

When You've Blown It

Q: What do you do if you feel like you have blown it with your kids as far as parenting? Can you undo what has been done in the way of parenting with yelling and anger? I have a 10-year-old and a 4-year-old. I've seen how my anger in parenting has affected my 10-year-old's attitude and respect for my authority. Please tell me it isn't too late!!

A: It's not too late, but it's none too early either.

I don't know how badly you've "blown it" with your yelling and anger. I'm assuming that things have gotten pretty bad, since you took the time to write, and since you are addressing this as an issue in your parenting, and not just as an infrequent occurrence. You may have done some damage to your relationship with your children, and you may have impacted their view of themselves and of you, and you may have set a bad example, but they can still come through this. So can you.

When Jesus picked his disciples, they were grown men. Some of them may have been very young men, but they were not children. Each of them had been influenced by their parents, peers, and neighbors. Each had his own set of baggage consisting of all types of sin and wrong thinking. They had issues, but they were not beyond hope. Jesus still had an expectant heart for them, and believed that God could do a great work in their lives, regardless of their starting points. If it is not too late for the young disciples, then it is not too late for your 10-year-old.

If you adopted a 10-year-old boy into your family that had been through a rough life, I have no doubt that with volumes of love, as well as lots of loving discipline and training, you could help that boy become a godly man. He may always carry some baggage from his past but you could greatly shape his future. Do you believe that? If so, then you certainly can still win with your own child.

I'd start by apologizing for what I'd done wrong in the past.

Proverbs 6:2-5 if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth, then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor! Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids. Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler.

I'd be very clear with my kids that my actions or speech had not been acceptable, and were not in line with what God desired from a parent, or even from a Christian. I'd explain that just as they (my kids) are growing and maturing that I am growing and maturing. I will never be perfect, but I will grow and be different, as I yield to the work of God's Spirit in my life. I'd clearly explain what I meant and give a plain apology, "I'm sorry for my yelling and anger. Will you forgive me?"

Then I'd make a commitment to them and myself that I would no longer act in those ways, but that I'd live in a way that honored God.

As a parent, I can afford to not be perfect—no one is. I can afford to continue to fail—everyone does. However, I can not afford to be complacent. I cannot be indifferent about my sin. I must grow and change, and my efforts to change must be serious and significant.

1 John 2:6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

James 1:19-20 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

I'd take steps to help me keep that commitment.

- I'd apologize to God for my actions and thank Him for forgiving my sins.
- I'd search for and memorize relevant verses from the Bible. (Read through Proverbs and memorize the ones that God gives you.)
- I'd talk to my pastor or spiritual leader.
- I'd ask my spiritual mentors for book recommendations.
- I'd ask for prayer from my small group at church.
- I'd ask my spouse to hold me accountable.
- I'd pray about it.
- I'd tell my kids about the steps I'm taking to grow.

When I failed at that commitment, I'd apologize, recommit, and get back on track.

Children are extremely resilient. What's done is done, and you need to move forward. Do your best to get it right with them, and to grow as a Christian. Think through what areas have been impacted in your children's lives. Help them think through those areas and to build a biblical, truth-based foundation. God is a God of forgiveness and fresh starts. With God there is always hope—lots of hope—in every situation.

In response to a similar question Dr. James Dobson wrote, *"I doubt if it is too late to do things right, although your ability to influence your children lessens with the passage of time. Fortunately we are permitted to make many mistakes with our kids. They are resilient and they will usually survive most of our errors in judgment. It's a good thing they do, because none of us can be a perfect parent. Besides, it's not the occasional mistakes that hurt a child – it is the consistent influence of destructive conditions throughout childhood that does the damage."*

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In a Rick Whitney seminar a father asked a similar question because he had just made a decision to become a Christian, and had not been raising his twins using Christian principles. He asked, "Have I blown it? Here I am coming to Christ, my boys are 12, have I blown it? Is it a lost cause?"

Rick responded, "Don't you ever believe that! Not when you deal with the God I'm dealing with. And you're going to be introduced to Him as soon as you pray."

You need to have this confidence in your God, and believe that with His help you can win!

Luke 1:37 "For nothing is impossible with God."