

Three Things to Do When Your Kids Drive You Crazy

Sometimes my teenage son drives me crazy. And I mean totally batty—up the wall. My other three children are grown now, but I remember having the same feelings when they were living at home.

I know I'm not alone. But I've been fortunate to have a job that reminds me constantly of the privilege and opportunity that raising children is.

I'll admit, though, that at times it requires a tremendous amount of effort to make the shift from being driven crazy by my kids to honoring them as a high priority—to expecting them and welcoming them to engage with me.

Here's a story about Andrew, a dad who just wants a few minutes of peace and quiet when he gets home from work.

Andrew's Story

When Andrew comes home from work, young Grace is eager to see him. Andrew shakes her loose from his arms and legs for a minute so he can read the mail.

Grace immediately starts talking about what happened that day, overflowing with information. It's too much for Andrew to follow.

"Gracie," Andrew says, "can't you see that I'm trying to read the mail?" He goes upstairs to change his clothes.

Back downstairs, Andrew fixes a plate of leftovers and sits in front of the TV. On cue, Grace enters the room: "Ready to go play outside, Daddy?"

"Pretty soon," Andrew answers.

As he eats, Andrew gets involved in the storyline on TV.

As soon as Andrew is done, Grace says: "Daddy, you said we could go outside! When?"

Now Andrew is frustrated and angry about missing the dialogue on his show. "I don't want to hear another word about it," he snaps. "I said we'll go outside. Just be patient!"

Of course, the tears start flowing out of Grace's eyes the minute she hears her dad's angry tone.

Now, let's step back for a minute.

Every dad is different, but I think many dads can identify with Andrew's experience. (I know I can!) Andrew's a good dad, but he let an innocent situation spiral out of control.

Why did it happen?

Basically, a series of little interruptions and frustrations between Andrew and his young daughter *combined* to produce anger instead of anticipation over their fun daddy-daughter time.

So often, frustration and anger start as an inner conflict between priorities. Andrew wanted to do one thing, but family responsibilities pulled him another way. During that battle between what he selfishly *wanted* to do and what he knew he *should* be doing, the negative emotions continued to grow.

Andrew expressed the negative emotions as threats and harsh words.

And herein lies the danger. If a dad doesn't recognize his error and commit to change, the bad habits will escalate. Being short could lead to screaming at a child for little mistakes, or it will lead to making cruel, demeaning statements.

In a worst-case scenario, it could even lead to physical abuse.

As you know, Dad, children are not always convenient. Like Grace, they can be persistent or demanding. Sometimes they will disobey or even whine and throw fits. But no matter what they do, *they do not cause their father's response.*

So how do you handle those times? Here are some ideas.

Action Points

1. Responding calmly to our children begins with reminding ourselves—every single day—that they are among our highest priorities. If we can keep that thought in mind, there won't be as much inner conflict; we'll be much less likely to let other, lesser things compete for our attention, and we can decrease the likelihood of negative emotions when relating to our kids.

2. Make a decision that you are going to do what is best for your child. Sometimes making this shift will take years, but if you constantly remind yourself that you are going to do what is best for your children, there will be no more competition for your attention and energy. You will feel less frustration because the matter has already been decided.

Before you get home from work, you will have already determined that you are going to go outside and play with your child. You will have already decided that you will take the time to rock your baby to sleep at night, mix up a bottle of formula, cook oatmeal in the morning or do whatever else she needs.

3. Write down your commitments. I don't want to imply that making this shift is easy. It isn't! So during moments of clarity—when you feel conviction about making changes in your life or becoming a better dad—write down your plan.

When coming up with your plan, take stock of when you tend to get angry with your kids. What actions can you commit to that will make a difference? Maybe, like Andrew, you need a specific plan that will help you transition more smoothly from work to home. Maybe it means turning off distractions, like the TV or computer, or asking your wife for help.

Regardless, share your plan with someone else who can help you stay accountable. Tell your kids: "Every day when I get home for work, I'm going to play with you for 15 minutes before I do anything else."

Or tell your wife: "I'm going to get up 15 minutes early so I can cook breakfast for the kids."

What do you think? Leave a comment below and tell us how *you* make the shift!

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