

Teens and Anger

By Suzan Myhre, M.S.S.W.

Have you ever experienced a "blow out" conversation with your teen, in which, in a matter of seconds, the tone, the pace and the intensity of the words exchanged is so heightened that it is hard to hear what is said? I believe most parents with teens have experienced the rapid mood swings and confusing moments mentioned above. Anger is a signal. It tells us, and our teens that something is wrong. Anger is one of the many emotions God has given us. As parents, we are in a position to allow God to walk with us through our angry thoughts and feelings, just as we desire to be able to walk with our teens through their angry thoughts and feelings.

Some teens will completely withdraw in their anger. It will be hidden and not discussed. This anger could be turned in on them self, or it could turn into hidden resentment. Some teens will explode with their anger. They may attack with their own hurt and angry feelings. The goal of the relationship is to understand each persons feelings. This requires that parents: 1) understand the issue and 2) understand the feelings involved with that issue.

The difficulty arises when the teen begins to yell about his or her feelings. One can actually be thankful if this happens, in that the feelings are out in the open. The thoughts come tumbling forth; they are not hidden and unable to be addressed. This openness about the anger now has a chance to be addressed.

If the parent enters the conversation with a thought or a series of thoughts such as, "she doesn't know what she's talking about" or "if he thinks he's going to get his way here, he has another thing coming" the conversation will begin and end in a power struggle. Power struggles focus on who is right and who is wrong, who will win and who will lose. Some teens have learned to communicate with their parents in this style--especially if their parents are perfectionist in their expectations.

As parents, we need to avoid fueling the power struggle by "fighting back". One way to do this is to call a time out. Give your teen and yourself some time to cool down. Then offer to discuss the problem later (in a calmer moment) and express a desire to understand what the teen has to say. This means putting on our "listening" hats. This means we are clearing our minds of our own biases, thoughts, and beliefs on the subject, and giving our teen our full attention to their thoughts and feelings. This also means we are not readying ourselves with a good "come-back" to prove how wrong they are--this is NOT listening.

Another option for handling the angry outburst is to pay attention to the content only, and ignore the strength of the anger. The goal here is to hear the concerns no matter how harsh they sound. The parent may have a better chance of discovering why the teen is angry--what 'wrongs' have been committed? If we can avoid our teens "bottling up" their anger, we have a chance to establish a sense of mutual respect in the

relationship. Feeling heard and understood in any relationship, is a key ingredient to bonding and feeling loved. God is in the details of all of our communications. Invite Him to have His way, for His ways are healing and all His paths are peace.

*Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.
P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920*

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited.