

## **Anger and Your Teen**

You've got an angry kid on your hands, and you're feeling frustrated and confused. You might be close to anger yourself. Anger is a normal emotion. It lets us know that something is wrong. It helps us know when our buttons are being pushed, our values not respected, or our boundaries are being crossed. But unresolved anger can make you physically sick, or show up later as a chronic anger problem. Often people find a way of not feeling the anger: they may get depressed, or use drugs or alcohol, or take up habits like gambling or excessive video game playing.

Anger is usually a symptom of other underlying emotions and is often referred to as a secondary emotion. Before people become angry, they have other feelings that are the actual root of their anger: hurt, frustration, fear, irritation.

For example, suppose your daughter discovers the whole class knows she has a crush on a certain boy—and the information came from her best friend. She feels several emotions. Loss: "Now he'll be too embarrassed to ask me out." Hurt: "I trusted her and she spilled my secret." Powerlessness: "I wish I had never told her, but I can't 'unsay' it now, or erase it from everyone's memory." She becomes angry at her friend, not just because of what the friend did, but also because of the consequences to her.

Your daughter will need to deal with all of these feelings at some time in her life. Anger masks the overwhelming combination of these feelings. If you can help her face them, you can help her understand where the anger comes from, and help her deal with situations that make her angry in the future. You can empower her by helping her understand and control her emotions.

### **Being the parent of an angry teen can bring up anger in oneself.**

Teenagers are in a developmental stage that can be extremely stressful for everyone. They are faced with questions of identity, separation, relationships and purpose. As well, relationships between teens and parents are changing as they become more independent.

This can bring about frustration that leads to anger and a pattern of reactive behaviour between teens and parents. Unless we endeavour to change our own behaviour, we cannot help teens change theirs. We need to *respond rather than react* to these situations. The intention is not to deny the anger, but to control that emotion and express it in a proactive way. We need to look for solutions rather than believing that punitive measures are always the answer. Listen to your teen and focus on feelings. Try to understand the situation from your child's perspective. Blaming and accusing only builds walls and end all communication. It is important that you also tell how you feel but stick to the facts and to the present moment. Work towards a solution where everyone wins. Always remember that anger is the feeling and the kind of behaviour with which we respond is a choice. It helps to ask questions such as: "Where does this anger come from?"; "What situations bring out this feeling of anger?"; "What unresolved conflict am I facing?"; "What emotion am I reacting to: hurt, frustration or fear?"; "Am I focussing

on what can be done, rather than brooding over what has been done to me?" These questions can help us direct the interaction more effectively and diffuse situations rather than add fuel to the fire.

If you do find that there is violence erupting out of these situations or depression and suicidal thoughts are expressed, you will need further assistance. Your school guidance counsellor can help direct you to appropriate outside agencies and can also help by counselling the student within the school environment. The guidance counsellors at George McDougall High School have Masters Degrees in Counselling Psychology and are able to assist with emotional and relationship issues.