

Seminar Recap
Building a Healthy Family System
Managing Conflict and Anger
By Pat Nolan

What does anger look like in your home

All families deal with anger and emotion. It's common knowledge. Managing these emotions and the conflict that comes with it certainly varies from home to home. However, awareness as parents about how we and our family handle anger is so very important. Parents aren't always aware of their own anger in their homes and the impact that their emotion could be having on their family. All emotions can play on each other, and then can become a ball of emotions to deal with. Parents and kids handle emotions differently. In fact even boys and girls handle emotions differently. Birth order and personality types can also affect how anger plays out in your home. Anger can look different in different families, anything from yelling and slamming doors, to sulking and retreating. What's important to remember is that the different personalities of kids require different parenting reactions. Parents can struggle with knowing what to do in the heat of the moment, but with some fore thought and planning ahead, understanding of how emotions work and not falling into parenting pitfalls, we can all learn to manage well the conflict in their homes.

How emotions work

Emotions are just that - Emotions. Emotions are our natural feelings. Situations can bring up many different types of emotions. Dealing with death or divorce can bring up emotions like sadness, feeling abandoned, denial, and loneliness. School and social situations can raise feelings of anxiety, fear and embarrassment. And of course our homes are not immune to situations that can foster disappointment, aggravation and jealousy - just to name a few. Emotions are like plastic - they are not biodegradable. They stay around unless we do something to alleviate them. Over time unchecked emotions will build up in our "feelings pitcher" and are certain to overflow. This can look like outbursts, tantrums, tears and even silence. Parents can feel the tension building as we become quick-tempered ourselves, negative or criticize our own parenting. So it's important that we find ways to begin to empty the "feelings pitcher" before it reaches the overflow point. As emotions build we approach our anger threshold. The anger threshold is the point where rational conversation ceases and we can lose control. If you or your kids cross the anger threshold the best action is to walk away and take a time out to calm down before things that are said, threatened or promised become bigger than the problem itself.

Parenting pitfalls

We can all be taken in by difficult moments, so we must be on the lookout for these parenting pitfalls, things we tell ourselves or believe that aren't true. Don't let these parenting stumbling blocks keep you from the truths of managing the conflict.

When you walk away from your kid they have more power

You are still the one in control and you can show this by modeling effective behavior

When you walk away the conversation is over

You can bring up the conversation again when everyone is calm and more rational

Kids are being disrespectful

Don't over react to their emotions

"This is how I was raised"

You are not your parents, you don't have to act or react like them

Fight all the battles you can

Pick your battles wisely, not all battles are worth fighting

Threatening (or promising) punishment in the heat of the moment

Think through the consequences, you will then have to follow through on

Crossing the line of becoming physical with your kid

Physical contact with someone in a highly emotional state can be gas on the fire

Every moment is a teaching moment

You can become a lecturer and the conversation becomes one-sided and ineffective

Ways to handle anger in your home

Having a plan of action before the situation escalates is the best plan to have. Knowing yours and your kid's emotional triggers can help you to guide the situation before it reaches a boiling point. If you know that yours or your kid's "feeling pitcher" is getting full, find ways to release the tension. Sometimes diversions like exercise, music and journaling can help us to stay calm in the moments to come. Listen to you kids if you want them to listen to you. Hearing them out can avoid them becoming frustrated or you not having all the information. And if kids keep throwing bait to get you to engage in a heated argument, don't bite the bait - no one wants to argue with himself or herself. And don't forget to praise and reinforce the positive behavior your kids are showing.

Encounter. Formation. Expression.

One of the things we talk about at Port City Community Church is the idea of Encounter, Formation, and Expression. The basic concept is that what we encounter in life will help to form what we think and believe. What we think and believe will inevitably show up and be expressed in what we say and do. As parents, part of our job is to help our kids maneuver in a world that is ever changing and help them build a solid foundation in Christ. When it comes to managing conflict and anger in our homes, we need to be watchful of the encounters happening to you and your kids. A positive encounter can produce the expressions of respect, empathy, compassion and understanding. While a negative encounter can produce stronger feeling of anger, disrespect, dysfunction and even fear. We are all growing and learning about relationships and ourselves. Formation can happen at any time in our life. So remember you and your family are all in this together. Talking about what has happened, what feelings came to surface and how the situation was handled can go a long way to bringing about individual and family expression that everyone can be proud of.

Links to audio here