



June 2004

TAMING THE ANGER BEE

Tame the Anger Bee before it poisons your health, your job, or your relationships!

Anger and your health

Part 3- How to raise an optimistic child, and how they'll benefit

I had just completed a session with 17-year old Julie who suffered from severe depression. Julie believed she was a total failure and would never be able to change anything in her life. Julie also felt her all shortcomings were her own fault.

Where, I asked myself, did such a young person acquire this negative and fatalistic thinking?

The answer soon became apparent when I invited her parents into the session. They began discussing numerous life events and explaining them in ways that their children were learning. The car, for example, got dented because you can't trust anybody these days; Mom yelled at brother because she was in a bad mood;

you can't get ahead in this world unless you know somebody, etc.

As a parent, your own thinking style is always on display and your children are listening intently!

Importance of optimism

Why should you want your child to be an optimist? Because, as Dr. Martin Seligman explains: "Pessimism (the opposite of optimism) is an entrenched *habit of mind* that has *sweeping and disastrous consequences*: depressed mood, resignation, underachievement, and even unexpectedly poor physical health."

Children with optimistic thinking skills are better able to interpret failure, have a stronger sense of personal mastery, and are better able to bounce back when things go wrong in their lives.

Because parents are a major contributor to the thinking styles of their children's developing minds, it is important to follow the following five steps to ensure healthy mental habits in your children.

How parents can help

Step 1. *Learn to think optimistically yourself.* What children see and hear indirectly from you as you led your life and interact

Part 3 of 4 parts.

Coming in July: The Optimistic Marriage

Read the first two parts online at www.drfiore.com



The AngerCoach™
Dr. Fiore & Associates

Dr. Tony Fiore is a California-licensed psychologist (#PSY6670)

Our Fast-Track anger management programs can take the "sting" out of anger in the workplace!

*Parents
greatly
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children*

with others influences them much more than what you try to “teach” them.

You can model optimism for your child by incorporating optimistic mental skills into your own way of thinking. This is not easy and does not occur over night, but, with practice, almost everyone can learn to think differently about life’s events—even parents!

Step 2. Teach you child that there is a *connection between how they think and how they feel*. You can do this most easily by *saying aloud* how your own thought about adversity creates negative feelings in you.

For example, if you are driving your child to school and a driver cuts you off, verbalize the link between your thoughts and feelings by saying something like “I wonder why I’m feeling so angry; I guess I was saying to myself: ‘Now I’m going to be late because the guy in front of me is going so darn slow. If he is going to drive like that he shouldn’t drive during rush hour. How rude.’”

Step 3. Create a game called “*thought catching*.” This helps your child learn to identify the thoughts that flit across his or her mind at the times they feel worst. These thoughts, although barely noticeable, greatly affect mood and behavior.

For instance, if your child received a poor grade, ask: “When you got your grade, what did you say to yourself?”

Step 4. Teach your child how to *evaluate automatic thoughts*. This means ac-

knowledging that the things you say to yourself are not necessarily accurate.

For instance, after receiving the poor grade your child may be telling himself he is a failure, he is not as smart as other kids, he will never be able to succeed in school, etc. Many of these self-statements may not be accurate, but they are “automatic” in that situation.

Step 5. Instruct your child on how to *generate more accurate explanations (to themselves) when bad things happen* and use them to challenge your child’s automatic but inaccurate thoughts. Part of this process involves looking for evidence to the contrary (good grades in the past, success in other life areas, etc).

Another skill to teach your child to help him or her think optimistically is to “*decatastrophize*” the situation—that is—help your child see that the bad event may not be as bad or will not have the adverse consequences imagined. Few things in life are as devastating as we fear, yet we blow them up in our minds.

Conclusion

Parents can influence the thinking styles of their children by modeling the principals of optimistic thinking.

Recommended Resource: *The Optimistic Child* by Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman, 1995. ISBN: 0-06-097709-4.

For more information: *Would you like coaching on how to think more optimistically?* Call 800-984-4414 to discover how we can help!



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