

# EXPRESSING FEELINGS

PARENTING CHALLENGES ★ PAGE 1 OF 1

Many generations of parents have raised children with a strict rule against expressing feelings, especially anger. Those children followed two primary courses: One type of child bury and deny their feelings in order to be safe.

The second type of child rebels, becoming a spewing volcano of anger and rage. Neither type meets our objective of creating sound, resilient human beings who trust themselves, choose to live in love over fear, and become inner-dependent.

When a small child gets punished for having a feeling, that child decides that feeling is wrong. What a person feels is not the problem. What someone does with a feeling can be a problem. It is not wrong to feel angry, it is inappropriate to use that anger to hurt yourself or others. Hurting yourself or others is exactly what happens when a child stuffs angry or hurt feelings. This child tends to become a passive-aggressive person who blames others for everything, uses sarcasm as a means of communication, and never assumes responsibility for his/her own choices.

It was very difficult for me to establish appropriate boundaries in letting my children express their feelings. We had a rule in our home that we were always kind to each other; put-downs, name calling, swearing at someone are not kind. Therefore, a child could say, "I don't like your decision it feels unfair to me." That same child could not respond with, "You are just a (censored). You never let me do anything I want to do. (swearing) at you!" When a child said, "I don't like your decision, it feels unfair to me," I responded with "Tell me more about those feelings." Children who feel heard may not cherish your decision, and they will respect you for having listened.

My children were taught to use "I" messages. Instead of starting a comment with the word "You", (you never, you always, you are such a nerd, etc.), begin with the word "I". For instance, "I feel really frustrated that you won't extend my curfew so I can celebrate Sarah's birthday with my friends..." Second is to state what you want: ".....and I want you to reconsider letting me stay out until midnight this one Saturday." Third is to move to conclusion: "Are you willing to let me have a late curfew this one Saturday night?" The formula for I messages is: FEELINGS, WANTS, WILLING (OR CONCLUSION). See more about "I" messages in my two books, *Recipes from Parenting* and *Leave Your Baggage at the Door*.

I've worked with quite a few labeled at-risk students in the schools. Something they each have in common is a lot of imploded anger and no training in talking about their feelings. Keep your child off the at-risk list and teach him/her to honor all feelings and to appropriately express them.