

helping kids with ANGER

THOUGHTFUL INSIGHTS & CREATIVE IDEAS TO REALLY HELP YOUR CHILD!



helping kids with ANGER: TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Let Insights Guide Your Strategies..... 1

GUIDING INSIGHTS:5

- ◇ Judgments Keep Us Stuck.....6
- ◇ Sensory Overload Feeds Anger.....8
- ◇ Four Payoffs Make Anger Powerfully *Addictive!*..... 10
- ◇ Kids Need Skills to Manage Their Anger.....11

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES:.....14

Build “Addiction-Busting” Skills.....14

- ◇ Share the Real Feelings Beneath the Anger.....15
- ◇ Respond Wisely When People Say Hurtful Things.....18
- ◇ Be Flexible and Solve Problems22
- ◇ Seek Affection Instead of Negative Attention.....28

Soothe Outbursts.....30

- ◇ Offer Calming Choices Quickly.....31
- ◇ Express Empathy Effectively.....32

Heal Shame with Grace.....35

FINAL THOUGHTS.....37



By Jim and Lynne Jackson

introduction

LET INSIGHTS DRIVE YOUR STRATEGIES

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. [Ephesians 4:26, 27 ESV](#)

Anger is a mover of mountains and a destroyer of families. It can empower and protect, or it can wound and destroy. Many of the parents I meet tell me their kids' anger is out of control, and they don't know how to make it stop. They fear what the anger will look like as their kids grow into teens and young adults.

Unfortunately, the parents' fear often drives their responses, producing even more anger in the child. In this system, it becomes natural for parents to get angry in their honest efforts to just "make it stop!"

As a parent, I can relate. "You can't talk to me that way!" was a common reaction to my kids' angry outbursts - especially with my first-born, Daniel. I've learned a lot over the years about dealing with my *own* anger, as well as that of my three kids. Additionally, I bring over two decades of experience mentoring parents, both as an Occupational Therapist working with children with sensory and behavior challenges, and as a Certified Life Coach providing in-depth parent coaching.



introduction: LET INSIGHTS GUIDE YOUR STRATEGIES

The bottom line of what I've learned about anger is, **"Quick fix" efforts to make anger stop almost always make things worse, not better** because:

- Kids feel invalidated and controlled, which increases their anger. In their hurt, they hurt back.
- Kids build identity around anger.
- Kids miss out on learning the skills they need to deal with anger in healthy, productive ways.

When a child's anger seems outrageous, it's tempting to try to shut it down as quickly as possible because **parents are often blamed for their child's difficult behaviors. A focus on getting rid of the anger, however, takes the focus off of understanding it, and understanding the anger is what holds potential for lasting change.**

This is why I invite you on a *journey* of parenting change. Instead of deeming your child's anger as something to "make stop", you can understand anger for what it often is: a complex reaction that implores you to look below the surface, and a valuable gift that helps you discover the values, needs, and feelings of your child. You can then help your kids learn to, "Be angry, and sin not," ([Ephesians 4:26a](#)) and gradually learn graceful, resilient responses to life's frustrations.

Along my own continuing journey, I have discovered four guiding insights that give perspective and three main strategies to equip parents for the anger challenge. In this eBook, Jim and I share these, hoping and praying that as you face unique anger challenges in your home, you will invite God's grace and truth into the middle it. Then anger can be transformed into something respectful and constructive, so that you "give no opportunity to the devil."

At Connected Families, we always start by stepping back to look at bigger picture perspective to guide any action we take. We consider what's going on not just with our kids, but with us. We consider what opportunity is before us to teach and train our kids. We will equip you with lots of creative ideas, but first we'll look at these four important insights to guide those ideas with wise perspective:

- [Judgments Keep Us Stuck.](#)
- [Sensory Overload Feeds Anger.](#)
- [Four Payoffs Make Anger Powerfully Addictive!](#)
- [Kids Need Skills to Manage Their Anger.](#)

guiding insights

⇒ JUDGMENTS KEEP US STUCK

⇒ SENSORY OVERLOAD FEEDS ANGER

⇒ FOUR PAYOFFS MAKE ANGER
POWERFULLY ADDICTIVE!

⇒ KIDS NEED SKILLS TO
MANAGE THEIR ANGER



insight 1: JUDGMENTS KEEP US STUCK

Most kids who struggle with anger do not like feeling angry and out of control and would *prefer* parents' positive attention over the negative attention they get when they are angry, but they don't have the skills to behave otherwise. They often feel stressed, discouraged, anxious, disconnected from parents' love, and may even feel like the troublemaker or "problem child" in the family. **Parents often don't even realize their below-the-surface judgments feed this disconnection.**

Rich and Paige (names changed for confidentiality) came for [coaching](#) because they were very concerned and frustrated by their intense, negative child. In their first coaching session, parents often want to immediately brainstorm ways to stop misbehavior. However, in the coaching process we usually start by stepping back to **take a look at what's going on with the parents before considering what's going on in the child.**

As I (Lynne) invited Rich and Paige to take this step back, they discovered that when their son Leo had one of his meltdowns, or expressed big dramatic emotions, their high anxiety and frustration fueled their responses to him. I asked them, "What's it like to be Leo when you're feeling that way, and acting the way you act to deal with him?"

The question prompted both sadness and insight. Together they agreed that Leo was receiving the message, "You are a problem." I empathetically shared my own struggle as a young mom with similar judgments about my child.

I explained that I experienced "loop tapes", recurring negative thoughts, that fueled my heavy feelings. I asked Rich and Paige if they were aware of their own "loop tapes." Immediately, they identified the following:

- Seriously, where does this come from?
- He's just being ridiculous.
- He's so different than I am. I don't relate to this kind of behavior at all.
- I just don't feel close to this kid.
- I shouldn't have to deal with this.
- He's just trying to get our attention.

**Look at what's going on
in the parents before considering
what's going on in the child.**

insight 1: JUDGMENTS KEEP US STUCK

We talked briefly about each of these thoughts, and both parents agreed they were not helpful. I assigned them to spend some time between sessions considering what new positive and constructive loop tapes they might want to play.

Rich and Paige arrived for session two more peacefully. They talked about their growing compassion for their son, their increased joy and connection with him, and how much better he was doing. The thoughts they “played” were now far more constructive:

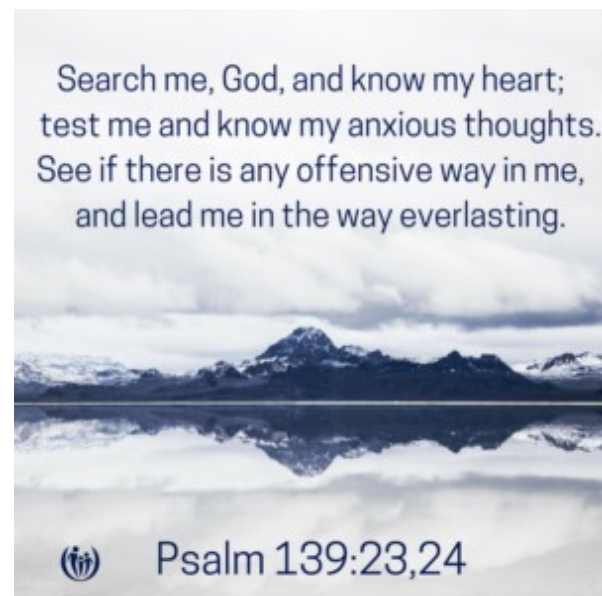
- My son is sensitive and very intense.
- He needs my help in handling his big emotions.
- I want to help heal this “troublemaker or problem child of the family” identity.
- More connection and joy in our relationship is essential.
- It’s wonderful to see him more encouraged about himself.

We share this story as an encouragement to take a step back and look inward at your responses and judgments related to your child’s anger.

MY RESPONSE:

- What do I feel when my child gets angry?
- What recurring thoughts do I have?
- What’s it like to be my child on the receiving end of those feelings and thoughts?
- What would be some grace-filled “loop tapes” I would like to hold on to when my child struggles with anger?

The next time your intense child expresses big emotions, ask the Holy Spirit for insight into *your* own thoughts, beliefs, and possible judgments. As you do, you’ll be more gracefully prepared to consider another perspective: What’s going on inside my child?



insight 2: **SENSORY OVERLOAD FEEDS ANGER**

Kids have tantrums for any variety of reasons. Conventional teaching might suggest ignoring, walking away, or removing privileges later because of the current outburst. To implement these methods with little or no understanding about why a child is tantruming misses a great opportunity.

Instead, we can help our child grow in the wisdom and the skills needed to be self-aware, and to self-regulate when she feels like exploding.

Sometimes kids are tired, or their blood-sugar levels are off, or they're mad about something else on their minds, or they have intensely wired nervous systems. Based on my experience coaching hundreds of parents, many children with intense anger issues also have sensitive nervous systems that are easily irritated by noises or bodily sensations. These kids are simply overwhelmed and frustrated with how they experience life, which sends them into a fight or flight response much more easily than kids without sensitivities. Conventional parenting approaches are often counterproductive because challenging behavior is often less about misbehavior, and more about needing to learn coping skills to deal with their emotional and sensory stress.

This issue hits close to home for us because two of our children had meltdowns at the sensation of changing their

clothes, brushing their teeth, or even sitting on a cold toilet seat. Some aversive noises led to intense reactions, too. We learned that disciplining their reactions was like punishing them for getting a cold.

One mom in coaching had an “aha!” moment as she began to understand her daughter’s nervous system and her constant state of “fight or flight”. “Could it be my daughter’s constipation and quick temper are aggravated by her sensory challenges?” After I explained that stress can often throw off digestive function, which causes discomfort and more stress, she continued, “And the way we’ve been handling it has only added to her stress!” This understanding brought subtle but powerful changes that dramatically improved her daughter’s condition.

We can help our child grow in the wisdom and the skills needed to be self-aware, and to self-regulate when she feels like exploding.

insight 2: SENSORY OVERLOAD FEEDS ANGER

A primary benefit of understanding a child's sensory challenges is that it increases a parent's empathy to know how stressed a child is by the experience of daily life in his/her body. **Understanding increases empathy, and when we empathize, we are calmer, our child is calmer, and we can more creatively develop healthy, effective solutions.**

If you suspect your child may have a particularly sensitive nervous system, to understand this better you can start with our blog post: [Helping Your Highly Sensitive Child](#), or you can simply search "sensory" on our website, connectedfamilies.org. In the section on soothing outbursts, we will include some simple sensory ideas, but in-depth sensory self-regulation strategies are beyond the scope of this ebook. We address it in more depth in our [Challenging Children DVD](#), and in the Tantrums/Meltdowns section of our book, [Discipline that Connects with Your Child's Heart](#). We also offer individual [parent coaching](#) which includes a five part sensory video series. You may also want to ask your pediatrician about a referral to a pediatric occupational therapist for a sensory processing evaluation.



*Understanding increases empathy,
and when we empathize, we are calmer,
our child is calmer, and we can more creatively
develop healthy, effective solutions.*

insight 3: FOUR PAYOFFS MAKE ANGER POWERFULLY ADDICTIVE!

How can anger be addictive when everyone feels so awful afterward? There's nothing enjoyable about it! The answer lies in how it *protects* us from discomfort in a variety of ways. [Research shows](#) that people place a higher value on *avoiding* fear, sadness, and embarrassment, than they do on obtaining peace and happiness, so even if anger is unpleasant, if it makes us feel safer and more in control, it's worth it.

**"If anger helps you feel in control,
no wonder you can't control your anger!"**

Leon F. Seltzer Ph.D.

Anger researcher Leon F. Seltzer Ph.D. identifies four addictive "payoffs," (benefits), that build habitual, angry reactions ([Psychology Today article](#)).

1. Anger **protects us** from disclosing vulnerable emotions.
2. Anger **soothes us** by numbing pain.
3. Anger **empowers us** with a sense of control.
4. Anger **regulates intimacy**. (Anger can be used by a child to push parents away emotionally, while getting their undivided attention.)

These payoffs will be explained in the following strategy section to clarify how each payoff relates to the corresponding practical ideas to help.

Seltzer also observes, "**With very few exceptions, the angry people I've worked with have suffered from significant self-image deficits** ([Psychology Today article](#))."
Low self esteem gives rise to emotional pain, anxiety, shame, lack of confidence, easily hurt feelings, etc. that make people susceptible to anger's addictive power. This insight absolutely corresponds to what we have observed in families, and it is the reason we focus on encouragement and healthy empowerment for both parents and kids.

insight 4: KIDS NEED SKILLS TO MANAGE THEIR ANGER

At face value, anger is what we feel when something important to us is threatened or challenged. Anger in this form is neither good nor bad. It is simply an indicator of what matters most to me. However, **parents can give kids the impression that anger is always bad, and kids are bad when they are angry.**

Even though kids may be expressing themselves the best they know how, their early expressions of anger will be immature and even ugly like some form of fighting or tantrum - and it almost always gets them in trouble: "Stop that! That is not OK! You may NOT talk to me that way! Go to your room until you can settle down! If you talk to me that way again you'll (choose one...) be spanked, get a timeout, or lose a privilege!"

Responses like the above are understandable because a child's anger can be hurtful, or even dangerous to others, and exhausting and discouraging for parents. But if our primary strategy is to punish in an effort to make it stop, we exasperate our kids, pouring gas on the fire of their anger, or feeding a slow burn. **Punishment does not help kids learn a better way to express anger.** Instead, it teaches kids to choose fight or flight to defend themselves from our response.

Fight:

Kids often react quickly and unreasonably to something that angers them. If they regularly get sternly confronted or



angrily punished for these expressions, they learn from their parents' example that anger is a weapon, and the fighting dynamic grows as kids seek more power in their anger.

Flight:

Kids flee either literally or figuratively. They might physically run away, but more likely they'll withdraw and feel sad without saying anything, and may not even appear angry.

insight 4: KIDS NEED SKILLS TO MANAGE THEIR ANGER

Out of fear they give in, suppress their anger and coast along. But there is a limit to how much anger they can internalize. At some point it will come out, usually in a mess of confused emotions and behaviors.

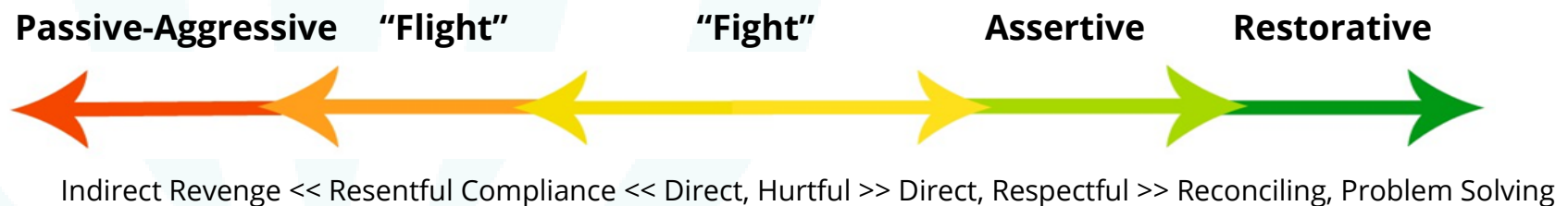
Kids often learn to combine the fight and flight responses by doing both *at the same time*. It's what psychologists call passive-aggressive.

When bottled up emotions build up, kids might not express anger directly, but instead begin to “fight” indirectly. When this happens, it can be hard to know the reason for the anger. Kids may express their anger at situations or people by breaking something (because objects don't fight back). They may show their anger about one person (or group) by being hurtful to another. They may be sullen, stubborn, avoid requested tasks ([Psychology Today article](#)), or even do

things to embarrass Mom or Dad. Jim once worked with a teen girl who said that she started having reckless sex just to show her parents they couldn't control her - a classic example of passive-aggressive behavior.

If you put all these anger behaviors on a spectrum, it looks like the diagram at the bottom of this page.

Kids' anger doesn't *start* with passive-aggressive behavior. As mentioned, their first expressions of anger are almost always aggressive, somewhere on the middle of the spectrum, but well-intentioned parents often send messages that anger is not OK and punish it. Whether kids respond by exploding more, or by bottling up angry feelings as they move toward the left of the spectrum, they're *not learning new skills* for expressing anger respectfully. Ross Greene, internationally known author and researcher



insight 4: KIDS NEED SKILLS TO MANAGE THEIR ANGER

regarding explosive children, cites “lagging skills and unsolved problems” as the primary causes of kids’ angry outbursts ([Lives in the Balance article](#)).

However a child’s anger manifests, wise parenting helps kids make progress toward the *right* side of the spectrum, learning first to be **assertive** and then gradually to be **restorative**.

[Ephesians 6:4](#) says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” This implies that our primary effort should go into proactive teaching and training, not stopping misbehavior.

As parents use these tools for kids with anger issues, many of the ideas can help other kids in the family who respond to hurt or frustration with withdrawal, passivity, anxiety or tears instead of anger. Encouragement and empowerment is good for all sorts of challenges with all kinds of kids! Learning together is more fun and avoids any “fixing the troublemaker or problem child” message.

This is a long, *messy* process, with lots of steps backwards between the forward progress. Under stress the brain

accesses its most dependable, self-protective behaviors. Be patient with yourself and your child! We’ve seen repeatedly that when parents take a compassionate, skill-building approach, significant change happens over time. Just like learning a sport, kids need to learn and practice skills outside of “game time” in order to access those skills when the pressure is on.

Based on all of these insights so far, you’ll be equipped in the rest of this ebook with an effective, three part strategy: **build skills** to decrease kids’ addiction to anger, **soothe outbursts** when they do happen, and **heal shame** when they are over.

MY RESPONSE:

- Of the five ways of expressing anger (on the anger continuum), which is most typical for my child?
- When was a time my child demonstrated anger in a healthier way (more to the right side)?
- What did I do that possibly helped her be more respectful/productive in her anger?
- How might I do this more often?

practical strategies

⇒ BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS!

In this section, we'll help you empower kids to take charge of their anger with four essential skills that protect against the addictive nature of anger:

- Share the real feelings beneath the anger.
- Respond wisely when people say hurtful things.
- Be flexible and solve problems.
- Seek affection instead of negative attention.

Kids also need *confidence* in their ability to use these skills, so we'll help you understand the corresponding beliefs that support the use of the great skills you're teaching.



practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

EQUIP KIDS TO:

Share the Real Feelings Beneath the Anger

Addictive Payoff #1: Anger protects us from disclosing vulnerable emotions.

Addiction-Busting Belief: I can safely express the sensitive feelings my anger is protecting.

Most of us can relate to the experience of lashing out in anger instead of calmly identifying and discussing more vulnerable emotions that might be right under the surface. (For example, “You are so rude!! What kind of person would joke about another person's weight at a party?” hides embarrassment and shame.)

Leon Seltzer states, “...**anger is almost never a primary emotion** . . . even when [it] seems like an instantaneous, knee-jerk reaction . . . there's always some other feeling that gave rise to it. And this particular feeling is precisely what the anger has contrived to camouflage or control ([Psychology Today article](#))”.

When kids (and adults) experience tangled and confusing emotions that are difficult to express, what often comes out is anger because it feels *vulnerable*, even unsafe, to be

anxious, ashamed, sad, embarrassed, disappointed, hurt or rejected. A typical response is to self-protect by avoiding or hiding those emotions under a layer of anger. We may not even be *aware* of those difficult emotions. Unfortunately, when what we express is anger, we usually get the same back from others, escalating the conflict instead of solving it.

We've designed a fun activity to help kids understand this emotional dynamic. It's adaptable for different ages or learning styles to equip your kids with the insight they'll need for less meltdowns now, and healthy relationships in the future.

Uncovering Emotions Activity (for visual or concrete learners)

1. Name a few common unhappy or heavy emotions your child might experience (from our simple list above: anxious, ashamed, sad, embarrassed, disappointed, hurt or rejected, or [google search](#)).
2. Draw a face on the rounded back of a paper plate to represent each emotion, and talk about them until you sense your child understands.
3. Draw an angry face on a paper plate. You can say: *“Sometimes when we are angry, that anger makes us feel more powerful, but it covers up the real emotions we are feeling.”* (Set the angry plate on top of one of the other plates.) *“But the anger doesn't actually make us more*

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

powerful. It often causes more problems when people get angry back at us. Covering up with anger keeps us from solving the real problems underneath.”

4. Share with your kids a time when you covered up an unhappy emotion with anger and what happened as a result. Demonstrate with the plates and talk about what you wish you had done in your situation. For example, if you had understood how you really felt, how might you have solved the problem or calmed down more easily?
5. Ask your child about a time when he might have covered up an emotion with anger. You can recount an example if they can't remember, and ask them about it. Help your child figure out what was underneath the anger and how they might solve the problem, or feel better about that kind of situation. For example, “When I'm worried and lonely, I can remember that Mommy is coming back after snack time.”

Set an example

Once your kids understand the idea, keep modeling; refer back to this activity when you are having a hard time or feeling angry, and even let your kids help you figure out your emotions hiding under your anger. For example, “I had my angry face on just now, but I realized that underneath...

- I'm worried we will be late for your appointment.”

- I'm *sad* you've hurt each other's feelings.”
- I'm *overwhelmed* that the house is such a mess.”



Casual Conversation

If parents work this process into everyday, casual conversation, kids will understand that this activity helps *everyone* learn and grow, and is not a parental plot to “fix my bad behavior.”

Over time, if you continue to model this, your kids will probably spontaneously identify their underlying emotions,

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

or be open to your gentle prompting, “You seem really angry! I feel that way sometimes. Do you think there is another emotion (or “emotion plate”) under your anger? Figuring that out could help us make things better.”

Key points for success

- Affirm any attempt your child makes to identify or be honest about underlying feelings.
- Poke a little fun at yourself and keep it light-hearted.
- Lead the way with your authenticity and vulnerability.
- Keep it short; “leave ‘em wanting more.” Start with a few basic emotions.
- Be sure to *model* this activity several times before using it with an upset child!
- Don’t give up. Many parents we’ve [coached](#) had good results later, even if their kids were resistant, silly or distracted at first.

For older kids

- Ditch the plates and talk about the principle in general terms.
- Do lots of modeling! They may spontaneously follow your example if they don’t feel manipulated or judged.
- If you want to help them apply it, start with their less volatile anger situations and gently take your best

guess at what might be under the surface of their anger. “Wow, I can see why you’re angry. I might also feel _____ if I were you.”

Keep at it

Progress is sometimes two steps forward, one step back. But when you persevere, your kids will learn to thoughtfully understand what is going on inside of them, so they can work toward a solution. Picture your child as an *adult* working through a conflict in an important relationship. Certainly your hope is not for a raging argument, but rather a restorative conversation revealing real feelings and desires. This will come as your child embraces the belief - “I can safely express the sensitive feelings my anger is protecting.”

MY RESPONSE:

- What vulnerable emotions might I be hiding under my own anger?
- How could I share what I’m learning with my kids?
- Based on their age and interests, how might my child best learn these concepts?
- What can I do to create a general atmosphere of safety in our home regarding vulnerable emotions?

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

EQUIP KIDS TO: Respond Wisely When People Say Hurtful Things

Addictive Payoff #2: Anger soothes us by numbing pain.

Addiction-Busting Belief: When people say hurtful things, I can figure out what’s really true and what to do.

One of the brain chemicals secreted during anger (norepinephrine) functions as an analgesic to block pain.¹ This makes sense because it’s essential to disregard pain if I am threatened and need to slug, kick or run for my life! This brain chemical is at work even when the threat is psychological or emotional instead of physical.

Hurt feelings are actually perceived as physical discomfort ([Harvard Business Review article](#)), and anger steps in to help numb the pain of those hurt feelings.

When kids get angry at what others say, it’s often because there’s hurt underneath the anger from giving power to someone else’s unkind, potentially untrue words.

Unhealthy people self-protect by invalidating others when they are criticized and feel attacked, essentially communicating some variation of, “You idiot! What do you know?”

Kids (and parents) can learn to evaluate the truthfulness and helpfulness of what others say to them by “[speaking the truth in love](#)” to *themselves*. The skills of identifying what’s really true about me and being solid in my own value as a person build the resilience kids need to face the challenges of sibling conflict, as well as peer pressure and social media without angry retaliation.

You can help your children learn to place the things others say to them in one of three categories: Trash, Truth and Treasure.

Hurtful **Trash** - These are the unkind, untrue, hurtful things that others say to us, usually out of their own frustration or discouragement. You can help your kids understand this concept:

“If you believe ‘trash’ that someone says is truth, this can give it power over your emotions, *and* it takes someone else’s hurt into your own heart. You might even pass that trash on to others as hurtful words of your own. Instead, you can imagine yourself tossing the words in the trash, and never thinking about them again. That will help you feel better and not pass on the hurt.”

¹ Stosny, Steven; [Treating Attachment Abuse](#) (1995)

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

9-year-old Blake often came home from school in a fit of anger at anyone in his path, usually because of interactions with his critical, shaming teacher. His mom was helping him and his 6-year-old brother learn to separate others' words into categories of trash, truth and treasure. One day Blake came home particularly upset, and spewed angry hurtful words at his mom. His little brother compassionately responded, “Mommy, you just throw those words right in the trash!” With time, Blake did learn to talk about and understand his hurt, and give less power to the words of his teacher.

[Proverbs 26:2](#) is a great verse to strengthen the confidence of any child upset by the harsh words of others. One mom shared the following verse with her daughter: **“Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest.”** The daughter was so encouraged by it she memorized it. It empowered her to not fight back or break down in tears at her brothers' taunts.

Helpful **Truth** - Sometimes other people's words are *true*, even though we don't like to hear them. [Proverbs 27:6a](#) tells us, **“Faithful are the wounds of a friend...”** Think of a time when you learned and grew from someone's criticism that

was accurate, even though it hurt. Our kids will miss important growth opportunities if they automatically lash back or blow it off when criticized.



Sometimes trash and truth are mixed together. Helpful truth may be present in something that was overstated or said harshly. Consider if someone says this to your child: “You're such a baby, you always have a fit when you lose,” and he fires back with something like, “I am NOT. *You're* a baby!”

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

Here’s how you can help your child separate out the trash through thoughtful questions that build confidence and wisdom:

“Hmm. Those were some strong words. Let’s think about this. Are you a baby?”

“No! I’m five!”

“That’s right. And is Ian a baby?”

“No...He’s seven.”

“You know the truth! And do you always have a fit when you lose?”

“No, not always.”

After you help your child toss away the “trash,” you can help them discover the “truth” of what was said.

“So you can put most of those words in the trash, right? But is it true that you do sometimes get really upset and yell when you lose?”

“Yeah, I guess so...”

“That was really honest! If you want I can help you learn to be more peaceful when you lose a game so you’ll have more fun when you play.”

Heart-strengthening **Treasure** - These are the words of encouragement that give us confidence in who God created us to be, like when someone notices your hard work, or a

kindness, or simply reminds you of how loved and valuable you are. The Bible is full of wonderful treasures of God’s love and value for us. [Zephaniah 3:17](#) says, **“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”** This love towards us doesn’t change when we make mistakes, or when others treat us unkindly.

Following is an example shared by a mom who helps her 8-year-old daughter hang on to truthful treasure when she is hurt by taunts from her siblings.

“Desiree, what is true? [Let's think upon these things.](#)”

And then, “What does God say about you?”

Sometimes if my daughter gets stuck, I help her with some phrases she can repeat: “I am beautiful, I am one of a kind, and God adores me!” I always ask her if she believes these words and, sometimes through tears, she will nod her head yes.

After you help your child toss away the “trash,” you can help them discover the “truth” of what was said.

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

For visual learners or action-oriented kids, you can write down the statements said by others:

- Hurtful **Trash**: wad up the paper and throw in a wastebasket
- Helpful **Truth**: write a plan to work on the growth area
- Heart-strengthening **Treasure**: write it in a journal or treasure box or scrapbook

Lydia, a coaching client, used three-dimensional objects in their home to explain Trash, Truth and Treasure.

I talked with my girls about where we put things depending on what they are:

- a trash can (worthless things)
- compost (a source of growth)
- recycling (something valuable to be saved and used)

We looked at the containers for all three and talked about how words can fit into these categories. They really liked this object lesson and talked about what words would fit into which place. It was really good for my daughter who struggles with her sister’s harsh words that have had power over her!

Kids can learn to separate trash from truth. Instead of reacting in anger, they can discard trash, grow in response to the truth about them, and receive and value “treasure words.”

Share with your kids your journey in this area, and celebrate even small steps of growth for either of you. When kids learn this lesson, they grab onto truth that most adults continue to struggle with. Remember to reinforce their confidence: “When people say hurtful things, you can figure out what’s really true and what to do! Then you can learn from it instead of get mad about it.”

MY RESPONSE:

- When someone spoke unkind, untrue words to me, when did I:
 - a) give those words power in my life, OR
 - b) stay focused on what was true about me?
- Either way, what did I learn that I could share with my kids?
- How might I adapt the truth-trash-treasure activity to my kids’ ages and interests?
- What important scriptural truths do I want to help my kids treasure?

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

EQUIP KIDS TO: Be Flexible and Solve Problems

Addictive Payoff #3.1: Anger empowers us with a sense of control.

Addiction-Busting Belief: I can be flexible and control *myself* in difficult situations.

Epinephrine, the amphetamine-like hormone produced during anger, gives a surge of energy and with it a feeling of power.² This feeling of power helps us feel less vulnerable when something important to us is being threatened.

Seltzer states, “Contrary to feeling weak or out of control, the experience of anger can foster a sense of invulnerability—even invincibility... In a sense, it’s every bit as much a drug as alcohol or cocaine.”

We all need *healthy confidence* so that we don’t have to bolster sagging insecurity with anger. There’s much less need for the “power drug” of anger if a child believes:

- I can be flexible and control myself in difficult situations.
- I can work toward what’s important to me.

Learning healthy confidence to replace angry control is a *big* issue, so we’ve included two practical strategies under this

heading. Kids need skills to both control themselves *and* to respectfully work toward gaining what is most important to them, so in this next section we will cover flexibility first and problem-solving next.

For kids to be flexible instead of reactive when they are frustrated, they must be taught proactively. The following story is a great example of how to teach these critical skills.

Teaching flexibility

Despite Jen’s best efforts, trying to stop her 5-year-old son’s meltdowns only made them worse. After realizing she needed to be more proactive in helping Jonah instead of waiting for those inevitable outbursts, she worked on a new plan with one of our parent coaches during a parent coaching session. She wrote her story:

Jonah once screamed for 45 minutes due to an unexpected reprimand from me! Mealtimes were particularly tough. If we said we were having chicken for supper, he might think it was chicken nuggets. When he came to the table and saw chicken breast, he would scream, “That’s not what I wanted! I wanted chicken nuggets!” and get so angry he’d refuse to eat.

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

One day we tried this hands-on learning activity with a popsicle stick and a pipe cleaner to teach Jonah about the value of flexibility. (You could also substitute a fresh, green twig for the pipe cleaner, and a dry, brittle twig for the popsicle stick.) We talked about how sometimes people just want things to go their way, and if they don't get their way they explode! “That's being rigid, like this popsicle stick. When rigid people don't get what they want or what they expect,” I said, pressing the popsicle stick, “they just keep trying to make things go their way, and then BOOM, they explode!” The popsicle stick snapped in my hands.

Then I picked up the pipe cleaner. “Other people can bend and change when they need to in a situation, like share a toy when they didn't expect to, or be okay with a different kind of cereal in the morning, or find other fun things to do when rain cancels a trip to the zoo. That's being flexible like this pipe cleaner; it can bend when it needs to, and then it can straighten back out again like it was. A person that can do that is flexible.”

We focused on his success by talking about a time when Jonah had been really flexible — like when our family went on vacation and he tolerated all sorts of schedule

changes and travel stress like a trooper. “You were so flexible, and that helped everyone have a great time!”

That night at dinner, Jonah used the pipe cleaner and another stick to teach the rest of the family about being flexible or rigid, repeating his story about his vacation

When parents take time to teach and affirm important life skills, they empower kids to make wise choices that will help them thrive.

flexibility. Then later we watched for other minor times of flexibility and reminded him of how helpful and grown up he acted when he chose to be flexible. We also would sometimes give him a heads up before an unexpected change or challenge and say, “Now this is gonna be an opportunity to be flexible. Do you think you can do that?” His own prediction of success helped him to be flexible.

Over time it got easier and easier... Now when we say “Wow, Jonah, thanks for being so flexible about this!” he

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

says, “Yeah, it’s no big deal. I can do that.” It’s fun to see Jonah be so grown up about things that he literally had no idea how to cope with before (and neither did we for that matter!)

Do you see how Jen’s own proactive creativity created an opportunity for her child to learn an important life skill of flexibility, and then grow in confidence in that skill? Kids young and old can learn from this object lesson. (If it feels too contrived for an older child, you can just tell the story, or talk about the difference between rigid and flexible objects while making the comparison to real-life flexibility.) Look for any possible examples of your child’s flexibility to affirm.

Jonah’s story perfectly illustrates that sometimes children have angry outbursts because they lack the skills to behave appropriately. But **when parents take time to teach and affirm important life skills, they empower kids to make wise choices that will help them thrive.**

MY RESPONSE:

- How might I adapt the flexibility activity to my kids’ age and interest?
- In what kind of situations does my child demonstrate flexibility that I could affirm?



When parents take time to teach and affirm important life skills, they empower kids to make wise choices that will help them thrive.

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

EQUIP KIDS TO: Be Flexible and Solve Problems

Addictive Payoff #3.2: Anger empowers us with a sense of control.

Addiction-Busting Belief: I can work toward what’s *important* to me.

Teaching problem-solving

Kids will default to angry demands to get their way in a conflict unless they have problem-solving skills and *confidence* in those skills. Just like flexibility, helping kids learn problem-solving doesn’t start in the heat of conflict.

Use stories: Teach problem-solving while you read to kids.

Stories generally follow a typical flow: A hero has a problem and makes a choice about what to do, experiencing a positive or negative result based on that choice.

Stop at the point where the hero experiences a problem, and ask your kids for some ways they might solve the problem if they were the hero in the story. Affirm creative thinking, even if it’s not realistic enough to be practical.

Another creative way to teach problem-solving and compromise to elementary-aged or younger kids is [this fun activity](#) using oranges.

Coach: Teach your child to solve her own problems.

You can use questions to guide your kids to learn to solve their own problems. For little ones, this looks like: “Uh-oh. We’ve got a problem.” Then describe the problem in a simple sentence. (The milk spilled. All the markers without caps are drying out. It looks like it might rain.) “What shall we do?”

No matter what the age of your child, point out whatever goes well in the problem-solving process.

For older kids, you can teach a simple process to solve problems:

Define: What’s the *real* problem under this challenge? Defining the problem accurately is the essential first step. For example, working to understand “My teacher is stupid” reveals “It’s hard for me to finish assignments on time.” You can ask (several times if needed), “And what might be causing that?” until you identify the specific ground-level glitch.

Brainstorm: What different solutions might work? (Try to come up with at least two.)

Consider: What might be helpful or unhelpful about each solution?

Choose: Which solution do you want to try first?

Evaluate: How did it go? How might you adjust your solution?

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

You can also help your child learn to solve problems when the conflict is with *you*. Communicate clearly, “We’re teammates to solve this problem!” (within the boundaries you set, of course.)

The intense daughter of a coaching client stated strongly one day, “I’d really like to stay calm while we talk about this problem.” This growth was the result of her parents patiently, calmly solving problems with her over a period of months. When she had confidence in the outcome, she didn’t need or want to get angry.

Facilitate: Help kids in conflict solve problems together.

This can be between siblings or peers.

- “This is really frustrating for both of you! Let’s calm down so we can solve this problem well.”
- Remind kids of previous successes in problem-solving a challenge.
- “What are some ideas to solve this situation so that each person feels cared for and gets part of what’s important to him?” (If kids seem stuck, offer ideas to choose from.)
- Celebrate kids’ success if they arrive at a solution. “You worked really hard at figuring it out! Do you feel good about that? Now you’ll have fun together again.”

Collaborate: Hold family meetings to practice problem-solving and compromising. For school-aged kids, you can tackle family challenges together, like morning routine, bedtime, meals, family schedule, etc. Questions like,

- “How does everyone feel about this situation?”
- “How would we like to all feel?”
- “What’s important to each of us?”
- “When this problem goes better, what do we each do to help?”
- “What ideas might we try to solve it?”

You can also help your child learn to solve problems when the conflict is with you.

Search our website www.connectedfamilies.org for blog posts on family meetings. Then you can build an identity and strengthen confidence: “The Johnsons are a problem-solving family!”

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

The kinds of issues that trigger anger are quite varied, and we have a variety of resources to help you. You may discover a blog post on our [website](#) that directly addresses your issue. For example, if your child explodes angrily when she loses at a game, check out this [blog post](#). If sibling conflict is your family’s predominant anger issue, or perhaps entitlement, scroll down on our [resources page](#) to our online courses.

My Response:

- Which of these problem-solving ideas best fit my kids’ ages and interests?
- In what situations has my child solved a problem or compromised well that I could affirm?



Kids will default to angry demands to get their way in a conflict unless they have problem-solving skills and confidence in those skills.

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

EQUIP KIDS TO: Seek Affection Instead of Negative Attention

Addictive Payoff #4: Anger regulates intimacy.

Addiction-Busting Belief: I can feel close to my parents and get their attention in good ways.

Intimacy can be anxiety producing if we doubt we'll be accepted with all our flaws. If a child feels mom or dad doesn't really *like* him, it's unlikely that child will be vulnerable to his parents, submit to their authority, or share sensitive feelings.

But connection with parents is vitally important to kids, and intense kids are looking for an “energy match” in the form of equally intense responses from their parents. When both parents and child are chronically angry and discouraged, it's unlikely the child will get that need met in the form of exuberant positive attention from a parent.

It feels risky to a child to seek intense positive attention and be disappointed, so a child may use an emotional power struggle or an angry outburst as a fail-proof way to get the “energy match” he desires.

In this way, kids use anger to engage intensely with their parent, but at a safe emotional distance ([Psychology Today article](#)). They get the intense desired eye contact and attention from the parent in a predictable, non-vulnerable way.

When parents stare at an angry child, wave their finger, and command, “Stop it! You calm down right now! This is not ok. You're being ridiculous,” negative behavior is being “fertilized” by the intense attention, and neural pathways are strengthened. Essentially, an oppositional bond is growing with the message of, “This is how you and I relate with our biggest emotions.”

**Intense kids are looking for intense responses.
Parents meet that need through anger OR affection.**

If you recognize that the joy has drained from your relationship with your child, be encouraged and equipped by this fun, practical blog post: [How to Prevent Misbehavior in 30 Seconds or Less.](#)

practical strategies: BUILD “ADDICTION-BUSTING” SKILLS

Another way to empower kids to regulate their anger is to equip them to *ask* for attention when they need it. We equipped our strong-willed son with this skill by first explaining the importance of paying attention to his feelings so that then he could ask for what he needed in an appropriate way. We role-played the process once to make sure he understood. That one time was all he needed to begin to occasionally come and declare, “Mom/Dad, I need some attention now.”

These ideas, along with the previous section on safely sharing the vulnerable emotions hiding beneath anger, can meet a child’s need for healthy intimacy. Using these tools, you can help your child come to believe, “I can use helpful ways to feel close to my parents and get their intense attention.”

MY RESPONSE:

- What percentage of my intense attention with my child is joyful or affectionate, and what percentage is related to anger outbursts?
- What are our best times of connection?
- How could I do more of that, or are there other ideas that stand out to me?



Empower kids to regulate their anger by equipping them to ask for attention when they need it.

practical strategies



⇒ SOOTHE OUTBURSTS

- Offer Calming Choices Quickly
- Express Empathy Effectively

⇒ HEAL SHAME WITH GRACE

practical strategies: SOOTHE OUTBURSTS

Offer Calming Choices Quickly

It would be great if we could promise, “A week or two of this proactive training, and your child will be calm, articulate, and mature when things don’t go her way.” The truth is, you’ve entered a long process that will still include some meltdowns. That’s why it’s important that part of your plan involves determining the most helpful, soothing response when it all falls apart.

Let’s take a look at what happens to a child’s brain during a meltdown, so our strategy is actually helpful and soothing, not inflammatory. When the brain detects a threat to the child’s well-being, it takes only a few seconds for the brain to be flooded with initial hormones to trigger fight or flight ([MentalHelp.net article](#)), because in real danger, immediate action is essential for survival.

Soon after all this initial fight or flight, an adrenaline release initiates a *lasting* state of arousal to sustain the self-protective reaction. The increased adrenaline can last for hours, making it easier to get angry again later on ([MentalHelp.net article](#)).

All of this brain chemistry means that *quick* empathy and help are essential to soothe the child’s reactions before they

gain momentum. **If I quickly try to shut down my child’s anger, that adds to their sense of threat and drives the anger higher. Proverbs 15:1 states, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”**

Researchers estimate that a soothing response within three seconds of the start of an outburst is the most effective.³ So when your child’s anger starts to escalate, gently offer a couple of calming, pleasant activities in a light-hearted, encouraging way within a few seconds, before your kiddo’s brain floods with fight/flight chemicals.

Our client Marilyn proactively developed self-calming activities for her intense 5-year-old son that she knew he enjoyed. When he began to get upset, Marilyn quickly offered these activities: “If Max gets on a roll, hardly anything stops him. But if I intervene immediately when he’s getting wound up, he responds well. I can guide him to do some calm down time in his hammock with music, or do some big muscle/heavy lifting activities. He has improved in his reactions, and I relate to him so much more calmly.”

Kids will probably resist activities you suggest if they feel criticized or controlled in any way. Offering to do something fun and calming *with them* can be more connective and effective. One mom would jog with her daughter when

practical strategies: SOOTHE OUTBURSTS

trying to discuss a volatile issue. The rhythmic, big muscle activity was very calming for her daughter and their discussions were much more productive.

For quick soothing, you can try phrases like these:

- Hey Kiddo, you're really upset! I can help you.
- Younger kids: What will help your body feel better so your thinking brain can work its best?
- Younger kids: Let's get the markers out and each draw a picture about how we're feeling.
- Older kids: What do you need right now? What will help you calm down so we can figure this out?
- Older kids: Let's go shoot some hoops/play some catch while we talk about this.

Express Empathy Effectively

Anger experts for people of all ages agree: to soothe an angry reaction, use strong empathy statements that make it clear you understand.⁴ Effective empathy is sincere, uncanned, and offers much more substance than "I know you're frustrated, but you need to..."

⁴ Harvey Karp, *Happiest Toddler on the Block*; Ross Greene, *The Explosive Child*; Mark Goulston, *Just Listen*.

When a child's anger spirals up quickly, simply validate it by energetically saying, "You're angry right now, aren't you?!" This will immediately help a child feel joined



instead of opposed and ashamed. You can go on, "I understand! I get angry too sometimes!"

This sort of approach almost always takes the intensity out of kids' anger. It helps them feel angry without giving them unhealthy power and control over others. And if done effectively, models for them how to articulate those feelings

practical strategies: SOOTHE OUTBURSTS

and desires more respectfully. This is really important if kids are to channel anger productively.

For example: Your child erupts about her homework, “I hate math! And *you* drive me crazy when you’re always bugging me about it!” Instead of responding, “You can’t talk to me that way,” your **respectful rephrasing** might look like, “Math is really frustrating for you, isn’t it? And it doesn’t help when you feel nagged. It sounds like you’d like to be more independent with your homework. That’s probably a great idea. After dinner, let’s talk about a plan.” There are key elements in this example that make it really helpful.

To make sure your empathy is effective:

- Identify what your child is *feeling* (i.e. frustrated)
- State what is *important* to them (i.e. independence)
- *Validate* something about either one of those (i.e. more independence is a great idea)

As this becomes a habit, it teaches kids that there is “grace space” to wind down and more appropriately express what’s going on inside of them. Then you can begin to *invite* them to the right side of the [anger spectrum](#) making statements like: “How might you be more respectful when you’re angry? Can you say what you want? Can you give me your ideas

about how to solve this? What compromise might you suggest?”

These simple questions help parents turn the corner on their kids’ anger issues. At first this approach may not be easy, but over time, and as kids grow to believe that you are

... as kids grow to believe that you are for them and not against them, they will learn to be more respectful —to be angry, and sin not.

for them and not against them, they will learn to be more respectful - to be angry, and sin not. They will learn to trust your guidance and watch your example.

Julia worked on expressing empathy with her extremely intense 5-year-old daughter, Abby. She was elated during one of her early coaching sessions: “I knew it was probably going to be a two-hour meltdown based on how Abby started. I stayed calm and kept repeating in simple phrases how I thought she was feeling: ‘You’re mad right now. You didn’t

practical strategies: SOOTHE OUTBURSTS

want to come home! Abby calmed down in only *forty-five minutes*. I was so proud of us!”

Clearly, empathy for her child was no magic wand for Julia, but it was the start of a lot of progress! Over the course of a year or two, Abby learned to independently choose self-calming strategies when she started into quick anger, and then respectfully articulate what she was feeling to her empathetic mom. (Full story including sensory strategies is in Tantrums/Meltdown section of appendix in [Discipline that Connects with Your Child's Heart](#).)

It can be hard work to be this thoughtful when kids express anger, but it is well worth the effort. Consistently, parents tell us that when they learn to better validate and *then* guide their kids' anger, relationships improve, behavior (of both parents and children) improves, and resentments diminish.

A quick, connective start is particularly important if kids are prone to aggression. In fight/flight state the blood flows *away* from the frontal lobe and *into* the big muscles (shoulders and hips) so that a person is equipped to attack/run from danger. It's easy to see how kids lose language and problem-solving skills and become aggressive easily when upset.

We have a section on sibling conflict that in the appendix of our [Discipline that Connects with Your Child's Heart](#) book that includes more information about aggression. To get you started, a helpful initial strategy is to enter with big, *connective* energy. If you enter this aggressive conflict with a quiet, gentle tone, kids might not even know you're there! Your energy can be bold but loving. For example: “HEY KIDS, WOW, YOU'RE HAVING A HARD TIME! IT'S TOUGH TO SHARE, ISN'T IT?!” Get in between them as quickly as possible, *without judgments* toward either child, and suggest they each “find a comfy spot to calm down so we can solve this.”

Research shows that as kids learn to better identify and express their emotions, aggression decreases, so persevere at the other ideas included in the Addiction Busters section and with a good measure of encouragement for even small improvements, over time you'll almost certainly see more productive, less aggressive conflict.

MY RESPONSE:

- What soothing strategy stands out as a good match for my child in these sections on calming activities and empathy?
- How might I remind myself of that strategy in the heat of the moment?

practical strategies: HEAL SHAME WITH GRACE

In our Insights section, we mentioned anger researcher Leon Seltzer's conclusion that angry people almost always have significant self-image deficits ([Psychology Today article](#)). Our extensive experience with parents and kids validates his conclusion, but parents often overlook this important truth: **Shaming thoughts and feelings about being angry don't improve behavior, they drive more anger.**

Angry kids are almost always deeply discouraged and ashamed about having explosive anger and feeling like the troublemaker or "problem child" of the family. They usually can't articulate those feelings, and instead protect their fragile self-worth by blaming others for their troubles. But an underlying sense of "What's wrong with me? I'm just a bad kid," is very real, and feeds the anger cycle for three reasons:

1. **Anxiety is an anger trigger.** Negative beliefs about being a bad kid put a child's brain in an anxious, agitated state, triggering anger more easily.
2. **People act out of their identity.** If I believe I'm an angry person, that's how I act. Identity is even more important in determining behavior than either the cost or reward of the behavior ([Switch, How to Change Things When Change Is Hard, Heath](#)). In our [book](#) we tell the story of 8-year-old- Raul, a child so aggressive that he lost the privilege of participating in his church's mid-week children's program. After much proactive work

by his parents, he stated, "I can go back to church on Wednesdays. *I'm not an angry kid anymore.*"

3. **Self-criticism decreases both motivation and self-control.** It's actually *self-compassion* that's helpful. It



makes people more likely to take personal responsibility when they've blown it, receive feedback from others, and learn from the experience ([The Willpower Instinct, by Kelly McGonigal](#)).

practical strategies: HEAL SHAME WITH GRACE

The good news is that God's grace is the most effective source of self-compassion possible. Instead of "self-compassion" rooted in denial, blaming someone else for the problem, or glossing over really hurtful behavior, we know that the God of the universe has incredible compassion for us! He knows how weak we are and showers his compassion on those that honor him ([Psalm 103:13](#)).

[Romans 5:20](#) "...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." [Hebrews 4:15,16](#) "...We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. [Jesus has] been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. **Take the mercy, accept the help.**" The Message

When we receive that healing compassion we can pass it on to our kids. So when everything falls apart, communicate clearly to all involved:

"God loves us so much, even when we are the most angry. We can turn to him anytime, admit what we've done, and get his mercy and help."

If you feel like you need more practical examples of how to bring grace into your family's anger, simply search our [website](#) blog for "grace". You'll discover lots of material, including this [blog post](#) of how a dad creatively used his cellphone to teach grace after his daughter's angry outburst. We also have numerous strategies and stories in our [book](#) that equip you to bring healing grace into the shame of your family's anger. You'll learn how to do do-overs effectively, focus on success, and reshape identity.

MY RESPONSE:

- How might either shame or compassionate grace be affecting my family's anger?
- What is a simple first step to bring God's grace more fully into our interactions?

We want to close with the story of one family's *amazing* anger transformation through God's grace!

final thoughts



Ashley and Amber, two highly competitive 7-year-old twins, had physically violent anger outbursts with each other several times a day. They also had angry power struggles and screaming matches with their parents over things as simple as brushing their teeth before bed.

Their mom, Leah, stated, “The anger in our home made me believe that I was just failing God miserably. I thought He was constantly and deeply disappointed with me as a person and a parent, and maybe I wasn't even a Christian. I could never measure up, and especially when my girls mess up, I felt an overwhelming sense of failure and deep sadness.”

After Leah and Kevin immersed themselves in our book and in our parent coaching sessions, they began to experience God's grace for themselves like never before. Leah wrote,

final thoughts

God has made it so very clear to me that He sees me through the righteousness and perfection of Jesus...I no longer need to try to earn my acceptance. God is *not* disappointed in me!! Now I don't have to become angry when I mess up or when the girls mess up!!! We have the freedom to be messy. **Each mess brings the opportunity to grow in our understanding of God's grace through Jesus.** The pressure is off for us to be perfect. and that allows for SUCH freedom!! Freedom from anger! I honestly never knew I could be so calm and peaceful!!

Changes in the parents' lives were amazing, and the girls began to experience real grace for the first time. Their family relationships gradually transformed and were filled with joy. Ashley loved a particular song about the abundance of God's mercy and forgiveness in response to our shame. She and her family made up memorable moves to go along with the music and they had a blast singing and dancing together. Worship and joy took root in the fertile soil of that family's messy need for Jesus.

Our final thought for you is an invitation to enjoy that song, [Drops in the Ocean](#), and take it to heart. You just might find yourself dancing to it with your kids someday!

***If you could count the times
I'd say you are forgiven
It's more than the drops in the ocean!***



If you have any questions about how to bring God's grace more firmly into your life and home, contact us at info@connectedfamilies.org.