

Are You Rearing an Angry Child?

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Who of us has not looked at a child of ours and said, “Unless the Lord does something with that temper, this kid is headed for the penitentiary?”

But God *has* done something. He has given your child parents. And we are to act biblically for his or her good.



Apparently, in some cases, *you* can be the source of your child’s anger, for the apostle Paul said: Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

The word, “provoke,” means “irritate” or “exasperate.”

The verse speaks of discipline and instruction. It can be done in the wrong way, even by caring parents, creating pernicious anger problems in the child. I don’t want to imply that this is the only source of anger in children. Not by any means. But God included these words in the Bible for a reason.

How can you provoke your children to anger?

Hypocrisy

If you discipline or instruct your child with hypocrisy, you may be creating problems in your child. “Hypocrisy” is a drama term having to do with putting on a mask. But your child can see behind the mask.

You tell your child to obey authority, but you speed and joke about it. You tell them not to lie, but ask your kids to deceive people into thinking you are not home when there are incoming calls. You tell them to be pure, but have wandering eyes yourself. Remember what Paul said:

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. (Romans 2:1-2)

Pride

You may also provoke your child to anger when you discipline out of wounded pride. Your child can see when you are more concerned about your image than his or her obedience. “You embarrassed me this evening!” you say. Though this may be so, it is not the best rationale for discipline. Look rather to the child’s disobedience as the ground of your correction.

Unrealistic Expectations

And what about unrealistic expectations? Do you create an atmosphere at home that is based on performance rather than unconditional love? A child should not be punished for not being smart enough, fast enough, strong enough, or organized enough, if he is not rebellious in his heart. One young man I knew almost had a breakdown due to his father’s expectations. We should have reasonable expectations, of course, but should communicate acceptance even if a child is not #1 in everything.

Disrespect

I know that it often works the other way, that is, the child shows no respect for the parents. But many contribute to their child’s anger and disrespect by disciplining or instructing with their own disrespect for the child. I heard one insecure father call his child “stupid” when he missed a fly ball during a baseball game. Worse than that, it was common for him to use such speech toward his child. What does that do for the heart of a child? Perhaps you were the recipient of words like this in your childhood. Will you break the pattern of such foolish words?

Harshness

The Bible is clear about the need for physical punishment (with love). To neglect the rod is to spoil the child. Yet some parents discipline with harshness. Usually the parent has lost control emotionally when this happens. Your discipline is to be done in love. Your correction should be firm, but do not lose your composure by raging out of control over a child’s actions. Paul said the leaders of a church are to be an example in discipline by “keep[ing] his children under control *with all dignity*.” Love and self-control guide the rod.

If you have been provoking your child to anger, what should you do? Start with humbly asking your child’s forgiveness for your failure to guide him in the biblical way. Be specific about your failure. Think through how to have better discipline and instruction for your child. It is wise to ask for the help of trusted Christian friends, but chose the ones who have had success in rearing children. Talk it out until you have a plan of action that is respectful and loving, even if strong. And then, remain consistent.

You may be surprised to find that your child may yet gain respect for you. He or she can emerge out of the anger that is so much of the problem in the home. With Christ, nothing is impossible—peace can be restored. But expect that the change in your child will require just as much change in you.