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25 Ways To Provoke Anger In Children



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25 Ways To Provoke Anger In Children

Anger is a unique emotion and one of the most referenced emotions in the Bible. It can motivate to appropriate actions and causes (*Mark 3:5*) or diminish our effectiveness as a believer (*Prov. 14:29*). The Lord God expressed His wrath many times over people that hardened their hearts towards His commands and chose idolatry instead. Vine's Dictionary provides this insight: anger is a natural impulse, desire, or disposition, and is seen as the strongest of all passions. There is little doubt as to why the New Testament instructs believers multiple times to "put off and put away" the destructive side of this emotion (*Eph. 4:31, Col. 3:8*).

As parents striving to raise our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, we are provided many opportunities to teach, model, and instruct our children in this principle. One of our goals is to help our children grow from self-centered and emotionally driven to a Christ-like example that incorporates a biblical thought and reasoning process. How sad the first set of parents, Adam and Eve, must have been when their own flesh and blood could not manage this emotion (*Gen. 4:5-8*). In one day they lost two children – one to death, and the other to exile.

Solomon reminds us that there is nothing new "under the sun" (*Eccl. 1:14*). Therefore, parents need to be proactive in the everyday task of helping their children learn the wisdom of how to experience the emotion (be ye angry) and make good choices (sin not). The context of this article will encourage parents to examine themselves first in how they can avoid provoking their children to anger (*Col. 3:21*). In Lou Priolo's book *The Heart of Anger*, he outlines 25 ways that parents can unknowingly create anger and frustration in their children. The following is a summary of those ways.

1. A Relationship Lacking Marital Harmony.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Gen. 2:24)
Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; (Heb. 12:15)

It is easy to understand why this is the first point mentioned. A painfully accurate overview is evident by the statement, "Perhaps the greatest provocation of anger in children is parents who do not live with each other in the harmony that the Scriptures prescribe".¹ A husband and wife who do not develop the "one flesh" intimacy as intended by God (*Gen. 2:24*) will see various other problems develop over time. Additional correlations between lack of marital harmony and angry children are seen in the effect that bitterness has on the human spirit. As children observe the resentment that results from their parents' lack of harmony, they can be more susceptible to acquiring those bitter thoughts, motives, attitudes, and actions that have been modeled for them.

2. Establishing and Maintaining a Child-Centered Home.

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. (Prov. 29:15)

If parents do not know how to set up a Christ-centered home (which is defined as each member understanding his biblical role in the family and committing to place Christ above self), then the home is likely to be child-centered. It is a foundational principle that the husband and wife work at being closer to each other than to the child. If that does not occur, the child may view himself as equal and will tend to become angry when his desires do not get placed on equal status as the needs and desires of the parent.

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3. Modeling Sinful Anger.

Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul. (Prov. 22:24-25)

When parents model sinful anger, the child may accidentally be taught that the only way to solve problems is to win. There are many teachable moments to be had with our children in helping them observe how others expressing sinful anger can bring many consequences.

4. Habitually Disciplining While Angry.

O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. (Ps. 38:1)

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)

When a parent is angry, it is easy to over-discipline. That anger may be perceived as a personal attack and the discipline seen as vindictive (revengeful) instead of corrective. Stress from work, finances, marital and family struggles can all add to the parent's frustration that is then passed to the child.

5. Scolding.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. (Eph. 4:29)

By definition, scolding is to rebuke someone angrily; using harsh language especially when complaining or finding fault. While scolding may make the speaker feel better, it does little to biblically "train or instruct".

6. Being Inconsistent with Discipline.

When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay? But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. (2 Cor. 1:17-18)

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Eccl. 8:11)

There are two common types of inconsistent discipline. One type is utilizing different parental standards of discipline. In other words, Dad believes a certain behavior is wrong, while Mom sees nothing wrong with it or vice versa. The second is when parents are daily inconsistent on what is punishable behavior, and/or how severe the punishment will be. Both types can bring undue frustration to children.

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7. Having Double Standards.

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. (Phil. 4:9)

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)

A parent who uses the Bible to teach and instruct their child in righteousness but is not willing to practice that same standard in their own life fits the definition of a hypocrite. A hypocritical home will often provoke a child. 'Do as I say and not as I do' may work temporarily in an employer/employee relationship, but it has no application for a believing parent.

8. Being Legalistic.

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt. 15:8-9)

In detailing this section, the author states, "God has given each set of Christian parents the responsibility to develop from Scripture a biblically based economy or 'law of the house' for their children to abide by. This collection of house expectations or rules contains two basic sections: God's Law (biblically directed rules like the 10 commandments) and Parent's Law (biblically derived rules like bedtime, chores, food choices, etc.)."²² The particular type of legalism that can provoke anger is when parents present their Parent's Law as unchangeable laws that can never be appealed. As children mature and establish trust and respect, there should be an opportunity for them to exercise appropriate expansion of responsibility and trust. A rigid, one size rule that must fit all the kids all the time may lead to unnecessary provocation.

9. Not Admitting You're Wrong and Not Asking for Forgiveness.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (Matt. 5:23-24)

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16)

Due to human nature, parents will make mistakes. However, the failure to acknowledge these mistakes committed against children often discourages the children from practicing open and appropriate communication. When children perceive such insensitivity (and maybe even pride) in the parents, they may wrongly conclude that it's no use trying to talk to them about what happened. It's easy to learn that a wrong decision needs no apology if you're in the position of power.

10. Constantly Finding Fault.

Also against his (Elihu) three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. (Job 32:3)

Elihu was frustrated that condemning statements were made without anyone accurately pinpointing what had been done wrong. This area is not about diminishing the parent's responsibility to point out sinful behavior and character deficiencies in the child. It is rather the continuous critical, condemning, accusing, and judgmental attitude that can be mistaken as providing "reproof". For a child that grows up in that environment, he can often begin to believe that his parents are never or rarely pleased with him.

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11. Parents Reversing God-Given Roles.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (Eph. 5:22-23, 25)

Consequences that tend to promote frustration are unavoidable when God's order in the home is violated. Wives can become embittered over husbands not managing their homes biblically as the head and leadership role requires. Husbands grow in frustration as their wives either undermine their parenting efforts or have to compensate for their lack of parenting initiative and participation. Children are often left confused and uncertain about parent's behavior and without needed modeling for future generations.

12. Not Listening to Your Child's Opinion or Taking His Side of the Story Seriously.

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. (Prov. 18:13)
He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him. (Prov. 18:17)

Children can be difficult to fill with truth unless they are emptied of their self and those issues that worry and concern them. A parent doesn't always need to agree with their child's reasoning, conclusions and opinions, but should focus on how to lead them to the truth. That path to truth is strengthened when parents take the time to understand their child's perspective. To gain that perspective, parents need to have conversations with their children and display the skill of listening to comprehend and not just to respond.

13. Comparing Them to Others.

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Cor. 10:12)

God blesses every child with unique gifts and talents. It is important for a child to learn at an early age "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Rom. 12:3) Children that live in the constant shadow of another sibling or child will tend to over-focus or over-promote their accomplishments or lose the sound judgment of appreciating their God-given worth.

14. Not Making Time "Just to Talk."

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (James 1:19)
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; (Eccl. 3:7)

Relationships are the key to "training up your child," and they are impossible to build without communication. Moms and dads are under constant pressure from the requirements (and pleasures) of life that can keep them from spending enough time engaging in the "sharing and caring" process with their child. Parents that are overwhelmed with those pressures rarely establish strong and significant parent/child relationships.

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15. Not Praising or Encouraging Your Child.

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; (1 Cor. 1:4)

Building an accurate self-perception in a child involves them clearly understanding not only what is wrong and needs to be corrected, but also what is right and pleasing to God. It is too easy for parents to focus only on the wrong, which causes their children to tend to evaluate themselves inaccurately. Their self-perceptions become distorted instead of sober (*Rom. 12:3*) and true (*Phil. 4:8*). Generic and inflated praise diminishes this self-perception, while the opposite, specific and targeted appreciation, helps build a “sober and true” self-perception.

16. Failing to Keep Your Promises.

But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matt. 5:37)

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; (Col. 3:9)

Most moms and dads have every intention of honoring their commitments to their children. When promises and commitments are not consistently kept (regardless of reason) and no attempt is made to modify the promise or seek forgiveness from the child for breaking that promise, the child’s disappointment can turn into anger. If the string of broken promises continues to grow, so will the child’s view that his parents are undependable, unreliable, and possibly even deceitful.

17. Chastening in Front of Others.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (Matt. 18:15)

This principle presented in Matthew works well in the church family and is also sound practice for individuals within their family unit. The goal of chastening is to prevent a sinful action from becoming a sinful habit. If a child is acting sinfully and inappropriately in the presence of his peers and others, then he may in certain cases be verbally rebuked in their presence. However, if the misbehavior is not public, the discipline process should be handled privately and securely between child and parent.

18. Not Allowing Enough Freedom.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated (reasonable) . . . (James 3:17a)

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48b)

Children should be taught that freedom is not a right, but a privilege that can be earned by demonstrating their faithfulness to Mom and Dad’s expectations. That faithfulness involves demonstrating to God and parents that the child can be trusted with increased freedom in at least two areas: the successful fulfillment of specific responsibilities and the successive competence to make biblically wise decisions.³ Though some parents may struggle with over-protectiveness or insecurity, their children may often become exasperated, discouraged, and even rebellious if not provided with trust-building and freedom-growing opportunities.

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19. Allowing Too Much Freedom.

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. (Prov. 29:15)

Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. (Gal. 4:1-2)

When children are allowed to (1) practice sinful behavior, (2) indulge in non-sinful activities that are in excess of what their maturity and responsibility levels can process, or (3) live an undisciplined life that allows them to receive what they demand, other problems often develop.⁴ Children that grow up in homes that allow too much freedom and not enough discipline often perceive that they are not loved by their parents.

20. Mocking Your Child.

Are there not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation? (Job 17:2)

And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? (Ex. 4:11)

The many silly actions and awkward behaviors of kids will often produce moments that a parent can acknowledge with a teasing, making fun, or mimicking response. A lighthearted and spontaneous moment is one of the joys of parenting, but for the child's sake, parents should never respond consistently with a ridiculing or mocking attitude. Parents should especially be sensitive to the areas of their child's inadequacies about which the child can do very little. Some general examples include intelligence, athletic abilities, physical features, and motor coordination.

21. Abusing Them Physically.

Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; (1 Tim. 3:3)

And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. (Num. 22:27)

As parents model being the "bishops" of their home (1 Tim. 3:2), there are great benefits in exercising patience and avoiding the "striker" (brawling or bullying) mode of responding. There is also wisdom in not repeating Balaam's reactionary approach to discipline: (1) he had not collected all the relevant information, (2) he responded out of being embarrassed or having unfulfilled expectations, and (3) he was consumed with anger and out of control.

22. Ridiculing or Name Calling.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. (Eph. 4:29)

Some behavior categories need to be named. God used names to identify those who were living in an unhealthy and sinful way. Some of those names included: slothful, foolish, double-minded, deceitful, self-centered, and idolatrous. Utilizing earthly insults such as idiot, stupid, moron, lazy, etc. don't provide a biblically corrective direction. As a tool, the "name" (and only if such behavior is repeatedly portrayed) can serve to motivate a child to change. As a punitive weapon, the repetitive use of the insult only embarrasses, shames, or antagonizes the child.

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23. Having Unrealistic Expectations.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Cor. 13:11)

Parents should try to remember that the Bible acknowledges that children speak, think and reason differently from adults. This process takes time and occurs at varying rates depending on the child. Frustration for both child and parent is probable when parents impose standards that their children are developmentally incapable of performing.

24. Practicing Favoritism.

And he (elder son) answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: (Luke 15:29)

The prodigal's father rightly rejoiced, but the brother wrongly perceived that his father was showing favoritism. Human nature can be a powerful "score keeper". Since siblings are rarely carbon copies of each other, they should be treated as individuals. In contrast, the standards by which each child is evaluated and by which parents respond to each child should be identical (a point that the older son failed to understand). Some children experience hurt and bitterness in homes where parents fail to communicate this standard and neglect to reassure their children through the ongoing evaluation process.

25. Child Training with World Methodologies Inconsistent with God's Word.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

There are two ways being contrasted for fathers (parents) to "bring up" their children. Raising a child properly in the discipline and instruction of the Lord will not provoke them to anger, but jumping to each new parenting technique probably will. Parents without a biblically-built framework for creating structure and order in their home will find additional challenges and struggles with raising their children. This challenge will especially be magnified in the high-need, strong willed child.

Those that are parents, or provide for the care and education of children, are indeed blessed with the heritage of the Lord (*Ps. 127:3*). Helping children learn how to discern and appropriately respond to anger is vital for healthy families and churches. An unresolved hurt and wounded spirit usually progresses down a path of destruction from hurt to bitterness, then anger, then stubbornness and finally rebellion.⁵

While this article does not address specific skills for children to use in learning how to manage anger and frustration, it does provide an outline for strengthening parents' awareness of possible trigger points in children. Some children's personalities and temperaments are going to require additional help from Mom and Dad to effectively learn these skills. Those efforts on behalf of children needing to learn the balance of emotions and actions are going to be well pleasing to God.

References

1. Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1997), 30.
2. *Ibid.*, 36.
3. *Ibid.*, 45.
4. *Ibid.*, 46.
5. *Ibid.*, 21-22.