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## **Modeling Effective Communication for Your Child**

*By Margie Ryerson, MFT*

We have all seen parents who have been out of control with their anger and frustration. Hmm, come to think of it, many of us have probably been one of those parents at one time or another! But there is never an excuse to insult, ridicule, or verbally attack another person just because we are at our wit's end. Unfortunately, some parents cross over this line when they become angry. They sound off and it doesn't matter who is at the receiving end of their ire. What does this behavior communicate to our children (not to mention to the unfortunate recipient)? Our children may learn that it is all right to express themselves in disrespectful and inappropriate ways. They may learn that it is all right to let their anger fly instead of employing self-restraint. And they may learn that what matters most is their need to vent, and that the feelings and rights of others are not nearly as significant as their own.

One parent in the Lamorinda community developed a reputation for constantly threatening teachers and school staff that she would take her complaints directly to the school superintendent. Unfortunately, her child was often present when she sounded off. What she didn't realize was that she eventually lost credibility and good will among school personnel because of her abrasive conduct. There is always a better way to express ourselves if we take the time and make the effort to do so. It helps to think ahead and formulate ways of communicating clearly and emphatically so that we don't run the risk of being disrespectful. I often recommend writing down in advance what you want to say so that you have a rational and constructive reference. Think of how to express your feelings in ways that avoid assigning blame and are solution-oriented.

As Dr. Dorothy Stewart, Executive Director and owner of Old Firehouse Schools explains, "Parents need to understand their role in helping their child navigate through the social world of childhood. It is important for parents to ally themselves with those who take care of their children, such as teachers, coaches, and principals. Social organizations such as Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts want parents who are supportive. Parents also need to realize they are providing their children with a model of how to negotiate effectively in the social world."

In our small community, word spreads quickly when parents behave aggressively and negatively. In addition to setting a bad example for their children, parents with a reputation for verbally attacking those who take care of their children - teachers, coaches, service providers, babysitters, -- may find many doors shut to both them and their child.

At the same time, it is never too late to change how we react to situations and people when we feel angry and frustrated. Not only will we be more personally

effective, but we can also provide our children with a positive model for communicating with others.

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