

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Molding anger into love
- Stormy skies and scowling faces
- Around-the-clock parenting

## Mad or Sad? by Jean Buell

Some things do not make sense. My seven-year-old asks all the questions, and my eleven-year-old knows all the answers. Logically, they should get along perfectly, but they don't.

Once we saw a huge tree completely draped with white toilet paper.

Afterward, my seven-year-old started asking all about toilet paper and tree tops. He asked, "Mom, what would you do if I put toilet paper in someone's tree?"

"I'd be sad," I said.

"Oh, I thought you'd be mad."

That was a teachable moment. I've heard that parents give children their first image of God, and I want to give the image of a loving God. Therefore, I would be sad, not mad. My answer made sense, but my son's response troubled me.

That same morning, my eleven-year-old lounged in bed long past his alarm. Again. In the time he had remaining, how could he possibly make his bed, get dressed, eat breakfast, brush his teeth, comb his hair, grab his backpack, and catch the bus? I'm sure he knew the answer, but I was tired of waiting for it. It was time to assert my power! I stood up straight, stomped upstairs, and stormed into his room. I saw that he was happily getting dressed, but I didn't stop myself: I yelled at him. I yelled louder than I had ever yelled before, and as I yelled, I could see the expression drain right off his face.

That was another teachable moment. What image of God was I really giving, when my behavior defied my

words? This time, my own response troubled me. Before my son left for school, I apologized and attempted to hug him, but he didn't hug back. Logically, he should have, because I talk about forgiveness. It made more sense that he didn't.

As hard as I tried, I could not erase the image left by his lifeless face or fill the emptiness left by his listless arms. Finally, I prayed about it. I placed myself in God's hands. I imagined myself as clay in the hands of God the Potter.

Was God mad or sad? As a mad potter, God would yell and yell and send me to where I would bake to a bisque so brittle my heart could only break. Was that love? As a sad potter, God would moisten me with tears, hold me with steady hands, and gently re-form me. That's love. Sure enough, as I rested with God, I felt those teardrops falling upon my shoulders and those hands pressing against my sides. I stayed in prayer until I could no longer feel those teardrops. God had loved me even when I felt the most unlovable. Did that make sense?

When my boys returned from school, I hugged my eleven-year-old again. "Will you forgive me?" I asked.

"Yeah, Mom," he said as he hugged back. "Now can I go watch TV?"

Then I resumed the conversation with my seven-year-old. "What would God do if you put toilet paper in someone's trees?"

"He'd be mad. He'd put me you-know-where," he said as he pointed downward.

### What Do You Say?

Want to add to this conversation about anger? You can now enter the dialogue each month through our Web site, [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org). Click on the "Family Faith-Life Resources" tab and then click "Monthly?"

This month's question: How do you handle anger? What do you wish you could tell your child, teen, or parent about handling anger—theirs and yours?

Go ahead! Give us your thoughts on this question. Look for a new question each month. Future themes include "Reconciling Well" and "Beliefs." Also, check out the Saint Mary's Press family products and services offered by Family Faith-Life Resources on our Web site.

I have work to do. If I want to give my boys a healthy image of God, I must become the hands of God the Potter. When my boys misbehave, I'll hug them or hold them and gently re-form them—and me—with love. It doesn't have to make sense.

*Jean Buell lives with her husband and two sons in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

# Faith and Fury

by Eileen Pettycrew

Some mornings I am greeted by stormy skies and the scowling face of my young teen. Angry words sting me. Her favorite pants are suddenly too short. I shrunk her new blue shirt. She's sick of cold cereal. Her library books are due and she can't find them. She puts on her shoes and stomps across the floor, not caring that she is leaving dried mud tracks in her wake. On the way to school, she walks ten paces ahead of me and her younger sister, her shoulders hunched against the driving rain. She avoids me in the hallway and rejects any offer for a hug. When I leave the building, I wonder how I will ever make it through her teen years. As if in answer, a fat rain-drop splashes into the hole in my shoe.

Mornings as grim as this one fill me with pain and self-doubt. I have trouble finding God in the stormy moments with my young teen, and I question my ability to be a wise and loving parent—especially when I struggle with self-control myself.

One time during my pre-parent teaching days, a student came up to me and said, "You're so patient!" I smiled and mumbled a thank you, thinking, "Oh, if you only knew!" My calm exterior often disguised the rising irritation I felt, usually after the sixth student in a row came up to ask something I had painstakingly covered in the lab lecture. "Don't you ever listen?" I wanted to scream. Instead, in my best teacher voice, I supplied the desired information.

Little did I know what a cakewalk that job was compared to around-the-clock parenting. At home, when put-downs, name-calling, and sassing fly around the room, I have been known to slam doors, issue threats, or resort to name-calling myself. I doubt anyone would look at me in those moments and say, "You're so patient!"

When my anger flares up that quickly, it's as if I've been struck by lightning. Time stops. I shake. I burn

with the fire of fury. When the smoke clears, and the awful truth sinks in—I really did call my young teen a brat or I really did scream at her so loudly that she flinched—shame and remorse percolate through me like strong, hot coffee.

Who can blame my young teen when she brings up my less stellar moments as examples of my pathetic parenting? After all, I am supposed to be her role model. It doesn't matter that I apologized to her for my failings. Those times I "lost it" remain etched in her memory. As her parent, I am held to a higher standard.

I want my young teen to know that I am not perfect. I want her to know that I am not so different from her, that some days I might have a short fuse too. I want her to know that if she deliberately stomps mud through the house, she will be expected to clean it up. I want her to know that if my husband or I lose control, we will also be expected to make amends.

When I'm in the middle of family fury, I feel caught in a drenching down-pour, cold raindrops pelting my face. Will the storm ever end? But if I remember to pray, I know that God is there, hidden among the raindrops, waiting to pour out gifts of grace and perfect peace—if only I am open to receiving them. With faith, I can make it through the fury.

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## Handling the Fury

by Eileen Pettycrew

For better or for worse, a loving home is a safe haven for us to share our emotions, especially anger. When anger shows up at your house, here are some ideas to keep things in perspective:

Anger is often the second emotion. It can mask feelings such as humiliation, disappointment, or grief. When things are calm again, offer a gentle presence and give your teen space to open up. Remember that this kind of interaction needs to be on your teen's terms, not yours.

When your teen is angry, remember that this too shall pass. A simple prayer, such as "Be with us, God" or "Send us your peace," can give you the strength you need to stay detached, calm, and centered.

If your teen exhibits unacceptable behavior during an angry outburst, gently but firmly assign a task that makes up for the offense. Wait for a calm moment before making the assignment. Make it clear that you will be held to the same rule should you lose control. Something as simple as having your teen make dinner or dessert for the family sends a clear message that we all deserve to be treated with love and respect.

*Eileen Pettycrew lives in Portland, Oregon, where she enjoys hiking, bicycling, reading, and playing the piano.*