

"You Make Me Sick" and other things Parents Say in Anger

by: Patricia Gatto Maryann is so focused she's blind. She's slipped over the edge of responsibility and forgot the real reason she is working so hard. It's for her daughter. Being a single parent isn't easy. Between working, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and homework, there isn't much time left in the day. It's a heavy burden to be the sole supporter of a young child. But when pressures and tensions are so great that harmful words spill out like bitter pills, isn't it time to stop and take inventory? "Clean your room or I'm gonna kill you!" "If you don't do your homework right now, I'll break your neck!" "Just leave me alone, I've had a rough day." These statements came from a woman who loves her daughter and she's working hard to provide for her. If you asked Maryann, she'd say she would do anything in the world for her child. But why can't she see that respectful communication conveys love more than a new pair of shoes ever will? And why does she have to be reminded to treat her child with respect? Maryann isn't alone. Life is frustrating. We've all heard parents, married, single or otherwise, speak to their children in anger. As adults, we've all rolled our eyes at the dramatic threats, knowing full well they have no intention of being carried out. But does a child know these are simply dumb words spoken in frustration? Does a child know that the violent threats of bodily harm are hollow? Whether over the top displays of drama are blurted in anger, or merely used to snap a child to attention, the results are unhealthy and damaging. When little Billy tells a classmate he is going to kill him over a broken crayon, where do you think he learned that response from? And in today's climate, do you think anyone would consider it just an innocent statement from an innocent child? Billy would be sent to the principal's office on the spot. And if not, he would certainly be called down after the victim of his harsh words went home and told his parents and they reported it to the school. What happens when your child gets a little older and has a real problem? What if he needs to talk about drugs or alcohol? Or she has a problem in school, or a question about boys? Repeatedly belittling your child with angry words and intimidation will break down the barriers of communication long before you even reach this point. If you threaten to "kill" your child over a messy room, what would you do if she told you she was having sex? Anger has a way of creating very colorful and exaggerated statements. Parents and caregivers need to make a concerted effort to remove these damaging phrases from their vocabulary by controlling anger. Save the drama for a time when it is really needed. On occasion, shocking statements do have a place in parenting, but used on a daily basis, they will only serve to create fear or simply numb your child to your words. Search your vocabulary; are you unintentionally damaging the relationship you have with your child? Here are some steps to help you take control when you feel frustration and anger rise. Take a deep breath, not from your chest, but pulling from your diaphragm. Slowly exhale. As you do this, picture your words evaporate into the air. Lift your hand, palm out, in a stopping motion. This will indicate to your child that you need a moment and serve to remind you that you are stopping yourself from anger. Calmly tell yourself to relax as you continue to breathe deeply. Wait until you feel in control. When you speak, intentionally bring your voice down, not to a whisper, but to a soft, paced level. Then logically explain the reason for your anger to your child, voiding threats and harsh criticism. It's okay to say you are disappointed or upset about a messy room or a bad grade, but focus on the problem and offer a solution or deliver a fair ultimatum. If punishment is necessary, make it realistic. I don't know of a single parent that took away television privileges from their child for the rest of their life. Follow through on your words. If you do get angry, offer your child an apology, not an excuse. Take blame for your actions. Closely examine the situation that triggered your anger. Was it really your child? Is there an underlying factor? If so, what can you do to correct the situation or avoid it in the future? Anger is a natural emotion. It can't be completely controlled or removed from our lives, but you can change the way you handle things. In doing so, you gain an invaluable gift, a respectful relationship with your child. Healthy communication is a parent's weapon against the outside world. A child should turn to his parent in times of trouble, not run away in fear.

About the Author

Patricia Gatto and John De Angelis are the authors of MILTON'S DILEMMA, the tale of a lonely boy's magical journey to friendship and self-acceptance. As advocates for literacy and children's rights, the authors speak at schools and community events to foster awareness and provide children with a safe and healthy learning environment. For more information, please visit Joyful Productions at <http://www.joyfulproductions.com> pgatto@ptd.net

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