a healthy way to explode. You could punch a punching bag, take a hammer to a coconut, run round the block, beat a pillow, scream at the moon. Brainstorm some ideas that would work for you. Once the excess energy is released, then return to feeling the feeling.
- 3 Ask the question: What is my anger trying to tell me?** Am I expecting myself to be one-sided? Am I expecting someone else to be one-sided? Am I expecting life to be only supportive and never challenging? Have I gone off my path? Am I not being true to myself? Am I expecting someone else to live according to my highest priorities and not their own?
- 4 Make changes.** Once you can see what your anger is trying to tell you, then make the necessary changes.
- 5 Be grateful.** Say thank you to your anger for bringing you back on track and invite it to come again and help you to live your life to your highest potential.

Anger is not something that we need to get rid of – not in ourselves or in our children. It is an essential aspect of our lives and helps us to be the best that we can be. Welcome your anger, welcome your child's anger, and as a welcomed guest it will teach you how to live your life to the max!

HOW TO EXPRESS YOUR ANGER WITHOUT DESTROYING YOUR CHILD'S SELF-WORTH...

All too often I hear parents trying to repress their anger around their kids. Now this is not only unhealthy for you (repressed emotions actually create illness within the body) but it is also not great for your kids to grow up believing that some emotions are simply not ok to have. All emotions are a part of our human journey, and as we've seen, are messages from our unconscious mind regarding things we need to pay attention to or change in our lives.

Having said that, it is also worth noting that telling your child that THEY are making YOU angry, sad, irritated (or even happy) is simply too much responsibility to place on another human being, particularly a little one!



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No one can MAKE you anything. Think about squeezing an orange. What comes out? I'm hoping that you're saying "orange juice"! Not guava juice or pear juice or cherry flavoured Coca-Cola! Why? Because you only get out what is already within. So if your kids are pushing your buttons and there's anger coming out, well then that's what is within. Take responsibility for your own emotions. Own them – they're yours.

However, this does not mean that you are not allowed to experience these emotions, and even experience them very strongly in the presence of your children. So how do we express strong negative emotions without damaging our kids and making them feel responsible for us and our emotional state? How do we teach them to take responsibility for THEIR own emotions and not blame you or their siblings or teachers or life for how it is that THEY are feeling?

It all starts with the little one-letter word "I". "I am feeling soooo angry right now", "I am feeling more and more and more irritated, so irritated that I could just scream", "I am feeling ridiculously happy, like the luckiest person in the world". As opposed to: "You are making me very angry", "You are irritating me", "You make your mom sooo happy". Can you see the difference?

And these can be said with as much emotion or volume as you feel is appropriate. You can even step it up in ways that they can relate to and that gives them some warning about where you're at... "I am about as angry as a pea right now... Now I'm as angry as a small cat... AND NOW I'M AS ANGRY AS A LARGE ELEPHANT!!!"

They will get the message. They will learn when to step away. They will learn how to experience strong emotional states themselves without lashing out at others. What they won't learn is to take responsibility for you. What they won't learn is to blame. What they won't learn is to beat themselves up for your inner state.

This builds emotional maturity, responsibility and self-confidence. All emotions are ok, but how we choose to express them is what makes the biggest difference.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR ANGER LEVELS ARE OUT OF CONTROL...

Divorce is almost on the top of the most stressful life events scale. And when our stress levels go up, so do our anger levels. In fact, stress puts our Sympathetic Nervous Systems onto overdrive, meaning that we go into a state called "Fight or Flight or Fold". In other words, when going through a divorce you are likely to react to it in one of three ways – you'll become really angry and want to fight everyone and everything; you'll want to run away and if you can't physically run from the situation you are likely to escape into alcohol, drugs, television, shopping, or whatever you use predominantly for escape purposes; or you're likely to fold – to become depressed, lethargic, panicky and unable to cope with anything.

Whichever of these options you find yourself in (and it may be a combination of all three), having some coping tools can go a long way towards helping yourself and your children to make it through the divorce intact.



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PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Have some tools to keep your stress levels down as much as possible.

- 1 Remember that stress is all about perception.** You will only feel stressed if you have perceived the event as stressful. While divorce is up there on the list, it doesn't have to be. Go now and make a list of all the benefits of the divorce for both yourself and the kids. Help your children to do this too, so that they can see that there will be a bright side and not only negative consequences to your choices. List at least 100 reasons why this divorce will be better for everyone. If there are particular aspects of the divorce that you are finding difficult (a custody battle, loss of a home, having to go out to work, etc) then find the specific benefits of these. It can help to even imagine the worst possible scenario and find the benefits of that if it were to happen (this alleviates anxiety for future events that have not yet occurred).
- 2 Breathe.** Breathing helps to bring balance, both on a physiological level and to your perceptions. In highly stressful situations when the Sympathetic Nervous System is on overdrive, you need to bring in its opposite. The Parasympathetic Nervous System (the Rest and Digest system) can be activated by using specific breathing techniques. The most important aspect of this is to double the length of your outbreath. So if you were to breathe in for the count of three, you'll breathe out to the count of six. Or breathe in for four and out for eight.
- 3 Relaxation / Meditation / Prayer.** Make time in your day for some kind of quiet introspection, whether that be a relaxation technique or a spiritual practice. An easy way to release stress is to start at your toes and work your way up your body simply tightening and holding tension in each muscle group as you breathe in and then releasing completely as you breathe out. Another quick technique to trick your body into relaxation is to expand your vision to include the periphery. When we are stressed we tend to have foveal vision (focusing intently on one spot) whereas when we are relaxed, we open up our vision to include a much wider view of life. Simply becoming aware of your peripheral vision (look ahead of you, but focus on everything you can see to the left and right as well) can trick the body into believing that it is in a relaxed state. Combined with the breathing, this is a very powerful way to relax quickly.
- 4 Support.** Studies have shown that people handle all stress better when they have a good support system. Make sure you are open to all the support that is around you – call on parents, friends, neighbours, people in your community or religious group. Find a coach, friend, therapist or organized support group. Connect, ask for help, be open to being vulnerable.
- 5 Exercise and diet.** Make sure you are supporting yourself physically to handle the extra pressure that your body will experience during this time. Some supplements that support the nervous system are Magnesium, Omega 3's, and Vitamin B. Make sure you are getting enough fruit and veg and are staying away from dietary stress like sugar, alcohol and refined products. And then exercise, exercise, exercise. Exercise is the most underutilized and most effective way of dealing with stress and depression.



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DAMAGE CONTROL

Everyone has times where they simply crack, where the wheels fall off and they fly into a rage. It's ok. You are going through a MAJOR life change and there will be times where you are pushed beyond your coping mechanisms. You are human and you're allowed to lose it. Here's what to do if you do...

- 1 Take some time out.** Step away from the situation and give yourself the opportunity to calm down, breathe, cry and let go. Take as long as you need.
- 2 Call for help.** If you're unable to calm down on your own, ask for help. You may need someone to take your kids for a few hours, or someone to listen to you offload, or someone who can give you some useful advice and nurturing.
- 3 Apologise.** Only once you have calmed down, then go and deal with the aftermath of the damage! Say sorry. Let your kids (or whoever else you lost it with) know that it is not about them, that you are doing what you can to remedy the situation, that you are sorry.
- 4 Find the good.** There are many benefits to losing your temper – both for yourself and for your kids. Remind yourself that it is better to get emotions out than to repress them, that now everyone at least knows how you feel, notice the support system that you had to draw from, see the benefits in making up with your kids. Keep in mind that children need to see adults go through ALL emotions, particularly the strong ones, and come out on the other side. This gives them a reference point in their own lives for handling the inevitable strong emotions that will come their way.

They learn that it is normal and human to feel these. They learn that they do not stick around forever. They learn that they don't need to destroy relationships – that people can resolve even very loud issues. They learn the appropriate response to shouting at someone else – to apologise. These are amazing life lessons that will help your children to navigate their way through the messy experience of life!