

EIGHT WEAPONS IN THE WAR ON ANGER

From Nancy Samalin's book
LOVE AND ANGER: THE PARENTAL DILEMMA

1. **EXIT OR WAIT:** The two most important four-letter words to remember when you are angry are *exit* and *wait*. When we are so incensed that we are about to lose control, exiting or calling an adult time out can give us a breather so that we are not at the mercy of our "short madness." Attacks that occur in the heat of anger are usually met with reactive anger.
2. **"I" NOT "YOU":** When a child does something to make us angry, our automatic response may be to shout an accusation: "Why are you behaving like such a brat?" "What kind of slob are you - throwing your jacket on the floor?" The message we communicate is that the child is unacceptable, not the action. "You" statements have the ability to wound. "I" statements make the point much more effectively, without damaging a child's self-esteem. When you're angry, it's better to say (or even shout) "I'm mad" not "You're bad."
3. **STAY IN THE PRESENT:** Don't use the incident as a springboard for gloomy forecasts or as an opportunity to dredge up ancient history. Say "I'm disappointed in this report card," not "Your report cards are always bad" or "At this rate, you'll never amount to anything."
4. **AVOID PHYSICAL FORCE AND THREATS:** If spanking worked, we would only have to do it once. And, when you've won by asserting physical power as a big person over a small person, you have won nothing.
5. **STAY SHORT AND TO THE POINT:** Be specific. It's pointless to tell a five-year old to clean up her room. If you expect results, you might wait forever. Children need specific instructions - although not too many.
6. **PUT IT IN WRITING:** A written message can be an effective and calming way to express your feelings in a manner others can understand. When you put your thoughts in writing, you also allow yourself a cooling-down period. It is another way of exiting and waiting.
7. **FOCUS ON THE ESSENTIAL:** In groups for both parents and professionals, we talk a lot about making rules and fights that break out when these rules get broken or are ignored. Parents and educators have to decide for themselves what is really important and try to let go of the less important issues. Ask yourself "will this matter a week from now?"
8. **RESTORE GOOD FEELINGS:** Parents and children want and need good feelings to prevail, even when the battles become fierce. Time and distance heal many wounds and a simple apology can diminish resentment and pave the way for reconciliation.

