**When Kids Get Sassy**

**Ken Canfield, Ph.D.**

*April 26, 2007*

When kids get mouthy-when they have a come-back for everything we say-tension fills the house, blood pressures rise, and we may say and do things that we'll later regret.

Dad, we need to be self-controlled. And teach self-control. But how? How do you teach right behavior so it sinks in-without yelling, making threats, or other emotional fireworks?

First, it's important to avoid heated emotions. Your child probably thrives on getting a reaction out of you, and if you do get angry, you're essentially letting her control the situation.

But, as Foster Cline and Jim Fay describe in their book ***Parenting With Love and Logic***, there is a way to maintain control and let your child save face-by giving her choices. The important thing is to offer her two or three choices that are all agreeable to you.

You can't reason with a child when she's sassing you, so give her choices with the goal of getting her away from you until she can speak calmly. You could say, "Honey, would you like to go to your room, or outside, or down to the basement? You're free to come back when you can talk calmly like I'm doing."

Just keep urging her-politely-to relocate until she can be polite. Then, once tempers have cooled off, try to figure out your child's reasons for being disrespectful. Discuss it with the purpose of really learning about your child-not just stopping an ugly behavior.

Maybe she's just being hyper, letting off steam. Or, maybe it happens when you've asked her to do something and she doesn't want to do it. Does she feel put down? Or like she's being controlled? Does she really mean the rude words she's saying? Draw your child out, and listen without being judgmental or defensive.

You still reinforce the fact that the behavior is unacceptable-that's important-but you help your child come up with a better way to satisfy her desires in a polite and more effective way. Dads, we can maintain control and teach our kids a better way.