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Anger Distracts Communication & Discipline

Sometimes our intentions get communicated poorly and children get confused. Adults need to stay calm and discipline maintained with compassion and understanding. Unfortunately, we can become frustrated, leading to the loss of compassion and anger erupting. We risk confusing children. Clear and effective discipline starts with clarity within you and your relationship experiences. Why do adults say things in anger despite knowing better?

Loud Equals Angry?

Sometimes you need to raise your voice just to be heard above the chatter. Other times, it is to emphasize a point. Or, something upsets you and you get angry. Your voice rises and changes in tone. The children hear, but everyone doesn't "hear" you the same way. Each child has learned to "hear" from different family dynamics. For each child, volume and tone can have different meanings.

- An adult authority figure communicating with intensity may mean one is in trouble. This makes it difficult to hear any loud or upset communication clearly.
- In some family, everyone just speaks loudly, without anyone being mad or in trouble. And, the discipline is fair.
- Loud voices may be about being self-righteous and aggressive to get what you can get.
- A dirty look, rolling eyes, a smirk, a sigh of disgust, or other non-verbal communication can be common messages disapproval with or without loud volume.

You raise your voice to activate the children and take care of a mess. Depending on prior experiences, not everyone is paying attention to what you're saying. Some children are not paying attention to your direction and are drawn only to your loud voice. Are you angry? Are you *dangerous*?

Anger Emerges and Anger Overwhelms!

Sometimes, what comes out of a teacher is primarily that he/she is angry. And, that the child must do something so that the teacher is no longer angry. The anger normally comes out of frustration. It may come from having held anger or having held frustration over a long period. *Anger can become counterproductive to the effectiveness of the discipline* (or can be supportive—another discussion). This is a functional rather than a moral perspective about anger. Discipline is about teaching a child the important lessons of life: what is appropriate behavior and inappropriate behavior, how to understand and interpret people, how choices affect other people and one's future, and so forth.



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While adult anger when a child has messed up may be normal, when too intense, it defeats learning—the intended acquisition of discipline. When the anger is too intense, it becomes terrifying to a child. It is important to accept and understand one's own process of anger. Only then, can one model it in an appropriate manner, without going into a rage. If nothing else, when the anger is too intense, it draws virtually the entire attention of the child to the anger—and away from the lessons that are supposed to be learned.

Whatever the lessons that were intended to be taught... whatever you want the child to learn... are lost as the child focuses on anger and avoiding anger. Expressing anger is appropriate, if you are aware, sensitive and responsive to how it is affecting others. Being angry is human... as if anyone can actually not experience anger when angry! Unfettered anger however risks, instead of learning good discipline, the child learns to never get or allow his/her teacher or parent to get mad. Or, the child learns that it is his/her fault that the adult is angry. Or, that the child must subjugate his/her own needs to keep the adult happy or pleased, or risk the rage of his/her adult. Or, that the child learns that he/she is helpless in his/her terror facing the rage of the adult authority figure. Or, the child learns that his/her adult hates him/her. Expressing one's needs would be experienced as being defiant and a very dangerous provocation of the adult.

A child cannot learn to own and modulate his or her anger if adults do not model appropriate anger among other emotions. Can you... do you do this? Discipline with children inevitably starts with adult self-discipline developed through self-awareness of emotional and behavioral habits, patterns, and learning. Can you... do you do this?

Biography

Ronald Mah, therapist and educator, combines concepts, principles, and philosophy with practical techniques and guidelines for effective and productive results. He uses humor and stories from his many experiences to illustrate important points in a stimulating and highly motivating and engaging style.

A Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, his experiences include: Asian-American community mental health, Severely Emotionally Disturbed mental health & school partnership programs, vocational programs for at risk youth, welfare to work programs, clinical consulting & cross and multi-cultural training for Head Start, other early childhood education programs, social services organizations, & mental health agencies, supervising a high school mental health clinic, training and supervising therapists, private practice in Castro Valley, author of the Asian Pacific Islander Parent Education Support curriculum.

Professional Education experiences include: 16 years in ECE, including owning and running a child development center for 11 years, Kindergarten, elementary, & secondary teaching credentials and experience, ethnic studies curriculum writer, community college instructor, Masters of Psychology instructor, and former member Board of Directors of the California Kindergarten Association and of the California Association of Marriage & Family Therapists.