

FLYING OFF THE HANDLE

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We have talked before about toddler and teen tantrums and today I would like to share some thoughts about adult tantrums. You might ask, “What do you mean when you say adults throw tantrums?” They certainly do! Here are some examples. When you are so frustrated that you throw something, it could well be a tantrum. When you make inappropriate signals or sound your horn at some slowpoke driver ahead of you on the freeway, then that could be a tantrum. When the mower won’t start and you kick it savagely, that is certainly a tantrum. Whenever you let your anger boil over into irrational, inappropriate or aggressive talk, shouting or other behaviors – you are throwing a tantrum.

When I was a child, I thought that when parents got really angry it was always legitimate and often related to something we kids had done to make them mad. After all - only kids throw tantrums, right? NOT!

Anger in itself is a healthy emotion. If anger galvanizes us into standing against injustice, or it helps save a life then it is being used constructively. However, uncontrolled anger or rage is always destructive. It doesn’t matter whether the person is acting out towards someone else, or whether they are alone. Uncontrolled anger always hurts somebody or something. “Really,” you might ask. “Even if you are alone?” Sure! You’ve heard about people throwing their fist through a wall? Now that’s got to hurt and the wall also suffers! My husband, Brian, visited a home once where the father had thrown a sewing machine right through the kitchen wall. That was one might big hole!

It goes without saying that uncontrolled anger towards another person is often physically dangerous. Our jails are full of people with anger management issues that have taken out their vengeance on someone else. Unrestrained words can never be taken back. The person these cruel words are aimed at never forgets them either. Statements such as ‘I wish you had never been born’ can mentally cripple a person’s emotional growth.

Why do adult tantrums exist? Mainly because the tantrum behavior had never been dealt with adequately when the person was a toddler and/or a teen. Adults are role models, positively or negatively. When a parent flies off the handle the child thinks that this is normal and adopts the same response unless taught otherwise.

Is it too late to change the way we deal with our anger? No, it is never too late but, once a behavior is learned, it is more difficult to change. The first thing is to realize that there is a problem. The next is to immediately get professional help to be able to channel the anger emotion into an *appropriate* response.

Ultimately, we need to recognize where our 'red buttons' are or what sets us off. When we deal with the underlying issues it is much easier to manage our emotions and reprogram our responses. Sometimes, when we feel anger brewing, we need to simply remove ourselves from the situation to allow our fury to abate. Counting to 20 slowly is not a silly idea. What we say or do after counting will be far different than if we just automatically react to the situation.

We also need to repair damage to people by asking forgiveness for our hurtful actions and words. Kids need to hear that we are sorry just as much as we would expect our children to say it to their sibling or to us. The healing process requires it. While people never forget the words that have been spoken against them, they will remember the affirmation and love offered by a remorseful parent and respect will return as the adult/parent demonstrates a positive change in the management of their anger.

If you have any comments or suggestions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us by email at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. Also, check our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org or our blogsite at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com