

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

Handling Anger as Parents – Part 1

This week we began our course on Handling Anger in the Family. Over the next few weeks I'll be covering the main points from the sessions. In the first 2 weeks of the course we look at how parents handle anger and in the second 2 weeks we use that learning to help our children when they get angry. Here's what we covered in week 1 ...

We began by acknowledging that anger is a normal, healthy emotion but that we can react to anger in helpful and unhelpful ways. The home environment is a good place to learn about dealing with anger healthily. One of the exercises we did was to write lists of all the things our children do that make us angry.

We had some long lists of our children doing the normal stuff that winds us up and we are being normal parents when these things make us angry. **Anger is not a bad thing, it's what we do with it that counts.**

We all have different ways of expressing anger. Some of us fly off the handle and lose our tempers. Others can suppress anger but then feel misunderstood and frustrated. Or we can use the silent treatment and make others around us feel guilty as they tiptoe around our emotions. Some of us react with a combination of these behaviours. Maybe we can stay outwardly calm for ages, but the unexpressed anger seethes under the surface until it explodes. Over time, anger expressed in these ways can damage relationships. Or it can damage us through mental illness, high blood pressure, heart conditions etc. We recognised that the first thing we need to do if we are going to change, is be more aware of where we are now, then we can move forwards and learn new and better ways of dealing with anger.



But change is hard work! We used the image of cutting a path through the jungle. Imagine a hot, steamy, thick jungle. You are cutting a path with a machete and with every vine you hack through, you get hotter and sweatier and thirstier. You might feel like giving up but if you keep going you'll end up with a brand new pathway. Now the trick is to keep walking down that new route. If you forget to use it for a couple of days, new tendrils of plants will find their way across the path and you'll have to cut them back again. In time, as you get into the habit of always using this new path, the old pathways or habits will become overgrown and the new path will become normal. Changing the way

that we manage our anger is just like this. We need to develop new pathways in our brains, rather than trotting down the same old route.

Once we have a better idea of how we express our anger and we're prepared for some hard work, we can begin to explore some strategies to help us. We used the concept of The Anger River, which is deep and fast flowing, can quickly turn to white water and then eventually wash us downstream and over the waterfall. Using this idea we looked at ways of staying out of the river in the first place, recognising when we're in it, getting out if we can and dealing with the consequences once we've gone over the edge. Anger management is complex and takes more than a weekly article to unpack. If you need help, get in touch and we can chat some more. You can email me at parenting@foundrylanepimary.co.uk

