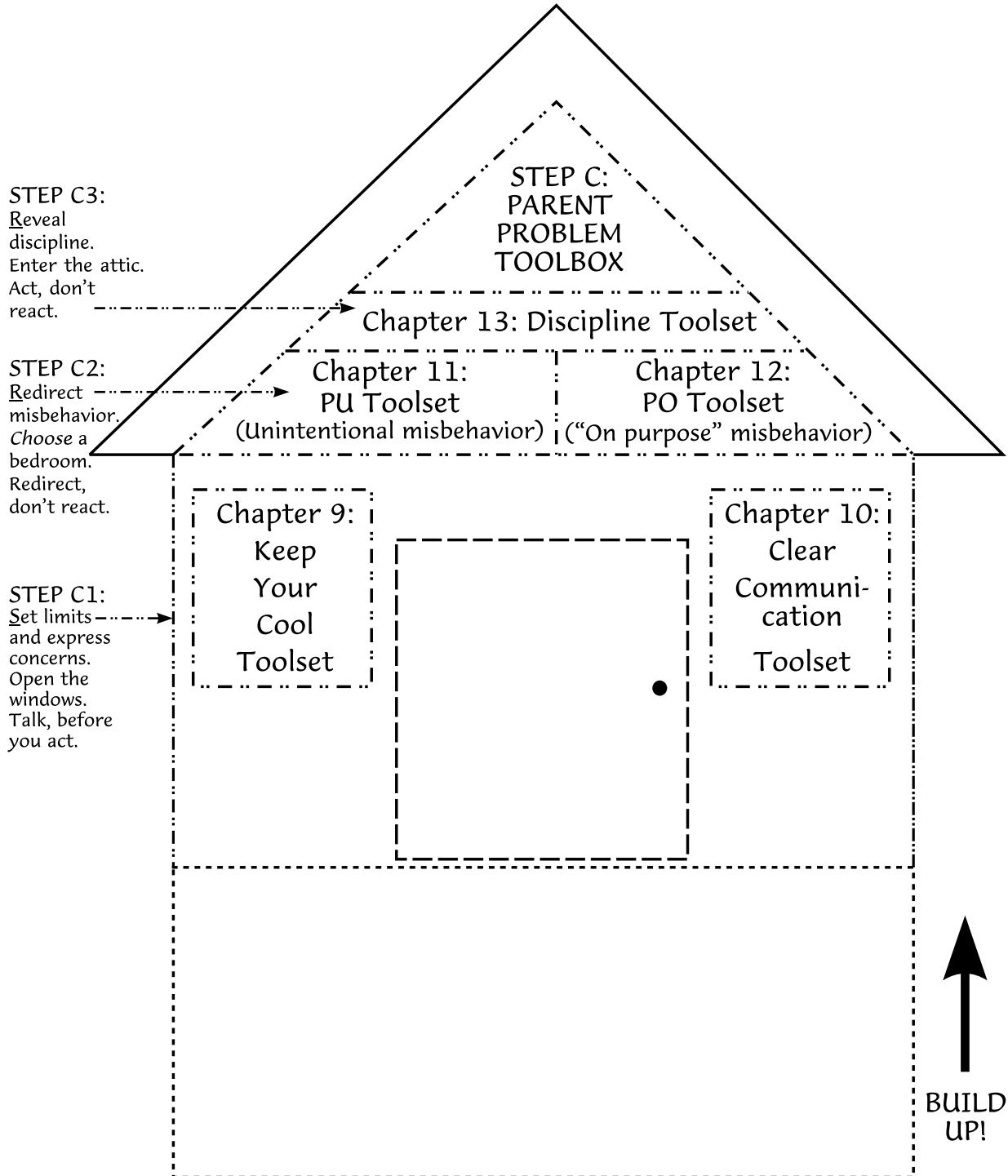


STEP C PARENT PROBLEM TOOLBOX



STEP

C PARENT PROBLEM TOOLBOX

Once we enter a house, we can open the windows to let in fresh air and light or go to a bedroom. We can even explore the attic, where we store items that we don't use every day but don't want to throw away. Each part of the interior serves a specific purpose.

The inside of the Universal Blueprint's house contains several toolsets that serve specific purposes. One window is the Keep Your Cool Toolset; we open it to release the toxic fumes of anger and let in fresh healthy feelings. The other window is the Clear Communication Toolset; it helps us communicate with others so they can see and understand our feelings and concerns more clearly. The two bedrooms contain the tools we need to redirect problem behavior; the PU Toolset responds to unintentional misbehavior and the PO Toolset redirects misbehavior that seems to be on purpose. Finally, the attic contains the Discipline Toolset; the tools we don't use very often but can't throw away. When we have a problem, we walk up the stairs (Prevention Toolbox), open the door (Child Problem Toolbox), and come into the house (Parent Problem Toolbox). We walk step-by-step through the house to find all the tools we need to resolve our part of the problem.

IN THIS SECTION

Step C: Parent Problem Toolbox. The last three steps of the PASRR formula are within this toolbox.

Step C1: **S**et limits and express your feelings or concerns.

- Chapter 9, “Keep Your Cool Toolset,” teaches us healthy anger and stress management skills that we can also teach to our children.
- Chapter 10, “Clear Communication Toolset,” teaches us assertive, respectful, effective verbal responses. When children misbehave, we take the next step.

Step C2: **R**edirect misbehavior.

- Chapter 11, “PU Toolset” (**P**arent problem, **U**nintentional misbehavior), details the differences between PU and PO behavior and the options we have to redirect PU behavior.
- Chapter 12, “PO Toolset” (**P**arent problem, **O**n purpose misbehavior), teaches us how to identify the specific purpose behind PO behavior and which tools can prevent or stop it.

Step C3: **R**eveal discipline.

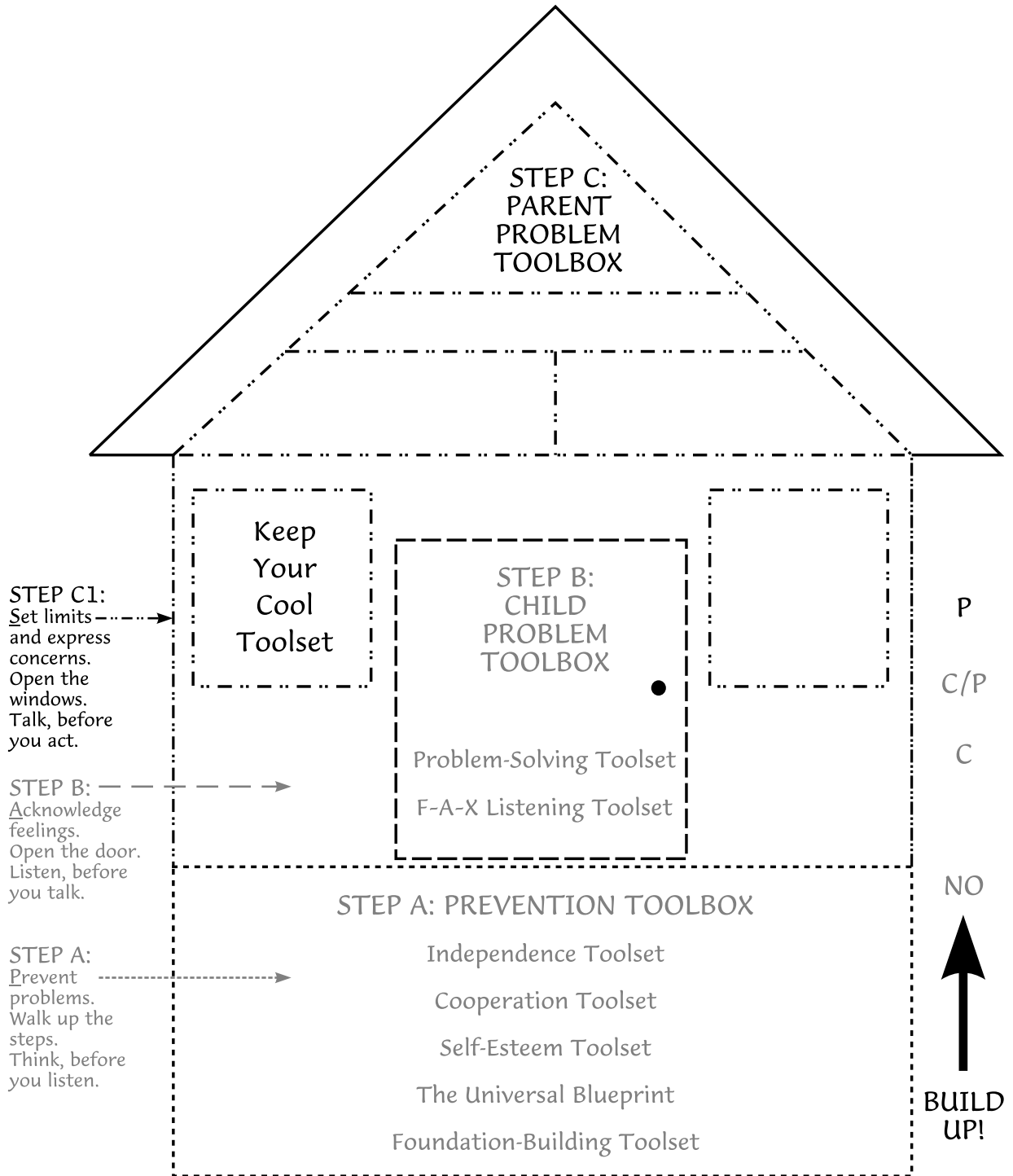
- Chapter 13, “Discipline Toolset,” teaches us the difference between punishment and discipline, the four important parts of effective discipline, and the options available to us.

WHEN TO USE THE PARENT PROBLEM TOOLBOX

We *only* use the Parent Problem Toolbox when *we* have a concern or problem. When problems involve *any* of the SHARP RV issues (safety, health, appropriateness, rights, property, rules, or values), we use the Parent Problem Toolbox to plan our verbal response and any action needed. As with all the other tools in this book, we can use the Parent Problem Toolbox in adult relationships, too.

CHAPTER 9

PARENT PROBLEM TOOLBOX



CHAPTER

9 KEEP YOUR COOL TOOLSET

Most houses have windows that provide fresh air and sunlight. A house without windows is a dark and dreary place. It is hard to see where we are, where we're going, and what we're doing. Windows also let out extra heat and toxic fumes that can build up inside. Without ventilation, these poisons can cause discomfort, illness, or even death.

People need a different kind of light—a clear vision of what's going on inside us. We need to see clearly what we are feeling, what we are doing, and where we are going. Without this sense of direction, we bump into obstacles and become lost. We also need a way to rid our bodies of toxic emotions. When there are no healthy outlets for angry emotions, the chemicals and energy they produce can bring emotional or physical discomfort, illness, or even death. We need to learn how to control our bodies and minds so we can release chronic anger and stress in healthy ways.

IN THIS CHAPTER

When dealing with a problem, we control our anger first, so we can keep our logic on-line and respond helpfully. This chapter encourages us to consider seven important ideas:

1. Anger is a natural human emotion—but there are healthy and unhealthy ways to express it.
2. Events and other people do not *cause* our anger and stress. Our *beliefs* about the people and events affect our feelings and responses.
3. We can stop or control the anger cycle by *choosing* to control our reactions.
4. We can have different styles of “recharging” our energy and learn techniques, consistent with our style, that prevent and relieve stress buildups.
5. There are healthy, assertive ways to relieve the energy anger causes—verbally and physically.
6. Once we can identify someone's individual anger and stress style, we can design an individualized anger and stress management plan for ourselves and our children.
7. We can use these skills to defuse others' anger and teach children healthy stress and anger management skills.

WHEN TO USE THIS TOOLSET

It is important to use the Keep Your Cool Toolset before any of the other tools in the Parent Problem Toolbox, because anger can turn our tools into weapons—to blame or get revenge. These tactics only cause more defensiveness and rebellious behavior. As with all the tools, we can use the Keep Your Cool Toolset in *any* relationship, because we can feel angry and stressed in situations that have nothing to do with parenting.

WHAT IS ANGER?

Anger is a physical and emotional reaction to a perceived threat.

In prehistoric times, humans faced many dangerous situations (like large animals), so the body developed the ability to generate extra strength and energy to stay and fight or quickly escape the danger.

When this fight-or-flight response kicks in, adrenaline dramatically increases, the heart pumps faster, blood pressure rises, and blood flows faster. The body releases chemicals that make muscles tense, stronger, quicker, and prepared for action (either fighting or fleeing). These chemicals also cause people to lose some of their self-control, which could cause them to wait before acting. (A dangerous thing to do when a large animal is attacking!)

As the human brain developed, people learned how to better control their environment. They had less need for fighting or fleeing and learned to use their brains to analyze and solve problems. Nevertheless, our bodies still have this automatic fight-or-flight response, which we still need in emergencies.

Busy lifestyles can frequently trigger the fight-or-flight response. Traffic jams, hectic schedules, annoying interruptions, and conflicts with others are just a few of the events that can trigger chemical reactions in the body. If the body triggers these reactions daily, the extra tension and stress chemicals can seem normal, but their damaging effects can go unnoticed—until it's too late.

If people don't use these extra chemicals for action, the buildup hurts the body. Fat, which is sent to the blood for energy to fight or run, turns into cholesterol, which causes heart disease and eventual death. Chronic anger and stress can also cause high blood pressure, headaches, stomachaches, skin irritations, digestive problems, and eating disorders. Nonphysical problems can develop, too. People can become accident-prone and their hostility, sarcasm, and critical attitudes can destroy their relationships with others. Without healthy outlets for these extra emotions and chemicals, the body acts like a car going 9000 r.p.m. in neutral—eventually, it burns out.

Healthy Anger

Conflicts are unavoidable when two or more people with individual opinions and personalities live together. *How* people handle these conflicts depends on their skills and choices.

Destructive anger destroys relationships and hurts the body.

Constructive anger uses the extra energy from conflicts to resolve them peacefully and respectfully.

Destructive anger hurts others by trying to control them, win arguments, or get revenge. It gets results because angry reactions get attention. The strength and tension in someone's face can cause fear and obedience. However, anger may lose its effectiveness over time. People build walls to protect themselves from the angry person and their own feelings and reactions. What once only took a raised voice can later take yelling, threats, or even punishment to get the same results. This cycle has serious long-term consequences on the relationship and the self-esteem of the people in it.

When parents try to control their children, they often forget to control their *own* behavior. Self-control is more difficult when we are angry. Emotions are high, which lowers our ability to think straight. To respond effectively to problems, we need to ease our physical reaction to stress *and* increase our ability to think clearly. Instead of *losing* our temper, we can *use* it in positive ways to solve the problem.

Constructive anger separates *feeling* angry from *acting* angry. It releases the energy created by anger and stress in healthy ways, using it to help resolve the conflict. It is possible to be angry *and* respond assertively and respectfully. Healthy conflict can provide opportunities to practice anger management, negotiation, and problem solving.

STEPS OF CONSTRUCTIVE ANGER/STRESS MANAGEMENT

The abc's of Constructive Anger/Stress Management

Step C1:

- a. *Become aware of your anger/stress cycle. (Keep Your Cool Toolset)*
- b. *Relieve the pressure of the anger/stress. (Keep Your Cool Toolset)*
- c. *Plan an assertive response to the problem. (Clear Communication Toolset)*

In this chapter, we learn how to do steps a and b, using the Keep Your Cool Toolset. These two steps get our emotions under control and our logic on-line. Once we have calmed down enough to think clearly about how we want to handle the situation, we can move to Step c and use the Clear Communication Toolset to formulate our response. This a-b-c process can take a split second, unless we are *extremely* angry. In that case, we control our anger long enough to respond to the problem helpfully. Then we take time to deal with our remaining feelings in a healthy way.



a. Become Aware of Your Stress/Anger Cycle ☆☆☆☆

If we understand how anger eruptions happen, we can recognize unhealthy anger, unhelpful beliefs and responses, break unhealthy reaction habits, and replace them with healthier alternatives for relieving stress and expressing anger.

WHAT REALLY CAUSES ANGER?

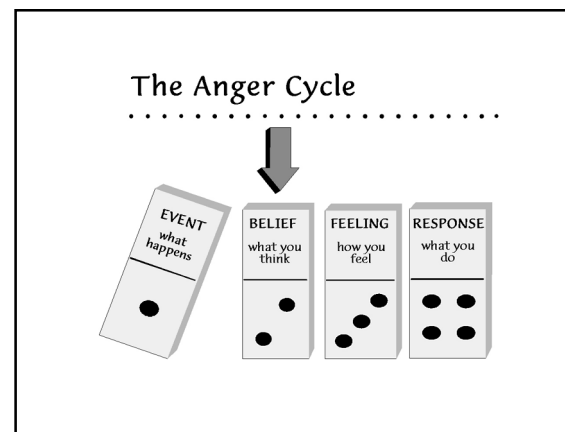
Think about a situation that sometimes makes you angry, such as a traffic jam. Most of us can remember a time when we got frustrated and angry and a time when we handled the same situation calmly. Most people mistakenly believe that other people and events *cause* their anger and stress. If this was true, our reaction would always be the same—we would *always* get angry. Since this doesn't happen, there must be another factor.

The process of getting angry can take a split-second, but if we slow down and look at what's really happening, we see there are actually four steps involved¹:

First, an event happens. Then, in our minds, we tell ourselves something—it could be accurate or inaccurate, rational or irrational, helpful or unhelpful. The feelings we experience are a direct result of what we tell ourselves—what we *believe* the event means. We actually talk ourselves into believing we *should* feel a certain emotion. Finally, based on our feelings and beliefs, we respond. We actually *choose* our feelings, but are rarely aware of this amazingly quick process.

Remember in the Child Problem Toolbox, when we learned that anger is a secondary emotion? It is important to remember this now. Anger can result from a build up of other emotions—frustration, hurt, annoyance, or harassment. If we get in touch with these *primary* emotions, we can tap into the *real* cause of our anger.

Our belief about the event causes our feelings—and our feelings influence our response. If our beliefs are inaccurate, our feelings will be irrational and so will our response. If we view the event in rational, helpful ways, we see our primary feelings more easily. This helps us respond more effectively.



Here's an example of how positive and negative beliefs can influence a parent's response to the same situation:

Negative Outcome

Event: Joey complains about the food his father serves for dinner.
 Negative Belief: The father thinks, "He is so *ungrateful!* After all the time I spent cooking dinner, *the least he could do* is show some appreciation. If *I* had ever complained about food *when I was a kid*, I would have gotten *no* dinner!"
 Feelings: Put out, taken advantage of, resentful, and angry.
 Response: The father calls Joey "ungrateful," lectures him about starving kids in Africa, and tells him "when I was a kid . . ." stories. The father sends Joey to bed without dinner, then stewes about it through the rest of the meal. He has indigestion all evening and blames Joey for making him sick.

Positive Outcome

Event: Joey complains about the food his father serves for dinner.
 Positive Belief: The father thinks, "*I wish* he wouldn't complain after I've taken the time to cook a meal. *I'd like* him to appreciate my efforts, even if he doesn't like it. *I can* use this to *teach* Joey about good manners."
 Feeling: Unappreciated, offended by impolite comment, motivated to prevent similar behavior in the future.
 Response: The father says, "People don't like it when others criticize their cooking. It hurts their feelings, especially since they made the time and effort to cook something. We don't have to like what people fix, but we can still be polite to the cook. We can take small servings and say 'no, thank you' to more."

As you can see, the key step in anger control is how we choose to interpret events. That is where the chain reaction *really* starts.

CHOOSE YOUR BELIEFS

If we can identify and change our self-talk, we can better manage our anger. When we *choose* our beliefs, we put things in perspective. We get in touch with our primary, rational feelings, instead of getting hooked into the anger trap.

Unhelpful beliefs:

- *Use absolute words*, such as *should*, *must*, *have to*, *need*, *always*, and *never*. These words lock us into all-or-nothing thinking which keeps us from thinking about other perspectives, feelings, and responses.
- *Make assumptions* about the other person's motives or how people are *supposed* to feel and act in similar situations.
- *Judge others' feelings/beliefs* as wrong or take their comments and actions personally.

Helpful, assertive beliefs:

- *Use flexible, positive words* such as, *I can*, *I choose*, *I wish*, *I hope*, *I don't like*, and *I would prefer*.
- *Consider other points of view*.
- *Are objective* and nonjudgmental.
- *Focus on solutions*, rather than blame.

Since our choice of beliefs directly affects our feelings and response, let's look at the four styles of anger and the beliefs behind each style. People usually develop these beliefs in childhood when they see and hear others expressing anger.

STYLES OF ANGER

Passive anger is unexpressed. People stuff their anger or only hint at it.

Aggressive anger explodes and hurts people (physically or emotionally).

Passive-Aggressive anger hurts others (aggressive) in passive ways.

Assertive anger is healthy and honest without hurting others.

Passive Anger

Passive anger, or stuffing feelings, is usually the result of believing that anger is bad. It can have one or more of the following beliefs:

- If I express my anger, I might upset the other person and then that person won't like me anymore.
- Expressing anger is childish and bad. I must always be in control of myself.
- I must be a perfect parent—who is always calm, cool, and collected.
- I must avoid conflict at all cost. To do this, I must avoid expressing my feelings, or ignore what is happening, even if others violate my rights.

People who stuff their anger were often taught as children that anger is an unacceptable emotion. If they expressed anger, they got sent to bed or to a corner. This taught them to not show their anger. The anger, however, didn't just disappear. They learned ways to deny and avoid their feelings or cover them up with other thoughts, feelings, and actions. Some people turn their anger inward, which can lead to harmful habits such as drug or alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression, sleep disorders, and physical illnesses. Instead of trying to stuff the anger altogether, these people can learn to express it in nondestructive ways.

Aggressive Anger

Aggressive anger explodes at targets. It is the result of believing that other people *make* us angry so they should be punished for upsetting us. Aggressive people control their anger by trying to control the *person* they blame for causing the anger. Aggressive anger can have one or more of the following beliefs:

- People who hurt me should be punished and controlled. It's their fault I'm angry. If they are wrong or treat me unfairly, I must do something to make them stop or change.
- I am the boss and my children must not forget that.
- If my children do not act properly at all times, they're bad and should be punished for making me look bad.

People who act out their anger aggressively often feel relief after the outburst, but those on the receiving end usually feel hurt or scared. People who express their anger aggressively usually pass on blame to others. This eases their load and helps them avoid responsibility. "It's not *my* fault!" Sometimes they hold their anger until they can find a target. Children, who naturally misbehave at times, are often targets for a parent's blame. Parents who save their anger, waiting for a target, often erupt when their children misbehave and overreact to the child's misbehavior. They let out not only their valid concerns, but also their stored up anger and blame from previous events.

Passive-Aggressive Anger

Passive-aggressive anger is a less obvious form of aggression. The most common form is to outwardly deny anger, but do hurtful things that only angry people would do. A few examples are the silent treatment, conveniently forgetting, or ignoring. Defiant compliance is obeying a command in a hurtful way to get revenge. (For example, cutting the grass *and* all the flower beds.) Passive-aggressive anger can also be outwardly passive and inwardly aggressive, as in putting ourselves down to others. Passive-aggressive anger can have any of the beliefs listed so far *and* any of the following beliefs:

- If my children really loved me, they would want to please me. I shouldn't have to ask them.
- I am sacrificing the best years of my life for my children. They should show more gratitude.
- I can't help how I feel and act. It's all because of my past. It's their (the event's) fault.
- I don't want anyone to know I'm angry, but I've got to say or do something to get revenge on this person for hurting me.

Assertive Anger

Assertive anger expresses emotions honestly without hurting our self or others in the process. It appropriately expresses feelings after deciding how to best express the anger. Assertive anger tries to fix the problem, not fix the blame. It can have one or more of the following beliefs:

- While things might happen or people might do things I don't like, they don't *make* me angry. I have a *choice* about my feelings and whether to be angry.
- I can choose my beliefs and find healthy ways to express my feelings and needs.
- I can focus on win/win solutions, instead of blaming or trying to change others.

REWRITING UNHELPFUL BELIEF STATEMENTS	
<i>Change</i>	<i>To</i>
I need	I want
I have to	I'd like to
I should <i>or</i> I must	I choose
They should	I wish they would
I must <i>or</i> I want	I would prefer
I can't	I can
This must happen	I wish <i>or</i> I'd like this to happen
I expect	I hope

PUT THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

When we stop to examine our beliefs, we become aware of our primary feelings. But we can still get hooked into looking at the conflict from our personal, biased view. To grasp and maintain an objective perspective, try asking the following questions:

1. **Is this a situation I can change?** Even if we are only two percent of the problem, we can change that two percent. If the situation is out of our control, we may need to adjust to the situation and accept it. To do this we can step over it or find some humor in it (which is usually best in these situations). We may need to shift our focus from resisting what is happening to planning how we can live with it.

A Personal Story. *When I worked at a runaway shelter, there were frequently parents who were unwilling to change in order to resolve the problems with their teens. There wasn't any blatant abuse or neglect (so removal from the home was not an option), but it was clearly difficult for these teens to get along with their parents. In these situations, our case plans often focused on helping the teens accept that their parents might not change and find a way to love their parents in spite of their behavior. We'd help the teens plan ways to live in their home environment, until they turned 18. Beyond independent living skills, we taught them how to choose helpful attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that might help them do their part to improve the family, whether their parents ever met them halfway.*

2. **How important is this?** Is this issue really important in the scheme of life? Is it worth getting upset over? Is a higher principle involved? Is serious danger present? If we can't answer yes to one of these questions, we've probably lost our perspective and our anger is causing us to blow things out of proportion.

If we weigh the importance of the problem against the consequences of our anger to the person and our relationship, we can pick our battles carefully. Major issues usually involve physical, emotional, or moral danger: serious SHARP RV issues. Minor issues are usually a matter of preference: food, clothing, hair styles, and housecleaning habits. We can still address these problems, but not make the *issue* more important than our relationship or inner peace.

For example, if children refuse to use safety gear (such as a bicycle helmet or car seat), we need to stand our ground more firmly than if children refuse to bathe, but are not filthy. The cost of arguing about safety gear is worth the benefit; it could save their lives. The cost of forcing a bath, which could increase power struggles, damage the relationship, or create a hatred for baths, is not worth the benefit; children are more clean than they already were.

If we experience more than two or three unhealthy anger episodes per day, our anger could be greatly affecting our body or relationships. And if more than a fourth of our angry events are not worth the cost, we are probably having too many of them.

3. **Is there another way to solve this problem besides getting angry?** What are our goals? Are we trying to win or make someone lose? Are we really interested in solving the problem with a win/win solution? If we aren't ready to let go of our anger, we go to Step b, Relieving the Pressure of Anger/Stress, before we respond. Once we get the anger out of our system, we can do something constructive to solve the problem. If we *are* ready to respond, we skip the next step and go to Step c, Plan an Assertive Response (Clear Communication Toolset).

b. Relieve the Pressure of the Anger/Stress

Each of us has a volcano inside us that can angrily erupt. While it may seem our volcano could erupt for many reasons, there are two basic types of eruptions.

There are two types of anger eruptions:

- **Smoldering embers** are slow buildups of stressful situations that eventually spill over or erupt.
- **Flash fires** are caused by events that push an emotional trigger button that sets off a sudden eruption.

Whether we are experiencing a stress overload or a trigger-button eruption, taking a time-out is recommended. Time-outs can be as short as ten seconds or last an hour. It depends on how much time we need and how much time we can reasonably take. Unless we are dealing with a life or death situation, we can usually spare three to five minutes. While we may want more time, we can learn to squeeze a half an hour of relaxation into five minutes. This helps us hang on until we can take a longer time-out later.

During our time-out, we can either emotionally withdraw or physically remove ourselves until we regain control. (When children are very young, we need to make sure they will be safe and occupied while we are gone or stay with them and tune out distractions we can't avoid.) If the timing or circumstances of a situation don't allow us to take an immediate time-out, we can give a quick, controlled, effective response and disengage. Once we calm down, we can resolve the problem further.

SMOLDERING EMBERS NEED STRESS MANAGEMENT

Smoldering embers are a result of built-up stress. Any change, whether positive (the birth of a baby) or negative (a divorce) can be stressful. Even everyday irritations (a baby's constant crying) and frustrations (a curious toddler) can cause stress to build. Children occasionally do things that are annoying, irritating, and even infuriating. It's part of the parenting territory. There are certain stages of development that will test our patience more than others. While most parents have felt like hurting their child at some time, *acting* on that feeling is totally off limits!

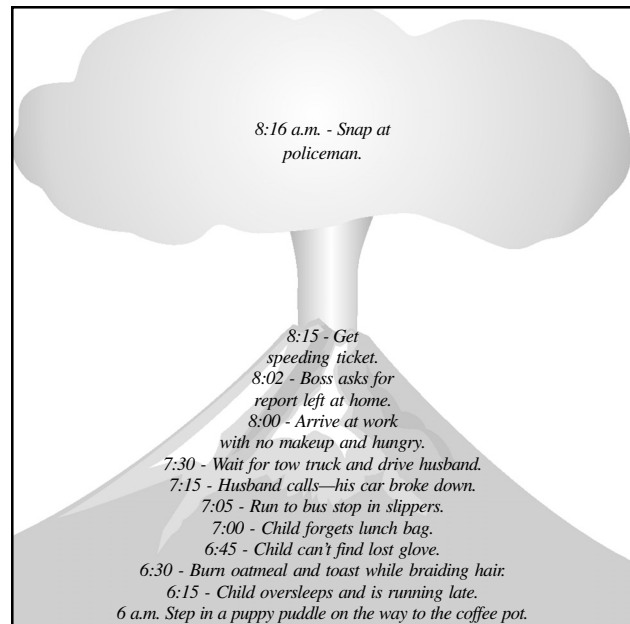
Sometimes our stress has nothing to do with our children, such as marital or work conflicts. We can explain to our children that we're dealing with a problem (we don't have to go into details) that has made us angry, sad, or frustrated. Reassure them that we are *not* upset with them. If we say nothing, children pick up on our stress, which increases *their* stress level. As children feel more stressed, they are more likely to misbehave. As their misbehavior increases, our stress increases and we are more likely to blow our tops. See the vicious cycle?

Smoldering embers build when we handle several small or big problems well, but don't take the time to calm down and regroup. As a result, our stress level increases with each new event. Soon, our overall stress level increases so much that even a small irritation can trigger our wrath—the straw that breaks the camel's back.

The real key to managing stress overloads is to prevent them. Our bodies send us signals, such as shaky hands, rapid and shallow breathing, sweating, or knots in the stomach or neck. We can become more aware of our body signals and take time for a calming activity (even ten seconds) to prevent a stress overflow.

There are several common stress management techniques. Some of these calming activities can be done any time, anywhere. Others require some planning:

Example of Stress Overload Eruption



- **Deep breathing** is the simplest relaxation technique. It involves paying attention to how and *where* we are breathing. We breathe shallowly from the upper chest when we are stressed. Deep breaths come from the diaphragm (which makes the stomach expand) and release tension. When we take a breath, we want to hold it for several seconds. When we exhale, we imagine blowing out all our tension or anger. When we realize we are breathing quickly and shallow, we remind ourselves to breathe more, talk less.
- **Muscle relaxation** is helpful for tense muscles. Simply start at the toes and work up to the head. With each deep breath, we focus full attention on a muscle group—toes, then ankles, calves, knees, thighs, and so on. As we exhale, we imagine all the tension flowing out, like melting wax. Tension from the lower body (below the chest) flows out the toes and tension from the upper body flows out the fingertips. Our goal is to become as relaxed as a rag doll. Sometimes we don't realize how tense our muscles are until we do this exercise.
- **Meditation** helps us let go of all thoughts and tension. We choose a word or phrase and focus our attention on it. We repeat the word or phrase in a slow, rhythmic way, either mentally or out loud. As distracting thoughts come to mind, we simply refocus on the word or phrase and our breathing. We allow the distracting thought to pass by, like a floating cloud, instead of holding on to it.
- **Prayer** is a powerful relaxation technique. Whatever our religion, contacting the universal consciousness or our higher power brings inner strength and serenity. There are many books and resources, such as prayer groups, which help us learn to pray and share the insights we gain from it. Learn to pray? Yes. A common mistake people make when praying is to plead or fill their prayer time talking *to* God. This helps us *share* a concern—but we must truly and completely *release* it and trust in God's power to solve it. More powerful than talking to God is the ability to *listen* to the thoughts and images we receive when the mind is quiet. In this respect, prayer is similar to meditation. Our focus can be a word like God, peace, or love, a scripture, or any other word or image that fits our religious beliefs.
- **Visual imagery** uses our imagination to picture a scene that is relaxing or gives us strength. To calm down, we can imagine we are at the beach, mountains, a waterfall, or any other relaxing scene. A scene from nature is usually best, and it is important to imagine all five senses in the scene—what does it look, sound, smell, taste, and feel like? (There are audio tapes that guide listeners through a calming scene with relaxing suggestions or simply provide nature sounds to set the mood.) We can also use visualization to see ourselves calmly and assertively handling an upsetting situation. We mentally rehearse the conversation several times, until we feel comfortable enough to try the approach.

Most people find it difficult to *make* time for relaxation. If we think about how much time we spend feeling upset, tense, or worried, we can choose, instead, to use that time and energy relaxing. The benefits of stress management have been repeatedly proven scientifically: the body releases chemicals that can slow or stop heart disease; regulate sleeping, eating, and digestion; increase creativity, work productivity, and brain power; improve interpersonal relationships; and even slow down or reverse aging.

***A Personal Story.** Stress management is one area where I have a hard time practicing what I preach. Over ten years ago, when I should have been on a maternity break, I continued volunteering nearly 40 hours a week for the nonprofit organization I had started. A serious conflict arose with a person with whom I had to work very closely. This person refused to resolve the problem with me directly and wouldn't accept mediation. The board of directors was unwilling to enforce the conflict-resolution mandates in the bylaws, so I took a leave of absence. Six months later, nothing had changed, so I resigned.*

*My body couldn't handle the ongoing, intense stress of this unresolved conflict. My adrenaline had been so high for so long, it could no longer regulate itself and I developed debilitating physical symptoms. Stress management was the key to regaining and maintaining my health, but I had great difficulty learning the techniques. Visualization was difficult and I was easily distracted by thoughts of more purposeful activities I could be doing. I finally took a meditation class and completely relaxed for the first time in years. I realized that relaxation **was** a purposeful activity. I also promised myself that I would never again allow any person or event to rob me of my inner peace. **Nothing** is worth sacrificing my health.*



Recharge Styles ☆☆☆☆

When we have too much energy or too little, we need a “recharge.” What relaxes or stimulates one person does not necessarily help others, because there are two styles of recharging one’s energy supply: internal and external.

Internal rechargers get their energy from within. They need to be alone regularly to regain control or recharge their energy supply or they get irritable. When physical isolation isn’t possible, they might tune out for a short time. They are often misunderstood and pressured to be a part of groups when they need time alone. Traditional stress management techniques usually work well for them.

When internal rechargers feel stressed or angry, they need to ask people for space, instead of pushing them away or ignoring them. They need to avoid interruptions when working and take time to think before responding to requests or problems.

Internal rechargers can stop one block from home after work and recharge before going home to their children. If they are stay-at-home parents, they can use nap times or quiet play times to recharge—not to do chores or other work. Otherwise, they’ll run out of energy by the bewitching hour—dinner time. If a spouse is an internal recharger, we can give the person about 15 minutes to unwind, before demanding time or attention. If 15 minutes is not enough, negotiate an agreement. For example, agree to immediately give the person some time alone if the person agrees to then spend time with you and/or the children.

If you are an internal recharger, try some of the following activities during your down time:

INTERNAL RECHARGE ACTIVITIES

- Sing, hum, or whistle.
- Listen to music on headphones.
- Write a poem or song.
- Just sit there.
- Paint a picture.
- Write a letter or in a journal.
- Do a crossword puzzle.
- Wake up before anyone else.
- Daydream.
- Curl up by the fire and read a book.
- Take a rainy-day nap.
- Enjoy a cool glass of juice or warm cup of decaffeinated anything.
- Soak in bubbles, a whirlpool, or sauna.
- Enjoy the beauty and sounds of nature: clouds, sunset, birds, wind, rain.

External rechargers draw their energy from the world around them. They need to interact with other people or activities to get energy, calm down, or work through problems. Without opportunities to talk with others, they get cranky and stir crazy. They usually have a harder time learning the traditional stress management techniques.

External rechargers who work outside the home may not feel as drained at the end of the day as an internal recharger does. If they are stay-at-home parents, they are often chomping at the bit for a spouse to come home so they can interact with an adult. If the spouse is an internal recharger, this can cause a conflict in needs upon his (or her) arrival. One person cannot meet all our recharge needs, so external rechargers need to plan outings with other adults.

External rechargers can get energy from anyone or any *thing* outside themselves, not just a spouse or close friend. They can make time each day (or weekly, at the least) to do one or more of the following external-recharge activities:

EXTERNAL RECHARGE ACTIVITIES

- Attend a support group, class, or workshop.
- Participate in a team/group sport.
- Watch children play or play with them.
- Do something adventurous now and then (skydiving, bungee jumping).
- Hug someone.
- Pet an animal.
- Get a back rub.
- Have a picnic.
- Attend an athletic event.
- Rock a sleeping baby.
- Talk to another external recharger.

Internal/External (Combination) Rechargers can get their energy from within or from others, depending on their activities that day and what they need to reach a centered balance.

***A Personal Story.** When Chris was born, I resigned my full-time job to be home full time with him. I was used to daily interaction with many people. Now I was home alone with a child who couldn't talk. I was starved for adult companionship and found few resources for meeting others during the day. It was difficult, financially and emotionally, to be a full-time mother, but my heart had reasons to stay home that were stronger than my need to socialize. Then, I thought of a compromise. I started a local discussion group for stay-at-home parents. Eight years later, when I returned to part-time work, the group was a nonprofit organization with almost 100 members.*

During my eight years as an at-home mother, I was an external recharge person. When my husband came home, I had difficulty waiting for him to unwind before I rattled on about my day. Now, I am usually an internal recharger. I teach parenting classes almost every day (or evening) and it takes a lot of energy to discuss and meet everyone's needs. My husband has time to himself while I'm gone, so when I come home, he wants to talk about his work day or a TV show he's watching. I try hard to listen to his stories and share a little about my day, but it's often a short summary. Usually, I just want to relax without talking for a while. It's ironic that we both have opposite recharge styles from what we had years ago.

There are some recharge activities that serve both needs, depending on whether we do them by ourselves (internal) or with someone else (external). Some can be internal *and* external, because the solitary activity involves an energy source outside us.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL (COMBINATION) RECHARGE ACTIVITIES

- Go for a walk.
- Watch a thunderstorm.
- Look at the stars, moon, sunrise.
- Listen to night sounds.
- See a play, movie, or concert.
- Climb a tree.
- Window-shop.
- Search for four-leaf clovers.
- Go sailing/paddle-boating.
- Roast marshmallows.
- Do a hobby.
- Look at old photos.
- Watch a comedy or read a funny book and laugh.
- Go for a swim.
- Visit a park or forest.

These lists of recharge activities are just ideas to get you started. Some might not fit your schedule, needs, or interests. There is no right or wrong recharge style; both serve a healthy purpose. They are part of a person's biology and personality makeup. We need to be sensitive to others' needs for time alone or interaction with others. This includes our children.

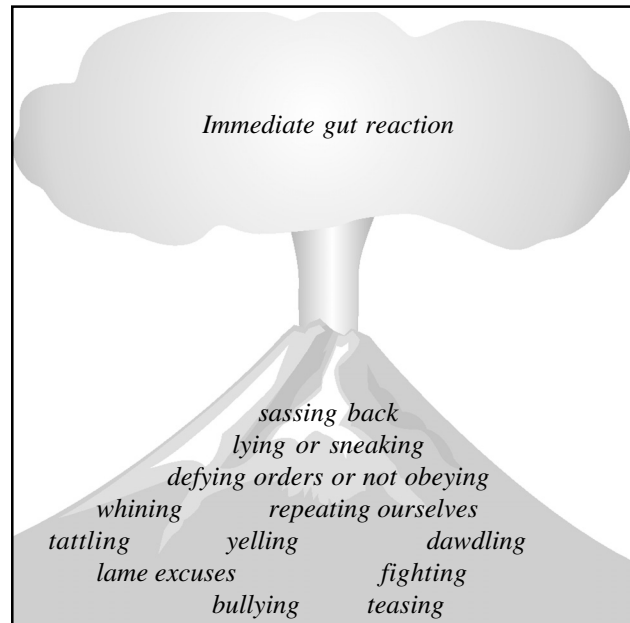
FLASH FIRES NEED ERUPTION OUTLETS

Flash fires are sudden explosions that can result from single events that push our emotional trigger buttons. Trigger buttons are reactions that were usually programmed at an early age from an upsetting memory. When a similar event occurs, it triggers a quick, extreme emotional reaction.

***A Personal Story.** Being rushed in the morning and morning arguments were two of my trigger buttons. As a child, I was always running late in the morning. If someone nagged or pushed me to hurry, I'd get a big knot in my stomach. My brother and I would also fight and argue almost every morning before school. My days often started out on the wrong foot and I'd cry as I walked to school. For years, when someone rushed me or picked an argument in the morning, it would spark an emotional, tense, irritated reaction from me. These events triggered memories and childish reactions that, at the time, were the only way I knew how to cope with the situation.*

Children do not *program* their parents' buttons, they simply discover them! When children are discouraged, frustrated or hurt, they can use these buttons to serve a purpose. This is PO behavior, a **P**arent problem with **O**n purpose misbehavior. If children can push their parents' buttons, they can get their parents' attention, cause the parents to lose control (which proves the *child* is in control), or get revenge. Although trigger buttons seem to *make* us lose control, we are really the only ones who can control them. We can re-program our buttons and *plan* how we react to similar situations in the future.

Common Trigger Buttons



There are three basic steps in re-programming trigger buttons:

- i. We become aware of the behaviors and situations that set us off.
- ii. Later, when we aren't upset, we examine the steps in our anger cycle, especially how our beliefs are contributing to our feelings and actions. We then *plan* how we *want* to respond to these situations, choosing more helpful beliefs and responses.
- iii. The next time a similar situation occurs (and it probably will), we briefly pause to relieve the pressure of our anger or stress. We follow through with our planned response, instead of emotionally reacting.

At first, this process simply increases the time we pause between the event and our response. As we use our new response more often, it becomes more comfortable and comes to mind more quickly. After a few times, we have de-programmed our trigger button and replaced it with a more helpful response.



Types of Anger Energy

Despite all our efforts to avoid stress and anger, there will still be times we erupt. The energy we experience can be verbal, physical, or both. Our ultimate goal is to replace any automatic, unhealthy reactions with healthier outlets for our anger energy. To do this, we need to first change *how* we release the anger, while we work on the future goal of not getting angry as often.

Verbal anger energy most often comes out as yelling, screaming, or saying something we later regret. If this is our tendency, our goal is to express our feelings in respectful and assertive ways. Simply saying nothing keeps our anger energy inside. Without an outlet, it does not go away. When we feel like yelling or saying something in anger that we might later regret, we need to bite our tongues and take a time-out. We release the anger energy by expressing ourselves through activities like those listed below. Once we've released the anger energy, we can plan a constructive way to express our feelings or resolve the problem using the Universal Blueprint.

HEALTHY VERBAL ANGER ENERGY OUTLETS

- Yell, scream or cry into a pillow.
- Say "stop" to yourself or out loud.
- Draw a picture of how you feel.
- Sing loudly, sing opera, or yodel.
- Growl (not *at* anyone).
- Blow up a balloon and set it loose.
- Go into a room alone, close the door, and let it all out.
- Talk to someone you know will be supportive.
- List the positive qualities of the other person in the conflict.
- Carry on an imaginary conversation with the person with whom you're upset.
- Write a letter or in a journal.

Physical anger energy that builds up during anger is very real and overwhelming for some people. It *must* come out—*somehow*. It's important for parents to use and teach healthy physical outlets for anger energy. Do not encourage children to hit pillows, etc. as research shows this *increases* the likelihood of children behaving aggressively in the future. Instead, use or suggest any of the following activities:

HEALTHY PHYSICAL ANGER ENERGY OUTLETS

- Knead and punch dough.
- Rake leaves, then jump in them.
- Play a sport.
- Polish your shoes.
- Clean a closet or dresser drawer.
- Have a pillow fight.
- Mop, vacuum, or dust.
- Skip rope.
- Throw away something you don't like.
- Do a job you've been putting off.
- Pound out a dent.
- Rearrange a room.
- Clean out the garage.
- Play kick the can.
- Distract yourself in mindless activity.
- Climb a hill.
- Do a hobby.
- Do an angry dance. (Stomp, jump, flail your arms. There are no directions, each person has a unique dance style.)
- Take a walk. (Stroll if you're stressed. Walk briskly if you're angry.)

Whenever possible, go outside to release physical anger energy. Doing some of these activities inside can make the energy feel like it's trapped and bouncing off the walls.

Physical and verbal (combination) anger energy can surge at the same time. When it does, we can combine some of the activities listed above, or try some of the following activities:

HEALTHY VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ANGER ENERGY OUTLETS

- Exercise, blowing out air powerfully (or grunting) when you exhale.
- Blow into a paper bag or balloon then pop it.
- Throw towels into a bathtub (or rolled-up socks into a laundry basket) and grunt (or mumble what you feel like saying to the person you're angry with).
- Throw marshmallows into a sink with a karate yell as you throw.
- Write your feelings. Don't censor yourself. Write whatever comes to your mind. Rip up the letter, as a symbolic way to let go of the feelings and problem.

We may feel silly doing some of these activities, but if we are alone, who cares! It's better to get the anger out in a silly way than to destroy a relationship or hurt someone. Just pick those activities you feel comfortable doing.

***A Personal Story.** My parents were always nurturing, calm, and skilled, even when they were upset. I experienced emotions strongly, but didn't learn healthy ways to release or express them or the energy they caused. Instead, I would stuff my feelings until I exploded. When my children were young, this scared all of us and I was afraid that even I could be abusive. I had to work very hard to learn how to express emotions appropriately, before I reach my boiling point. I can still lose it if I don't walk away soon enough.*

When Amber was about three, we were singing silly songs while I made a snack. I bent down, put my face right in front of hers, and made a goofy face while I sang. In her glee, she clapped my cheeks—so hard it left slap marks on my cheeks. This immediately triggered a button from my childhood memories with my brother and I almost smacked her back. I caught myself as my hand was starting to rise. I backed up against the kitchen counter and leaned on my hands. Tears came to my eyes as the stinging in my cheeks increased. I was ready to yell at her, so I literally bit my tongue. Amber had a shocked look on her face. She didn't mean to hurt me and was just realizing she had. I couldn't control myself much longer and ran out of the room.

I went to my room and cried, but was worried about leaving Amber alone, so I quickly returned. She was crying—she felt so bad that she had hurt me. I was still furious, though, and started to yell at her for crying! “I’m the one who’s hurt!” I stopped myself, bit my tongue, and walked away again. I stayed in my room longer, taking deep breaths, trying to calm down. If I returned to the kitchen too soon, I wasn’t sure I could control myself. That risk was greater than leaving Amber alone for two minutes. I finally returned when I had calmed down enough to comfort her. I gave her a hug and told her I knew she didn’t mean to hurt me. I apologized for yelling at her and told her when I got that angry and left it was because I didn’t want to say or do anything mean.

DEVELOP A PERSONALIZED MANAGEMENT PLAN ☆☆☆☆

Once we identify whether we experience verbal or physical anger energy (or both) and need either internal or external recharging, we can plan an individualized anger/stress management plan. If we mix each style of energy and recharging, we have six possible combinations. Here is just one example of what we could do when we are angry or stressed, based on each style combination:

POSSIBLE STYLE COMBINATION PLANS	Internal recharger	External recharger
Verbal anger energy	V/I. Go to your room and yell, write, or draw.	V/E. Call a friend who will be supportive and talk.
Physical anger energy	P/I. Go for a walk/jog by yourself or clean.	P/E. Exercise outside or with others.
Verbal/Physical anger energy	VP/I. Pull weeds and grunt with each pull.	VP/E. Exercise with a friend/group where you can talk, yell, or cheer.

Despite the type of anger energy we experience, there are four acts that anyone can use to regain control. They are the all-time best strategies for managing stress and anger, and each has been proven to have helpful biological benefits.

- **Talk to someone.** When people talk to each other, it reduces their blood pressure. Long-term studies have shown that people with a companion (whether it was a pet or friend), have better long-term health. Those without a companion tend to die younger, even when the presence of disease wasn’t apparent.
- **Talk yourself through the anger.** This is internal conversation encouraging ourselves to effectively handle the situation. We can talk ourselves through the various steps of anger control. “Okay, just hold on a second. Count to ten. Take a deep breath. Calm down. That’s better. Now, what is it I want to do? I know I can handle this. Take it slow. Remember to listen to what the other person is saying. Breath more, talk less. Think before you speak.” If we say these comments aloud, we can openly model healthy anger management for our children.
- **Forgiveness** is more than an ethical principle. It stimulates a release of chemicals that can counteract the toxic chemicals released by anger. Forgiveness is easier said than done. It begins by not taking events and comments personally. Someone may be having a bad day or they haven’t learned to control their anger. Just because *they* aren’t at peace doesn’t mean *we* have to give up our inner peace. We can stop debating who is most at fault and take responsibility for our part. This helps others admit to their part of the problem. We can forgive others whether they admit it or change. It is especially important for us to model forgiveness to our children, although children usually model greater unconditional forgiveness than adults. We can learn a lot from them!

- **Exercise** is widely known to release muscle tension and built-up toxins in the body, while toning the body for total health. Exercise is helpful when we are not yet stressed, already stressed, or ready to explode. It is a healthy way to express the flight or fight response. Internal rechargers can exercise alone, external rechargers can exercise with others.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

If we keep doing what we've always done, we'll keep getting what we've always got. To change the effects of our anger, the first step is to make a conscious commitment to change or improve our current anger management skills. Change involves practicing new behaviors that can seem awkward or silly, at first. It also might challenge beliefs we've held since childhood. Awareness is the first step in changing any habit. Once we are *aware* of our unhelpful beliefs, we can *choose* healthier beliefs, feelings, and responses. Below is a list of unhelpful beliefs that can block our willingness to change.

RESISTANT BELIEFS	MOTIVATING BELIEFS
I can't change. It's just the way I am.	Just because I have always been that way, doesn't mean I can't change. It's my choice.
Something (or someone) makes me do that.	Things happen that I can't control, but I <i>can</i> control my reaction.
I don't know why I did it; I just did.	If I 'just did it' without thinking, it is a habit—and I can change my habits.
I'd like to do that differently, but it's just too hard to change.	Change <i>can</i> be scary and difficult. But what I'm doing now is not helpful nor healthy. I can change that—now.
I've never been able to do that. I can't. (What I really mean is, I won't.)	Just because I've never done it before doesn't mean I <i>can't</i> do it. If I put my mind to it, I <i>can</i> .

DEALING WITH OTHERS' ANGER AND STRESS

Throughout this chapter, we've only focused on coping with *our* anger—which is an ongoing, lifetime process. We can use most of these same skills to deal with other people who are angry, even if their anger is not directed at us.

Teaching Children Anger Management Skills

Anger and stress management skills are not just for adults, children can learn them, too. Many parents express concerns about their children's temper, disrespectful responses, or inability to control their emotions. When trying to teach children self-control, identify their recharge and anger energy styles. Then suggest they do activities, during their timeout, that fit their styles. (We learn how to use time-outs appropriately in Chapter 13, "Discipline Toolset.")

***A Personal Story.** When Chris was a toddler, I was concerned about his aggression, especially when he was angry. There was one particular friend who tended to push his buttons and their conflicts had gotten too rough on several occasions. Before this friend came to visit, we did some problem solving. I listened to his feelings and frustrations about how the friend bothered him. Chris and I prepared a three-step plan to handle similar situations in the future. First, he would use words. If that didn't work, he would walk away. If that didn't work, he'd go to his room or ask an adult for help. We rehearsed his words and his plan.*

During the friend's next visit, the boy's mother kept talking, oblivious to her son's behavior. Soon, a conflict was brewing at the end of the yard. Knowing Chris had a plan, I simply observed from afar. I could hear Chris using words, although I couldn't tell what he said. Even from a distance, I could see Chris' face getting red, his neck veins bulging, his fists clenched. He walked away, over to the swing set. The friend followed. Chris looked around, then pushed his friend to the ground.

While the other mother tended to her son, I put my arms around Chris, who was still crying and shaking. I said, "I saw you using words! You were angry, but you used words! Then you walked away, but he followed you, didn't he?" My son nodded as he cried. "When he followed, you could have gone to your room or come to me. What happened?" He sniffled and said, "But I didn't know how to get to my room!" He was so flustered, he couldn't figure out how to get to his room from outside! It never occurred to me that we needed a backup plan for outside! I added, "Next time, just open the screen door and go inside the house. Okay?"

Despite the pushing, I was impressed that Chris gave his new skills a valiant try. Our problem-solving session was a major turnaround in his ability to resolve peer conflicts without aggression. Nature had its own timetable and progress was slow. But I was consistent and as he matured, the anger/stress management skills began working—for both of us. By the time he went to preschool, I realized he had progressed from below average in his anger skills to above average. This really reinforced, in my mind, the value of these skills—not just for adults, but for children, too.

Many parents complain about their children's temper tantrums. It's helpful to understand that tantrums are natural and healthy for young children. They provide a nonverbal way of getting their anger energy out, until they become more verbal and learn better anger management skills. Obviously, if they don't learn healthier ways to express their anger, their tantrums continue, in different ways at different ages. (See Chapter 3, "The Universal Blueprint," for the different types of tantrums and possible responses.)

When children are upset, we want to avoid getting hooked by the way they express it. Instead, we can use the Child Problem Toolbox to learn what's really going on and help them deal with their emotions. We can suggest activities (drawing, painting, clay, etc.) that help them express emotions they cannot verbalize or release their anger energy. The key phrase to use in this situation is, "*Show me* how you feel." The Problem-Solving Toolset is helpful, not only to plan an anger management program for our children, but to explore possible solutions to their problems.

Sometimes our children's anger is a problem for *us*, when it violates our rights, rules, or involves safety. We may need to temporarily move into the Parent Problem Toolbox to set limits and encourage our children to take a self-control time-out.

When we pause to keep our cool, our silence can have a surprising effect. Children look to us for our response to problems. If we take a deep breath, plan what we say, and speak slowly, we can calm down and stay focused. Often, while we are taking a breath, children jump in and take care of the problem!

Sometimes, someone other than the angry person can tell when tempers are about to erupt. At these times, it is helpful to have a family code word that anyone can say to call a time-out. The word can be one small word that is not used often, such as "Break!" Anyone is allowed to say this word; child to parent, parent to child, parent to parent, or child to child. When someone says the code word in the heat of the moment, it means everyone separates, gets out their anger energy and recharges. When everyone calms down, they can come together to resolve the problem more calmly.

A Graduate's Story. *During a family council, we actually used one of those silly ideas from brainstorming. Our children chose the word "pickle" for our family time-out code word. Later that week, we were getting into a heated argument about something that really wasn't worth arguing about. My youngest daughter called out "Pickle!" We stopped and looked at her, puzzled, as we tried to figure out what she was talking about. Then we remembered our agreement and*

started laughing—not at anyone else, but at ourselves. For us, having a silly code word reminds us of what is really important. Every now and then, when the issue is really important, people get a bit irritated having a silly code word. At those times, we don't laugh, but the code word still reminds us to take a time-out to cool off before we hurt someone's feelings or say something we might regret.

Defusing Another Person's Anger

When someone is angry, defuse the anger before negotiating a solution or problem solving, with the following suggestions:

- **Don't answer anger with anger.** If people make hurtful comments, remember that anger causes people to say things they really don't mean. Don't jump to conclusions or take everything literally, before they calm down. They may be venting. Don't defend yourself by blaming, even if they are blaming you. For example, "Well, I wouldn't have done that if you hadn't . . ."
- **Imagine that you are surrounded by an invisible bubble.** Love and positive thoughts can come through the bubble, from others, and out of the bubble, from you. Negative words and actions bounce right off.
- **Keep your ideas, opinions, and explanations to yourself for now.** Stating your opinions and ideas before angry people defuse their emotional energy only slows down the process and frustrates them. At that moment, angry people are *not* ready to listen. If it's necessary to give your side, they will listen better when they are calm. Be patient and wait to take your turn.
- **Try looking at the situation from their point of view.** Tell yourself, "If I saw the world the way they do, I'd feel like them, too." Find a part of what they are saying that is true. You can agree with the facts, their opinion, or the belief involved, such as "I agree, it was inconsiderate of me to be so late without calling."
- **Make what's important to them as important to you as they are to you.** Use the F-A-X process to let them know you understand how they feel. Restate their views. Focus on their hurt. Remain calm and respectful even if you disagree with them. Avoid the communication barriers listed in Chapter 7, "F-A-X Listening Toolset," which will only enrage them more.
- **Offer a sincere apology for any part you played in the problem or for upsetting them.** Ask for specific suggestions about what they want you to do. Or ask for details about what you did that upset them.
- **Help people discharge pent-up emotional energy by suggesting anger or stress techniques that fit their style of anger** (verbal or physical anger energy and internal or external recharge).

Only move to the negotiation phase after they've worked through their anger. If it is only their problem, use F-A-X communication in the Child Problem Toolbox. If part of the problem belongs to you, also use the Clear Communication Toolset to reach win/win solutions.

A Graduate's Story. My family had some horrendous experiences, affecting every one of our lives. My 11-year-old son was overflowing with anger and resentment, which came out in undesirable ways. He had to be physically restrained for periods up to an hour to keep him from hurting himself or another family member. Thanks to the skills we learned in The Parent's Toolshop, we learned how to defuse that anger, set safe limits, and create positive outlets for these feelings. The Parent's Toolshop taught us to use reflective listening, giving choices, one-liners, and problem solving to create a more open atmosphere that enables us to move on to more creative ways of dealing with feelings in our home.

My son had a real problem with throwing things, anything, when he was angry. So I figured, "Why not let him throw something he is allowed to throw, like a baseball?" We would go to the backyard and throw a ball when he began to get angry. At first, he could not aim the ball toward me. But as he calmed down, he wouldn't throw the ball as hard or crooked. When the ball was on target, I could use reflective listening and he could verbalize his feelings. Then we could move on to problem solving. But if he began to throw the ball harder or more wildly during the conversation, I knew I needed to slow down or something else was bothering him.

Knowing that it was okay to be angry and finding a safe way to get his anger out helped him break through and resolve the problem. His self-esteem was intact and he was managing his own anger. He was solving his own problems, which helped him feel more in control. When no one is available to throw a ball, he removes himself from the situation and does things such as rollerblading, walking, running, or batting a ball. He finds it helpful to get his angry energy out so he can move on to reasonable thoughts.

Children and Stress

Children experience stress, just as adults do. Obvious times of stress are divorce, moving, or deaths (family members, pets, or others). Other, less obvious, stresses can be recurrent problems with a teacher, with other students, or an unrealistic work load. Parents, too, can sometimes be the source of a child's stress. A parent with unrealistic expectations, unreasonable demands, or perfectionist attitudes causes stress. Parents who are ill or under stress can unknowingly affect their children. When parents try to protect their children by covering up what's going on, children can tell something is wrong. If they don't know the truth, they'll often come to their own (often incorrect) conclusions which are often more damaging than the truth would be.

The best strategy for helping children deal with stress is to be open and honest. Give children the information they need to understand what's going on. They don't need to know *every* detail. Be brief and let them ask questions. Use words and ideas they can understand and tell them in an honest, but reassuring way. (See the list at the end of this chapter for resources that help parents explain difficult topics to children.) Encourage them to express their feelings. If you aren't sure how or when things will work out, reassure them that you love them and will be supportive, regardless of the outcome. Teach children the stress management skills we just learned. Remember, children often *act* out their stress and feelings.²

Excessive stress in children can result in the following warning signs:

- A *sudden, dramatic* increase or decrease in effort at school.
- *Uncharacteristic, sudden* changes in attitude, such as irritability, lack of enthusiasm, or being easily distracted from tasks.
- Withdrawal or emotional/behavioral outbursts.
- *Recurrent* complaints of tiredness, illness, stomachaches, or headaches.
- *Sudden* changes in sleeping and eating habits.
- Drug use or abuse.
- *Unexplained* increase in allergic/asthmatic attacks.
- Avoidance of school or tests by direct refusal or convenient illnesses.
- *Excessive* eating, nail biting, or stuttering.

Teenage depression can outwardly appear different among teens. Teens can disguise their feelings through other behaviors that are directed at themselves or others. Although they may not seem to be trying to draw attention to their feelings, many teens are sending a message for help, “I’m hurting! Will someone please see my need and offer me some relief?” Depressed teens believe they cannot solve their problems and have little hope that others can help. We can often trace teenage depression to failed relationships, frequently within the home. Beneath the depression lies built-up frustration, stress, and angry feelings. It is *vital* for teens to know how to use anger/stress management tools, since they may or may not reach out for help when life seems overwhelming.

FINAL COMMENTS

In summary:

1. Admit you are angry and slow down your anger cycle.
2. Deal with your anger as soon as possible, rather than letting it build up to the point that you may explode. Reduce your anxiety by using energy outlets or recharge activities.
3. Identify the source or cause of your anger.
4. Identify and change any unhelpful beliefs you have about the situation.
5. Recognize the situations you can control and those you can’t. Don’t waste energy on situations you cannot control.
6. Make a conscious choice whether to express your anger. Consider the effects of your response and how others will react. Rehearse how you will deal with their reactions.

It is empowering to know *what* to do with our anger. It can be a great revelation to realize “I can control my own emotions. No one can *make me* feel anything. I can *choose* my reaction, response, and perception in any situation.” Such knowledge, however, doesn’t bring magical overnight change. These are just tools. Each of us must take these tools and be willing to use them until they are a new way of responding. Like any habit, anger and stress management take time and patience. Our progress may be gradual and slow. At first we notice an increase in our patience, simply because we have more tools at our disposal. With time, we can look back and see how far we’ve come in our ability to handle stress and anger.

It is not too much to ask that we control our behavior, since that is what we are expecting of our children.

SUMMARY SHEET

KEEP YOUR COOL TOOLSET

Anger is a physical and emotional reaction to a perceived threat. If we don't use the muscle tension and chemicals the body releases in anger, the build-up can lead to serious illness.

STEPS OF CONSTRUCTIVE ANGER/STRESS MANAGEMENT

a. Become aware of your anger cycle ☆☆☆☆

EVENT ----> BELIEF ----> FEELING ----> RESPONSE

Changing beliefs affects the rest of the anger cycle.

Passive anger = stuffs and denies feelings.

Aggressive anger = takes out emotions on others.

Passive-Aggressive anger = hurts others in passive ways.

Assertive anger = a balanced, honest, respectful response.

b. Relieve the pressure of anger and stress

Smoldering embers need stress management. ☆☆☆☆

- Internal rechargers get their energy from within themselves.
- External rechargers get their energy from outside themselves.

Flash fires need healthy eruption outlets. ☆☆☆☆

- Verbal anger energy = feel like yelling
- Physical anger energy = feel like hitting

Personalize your program: P/I, V/I, P/E, V/E, VP/I, VP/E. ☆☆☆☆

Use an anger log to re-program your response. ☆☆☆☆

c. Plan an assertive response to the problem

(Chapter 10, "Clear Communication Toolset.")

Children experience stress and anger, too. Explain stressful situations in honest and reassuring ways. Be a role model and teach children anger/stress management skills, based on their recharge and anger-energy styles.



PRACTICE ~ USE AN ANGER LOG ☆☆☆☆

An anger log helps us look at the various steps in our anger cycle, identify trigger buttons or symptoms of stress overload, and plan more effective ways of expressing anger in the future. We can use it after an explosion, to understand what happened and re-program a trigger button, or during a time-out to think more clearly and plan an assertive response.

Here are directions for using the anger log that follows. We go through each step twice. First, we go through all four steps of the anger cycle, reliving the angry attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Then we go back to step one and rewrite more healthy beliefs and perceptions. Once we do this, we usually have more clarity about our feelings and can plan a helpful response.

1. **Describe the event.** In the Before column, write a description of what happened.
2. **What do I believe about this event?** In the Before column, we write what we told ourselves when this event happened. These are our thoughts, opinions, and interpretations about what happened.
3. **How do I feel?** In the Before column, we write how we felt. If we were calm just before the event occurred, the event might have pushed a trigger button. If we were tense or overwhelmed, we make note of the physical symptoms, so we can catch ourselves the next time, before we blow. (Be careful to catch thoughts we often misinterpret as feelings. For example, “I felt like he was doing it on purpose” is a belief and interpretation, not a feeling.)
4. **What was my response?** In the Before column, we write what we said or did.

Now, move to the After/To Reprogram column.

5. **Am I being objective?** We look at the description of the event we wrote in the Before column. An objective perspective of the problem is factual, the way a camera sees it. Anyone in that situation would see the situation the same way. In the After column, rewrite any judgments or assumptions in a more factual, objective way.
6. **Are my beliefs healthy?** We look at the beliefs we wrote in the Before column. Are they helpful or unhelpful? Rational or irrational? Objective or judgmental? Is there anything about the way we perceived the situation that could have contributed to our anger?

For a belief to be helpful, rational, and objective it must meet at least three of the following four guidelines:

- a. The thought is objective and nonjudgmental. It is respectful of me *and* the other person.
- b. The thought helps me better understand the problem or the other person’s perspective.
- c. The thought helps me think more about how to resolve the problem.
- d. The thought makes me less upset.

Rewrite each unhelpful belief in the After column, using the guidelines above and those described earlier in this chapter (page 237).

7. **Now, how do I feel?** Now that we’ve rewritten our beliefs, what are we feeling? List these new feelings in the After column. Look at the feelings we listed in the Before column. We usually find that we are now more in touch with our primary feelings, the ones closer to the core of our onion. We also usually understand the other person’s point of view better.
8. **How can I respond?** Once we have rewritten the first three steps, we can plan and write a new response in the After column, using the Universal Blueprint’s PASRR formula.

ANGER LOG

BEFORE/DURING ANGER	AFTER/TO RE-PROGRAM ANGER
Describe the event. What happened?	Am I being objective? Look at the Before description. Change biased comments into factual, objective terms.
What do I believe about this event? When the event happened, what did I tell myself?	Are my beliefs healthy? Look at each belief listed to the left. Rewrite unhealthy beliefs using helpful, positive words.
How do I feel?	Now, how do I feel after looking at the healthier beliefs and thoughts above?
What was my response?	How can I respond in a helpful, healthy, rational, and positive way?

SAMPLE ANGER LOG

BEFORE/DURING ANGER	AFTER/TO RE-PROGRAM ANGER
<p>Describe the event. What happened?</p> <p><i>Joey, 12, rode his bike to Jacob's house to play before football practice. He's late and the phone is busy, so they're probably playing on the Internet. Now I have to drive all the way over there just to get him to practice on time.</i></p>	<p>Am I being objective? Look at the Before description. Change biased comments into factual, objective terms.</p> <p><i>Joey was late and had lost track of time, but the boys weren't the one's tying up the phone line. I don't have to drive to Jacob's, but can choose to if I want.</i></p>
<p>What do I believe about this event? When the event happened, what did I tell myself?</p> <p><i>Why is he so irresponsible? Is it too much to ask that he look at the clock now and then? He takes me for granted to remember everything for him. I shouldn't have to drive over there to get him. He'll probably want me to bring his bike home in the van, too. At this point, he's sure to be late.</i></p>	<p>Are my beliefs healthy? Look at each belief listed to the left. Rewrite unhealthy beliefs using helpful, positive words.</p> <p><i>When kids are playing, they can easily lose track of time. There was no clock outside, but Joey was wearing his watch with an alarm. It would have been nicer if the phone line was free. I could choose not to drive there and let Joey experience the natural consequences of being late and the coach's reaction. I can also choose whether to pick up Joey and/or his bike. we might be late.</i></p>
<p>How do I feel?</p> <p><i>Furious, put out and inconvenienced, taken advantage of, rushed.</i></p>	<p>Now, how do I feel after looking at the healthier beliefs and thoughts above?</p> <p><i>Frustrated, rushed, unsure whether to rescue Joey from being late.</i></p>
<p>What was my response?</p> <p><i>I drove to Jacob's house. Joey was jumping on the outdoor trampoline. I yelled at him to come NOW. I refused to take the bike and followed him home. I stewed while he got his equipment together and lectured him about his irresponsibility the whole way to practice. He was still late and we both were upset.</i></p>	<p>How can I respond in a helpful, healthy, rational, and positive way?</p> <p><i>Prevent the problem next time, by verifying that Joey has set his watch alarm before leaving. Decide up front, with Joey, what will happen if he is late. If he is late anyway and I choose to pick him up, I can be calmer and more relaxed. I can simply state the facts and ask Joey how he plans to get to practice on time. I can breath deeply while he is getting ready and drive calmly. I still probably won't pick up the bike.</i></p>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you would like to do more work on your anger management skills refer to the resources listed in the endnotes or consult the following resources:

- *Dr. Weisinger's Anger Workout Book*, (William Morrow & Co., 1985).
- *The Dance of Anger*, Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Ph.D., (HarperCollins, 1989).
- *Anger Kills: How to Control the Hostility That Can Harm Your Health*, by Redford Williams, (Random House, 1993.)
- *The Angry Teenager*, Dr. William Lee Carter, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).
- *Taming the Dragon in Your Child: Solutions for Breaking the Cycle of Family Anger*, Meg Eastman, (Wiley, NY: 1994).
- *Tantrums: Secrets to Calming the Storm*, Ann E. LaForge, (Pocket Books, NY; 1996).
- *When Kids Are Mad, Not Bad: a Guide to Recognizing and Handling Children's Anger*, Henry A. Paul, (Berkeley Books, NY, 1995).
- *The Relaxation Response*, by Herbert Benson (New York: William Morrow, 1975), offers instructions for meditation.
- *How to Talk to Your Kids About Really Important Things: Specific Questions and Answers and Useful Things to Say*, by Charles E. Schaefer, Ph.D. and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, M.Ed.(1994, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.) Topic chapters have suggestions by age groups.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We want to practice stress and anger management skills daily. When we take the time and make the effort, we experience less stress buildup and angry explosions. Once we have our logic back on-line, we can plan a constructive response to the problem. To do this, we move to the Clear Communication Toolset to plan the words we want to say.

Chapter 10, "Clear Communication Toolset," explains Step C1c: Plan an assertive response. Whether we use no words, one word, or several sentences, this chapter provides many tools we can choose. When the prevention tools are working most of the time and we have a positive relationship with our child (thanks to the listening tools), problems can still occur. Since we already took these first two steps of the PASRR formula, we can use the communication tools, immediately and by themselves, to stop the problem before it develops or worsens.

REFERENCES

1. Anger cycle steps are based on a model developed by Albert Ellis, author of *A Guide to Rational Living* (Prentice-Hall, 1961).
2. *The Effective Parent (The NextSTEP)*, by Donald Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay with Donald Dinkmeyer Jr., James S. Dinkmeyer, and Joyce L. McKay (American Guidance Service, 1987) p. 84.