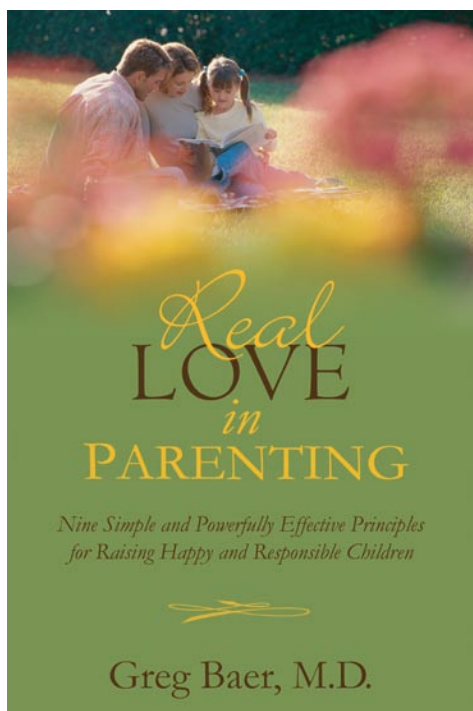
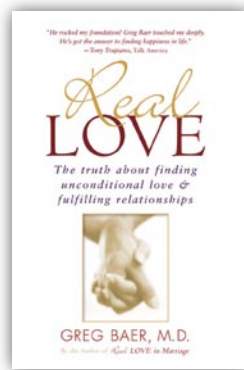
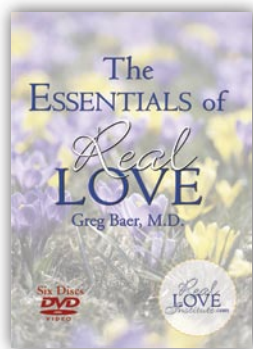
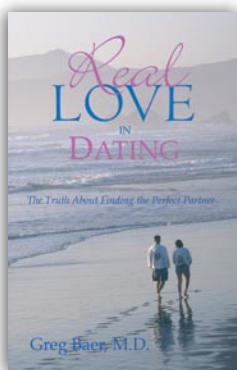


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THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PARENTING

The First Principle

More than anything else, my child needs to feel loved

The Second Principle

When my child behaves badly, he or she doesn't feel loved

The Third Principle

When I'm angry, I'm wrong

The Fourth Principle

I can't give what I don't have:
I must find Real Love for *myself*

The Fifth Principle

My child needs to be loved and taught

The Sixth Principle

After my child has been loved and taught,
he or she needs to be loved and taught again

The Seventh Principle

The Law of Choice

The Eighth Principle

Happiness comes from being loving

The Ninth Principle

Happiness comes from being responsible

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CHAPTER THREE

THE THIRD PRINCIPLE OF PARENTING

When I'm Angry, I'm Wrong

Because of their age and inexperience, children are naturally inconvenient in so many ways:

- They're always spilling stuff, falling down, making messes, and getting involved in all manner of "accidents."
- When they get ready for school, clean their rooms, prepare for bed time, or do anything else involving a time limit, they move at a slow and erratic pace rarely compatible with our own schedules.
- They're often unable to perform even the simplest tasks without help or supervision.
- They incessantly make unnecessary noises in a wide range of both volume and pitch.
- Frequently they are unable to clearly communicate their needs.
- When they do express their needs, they are often insistent and demanding. They have no patience.
- Everything they do seems to cost money.

When we don't feel sufficiently loved ourselves, these innumerable inconveniences often become more than we can stand—the straw that breaks the camel's back—and then we understandably respond with behaviors designed to minimize the effects of these inconveniences on us. We've learned from a lifetime of experiences as children and as adults that one effective way to get children to listen, and to change their behavior, is to get angry at them. When we're angry, children—as well as adults—tend to do what we want, and they tend to do it more quickly.

THE EFFECTS OF ANGER

Although our children often respond to our anger in the short term by doing what we want, the overall effects of anger are overwhelmingly negative. When we're angry:

- our children cannot feel loved by us.
- because they don't feel loved, they respond with even more Getting and Protecting Behaviors, the very behaviors we were trying to stop in the first place with our anger.
- they can't learn.
- we can't be happy.
- we teach our children the lie that other people make us angry.

Our Children Can't Feel Loved by Us

On one occasion in Chapter One, I lovingly described to you the mistakes you made while planting some bushes in my yard. Even though I was talking about your mistakes—a potentially negative subject—you could feel my concern for *your* happiness. In the scenario that followed, however, I was disappointed and irritated at you, and the effect on you was quite different. Why? When I'm angry at you, I'm saying, "How dare you inconvenience the true center of the universe—ME. You have somehow failed to remember that your purpose in life is to serve ME, or you have done something unpleasant to ME." We could, in fact, replace the word *angry* with ME-ME-ME. Anger is the ultimate arrogance.

Imagine, then, that I'm standing over you in anger, with my words and behavior shouting ME-ME-ME. While I'm completely

focusing on *myself* in that way, is there any way in the world that you could feel my unconditional concern for *your* welfare? Utterly impossible. This is such an important concept that I suggest you indelibly etch the following in your memory:

Every time you are angry at another human being—husband, wife, lover, friend, parent, boss, co-worker, or *child*—that person hears you say only four words: “*I don’t love you.*”

If you have any doubt about the truth of this, blow up at anyone you know—especially a child—and watch his or her face. When we’re angry at our children, we’re powerfully telling them that we do not love them unconditionally—at least in that moment—and they *feel* that. We may not be *trying* to say “I don’t love you,” but when we’re angry, we’re just too consumed with our own needs and fears to be capable of loving anyone else.

There is nothing children hate to hear more than “I don’t love you,” and that’s why they are so easily motivated by our anger. They’re willing to do whatever it takes to get us to stop being angry—to stop expressing our lack of love.

*Anger Can Literally Define the World
For a Child—in a Very Negative Way*

The cost of anger is especially high when we express it to our children. Young children don’t create out of thin air the view they have of themselves or of the world. They *learn* who they are, what the world is like, and how they relate to the world mostly from what we say and do as their parents. Early in their lives, they accept completely what we tell them, and so we have a virtually god-like influence over them. When a child makes mistakes, for example, and we become impatient and irritated, the child learns this:

- When I make mistakes, my parents obviously love me less.
- When I am flawed, I am therefore less worthwhile.
- Since I am flawed most of the time, I am obviously worth very little.
- The world is a harsh, judgmental, and unloving place.

I cannot over-emphasize the destructive impact of these lessons

on a child. A young child is quite incapable of questioning these conclusions when they are taught by a parent, who stands in a position of unquestioned power. When you are angry at a child, there is no way on earth that he or she could have the courage or insight to say, “Dad (or Mom), I see that you’re angry. You must be feeling unloved. Even though you’re expressing your anger at me, I know you’re just reacting to a lifetime of not feeling loved, not primarily to something I did or did not do in this moment. Is there something I can do to help you feel more loved?” Absurd. No, a child can conclude only that your anger is all about him or her, and the effect is disastrous, as outlined above.

They Respond with Even More Getting and Protecting Behaviors

It’s hugely ironic that when we get angry at our children, we cause the very behaviors we’re trying to control or eliminate. Here’s how that happens:

- All the behaviors in children that inconvenience and annoy us—disobedience, rebellion, whining, insistence, sullenness, withdrawal, and so on—are only Getting and Protecting Behaviors that exist in response to their not feeling loved unconditionally.
- When we don’t feel unconditionally loved either, the behaviors of our children then make us feel even more empty and afraid.
- To alleviate these painful feelings, we get angry, which gives us a sense of power and safety.
- From our anger, our children hear only “I don’t love you,” which greatly magnifies their feelings of emptiness and fear.
- They respond by using even *more* Getting and Protecting Behaviors, exactly what we were trying to prevent.

Children will do almost anything—they use all the Protecting Behaviors—to avoid any expression of our disapproval: a sigh, a frown, a raised eyebrow, a change in our tone of voice, or an unkind word. To our children, disappointment and anger are different only in degree, and both are devastating.

They Can't Learn

One beautiful fall day, George came to see me about his son, Dan. He was quite animated and irritated as he told me about Dan's negative attitude, disobedience, and lack of responsibility. "Only yesterday," George said, "I was trying to talk to him about something, and he just sat there, giving me that sullen stare. It's like he doesn't hear a word I say."

"He *can't*," I responded.

"What do you mean?"

"When you're angry, he can't hear anything you're saying."

"I wasn't angry. I was just being firm. He doesn't listen unless I'm firm with him."

"It doesn't sound like he listens to you when you're 'firm,' either, but you were more than firm. You were angry."

"How do you know that? You weren't there."

"I didn't have to be. I'm here with you now, and you've been angry at Dan from the moment you started talking about him. You're also angry at me for questioning what you did—which doesn't bother me in the least. I'm only describing what I see so that *you* can see it. You've already proven that the way you talk to Dan doesn't work, and because I care about you, I'm helping you see *why* he can't hear you. Considering all the anger you're showing here, it's utterly impossible to believe that you were not angry with Dan when you talked to him. If I spoke to you in the same tone of voice you used with Dan yesterday, would you think I was angry?"

"Okay, I get the point. So I might have been a little irritated at him."

"Let's assume for a moment that I'm your employer. I supervise you, sign your paycheck, and have the authority to fire you. Can you picture that?"

"Sure."

"Now, suppose I come to you and describe a mistake you made at work yesterday. I tell you that it'll cost the company a couple hundred dollars to fix the mistake, and two other employees will have to work overtime to correct it. But you can see that I'm not the least bit irritated by any of this. In fact, I apologize that I didn't give you enough information to do the assignment correctly in the first place, and then I describe how you could do the task in a way that will be easier and more productive. Would you be willing to do it the new way?"

“Of course.”

“How do you feel about me describing your mistake?”

“Fine. You’re just trying to help me.”

“Now imagine that I come to your office and throw a pile of papers on your desk. I say that what you’ve done is completely unacceptable, and I yell at you as I describe what a bumbling fool you are. Do you feel different about our conversation this time?”

“Sure.”

“What’s the difference?”

“It’s hard to listen to you when you’re yelling at me.”

“Why?”

“It just is,” he said.

“The first time I talked to you, it was easy to hear me, because—in your words—I was just trying to help you, right?”

“Yes.”

“What was different about the second time was that I was *angry* at you. We rarely appreciate what our anger means. I can describe your mistake and still have a genuine concern for *your* happiness, as you discovered when I talked to you the first time. But the moment I become angry, I’m telling you my primary concern is for whom?”

“Yourself.”

“Exactly. Every single time I’m angry, I’m mainly concerned about what *I* want, which means I can’t possibly be concerned primarily about you. Every time I’m angry, I’m telling you I don’t care about you—which is the one thing we all hate to hear more than anything else—and then you will react to *that*, instead of listening to my correction of your mistake. You’ll defend yourself by withdrawing from me, or being angry at me, or acting like a victim, and so on. While I’m angry, you can’t really listen to me, because all you can hear is my telling you I don’t care about you.”

“I never saw it that way before.”

“Most people don’t, but you have to understand this before you can change the way you interact with Dan. Every time you’re angry at him, I promise you he hears you speaking only four words: *I don’t love you*. Once he hears that, essentially he becomes deaf to everything else you’re saying. You’ve been wondering why he doesn’t listen to you, and this is the answer: your anger.”

“But I’m not always angry when I talk to him,” George protested.

“That’s probably true,” I agreed. “Let’s go back to the example of my being your boss. Suppose that I blow up at you only half the times we speak. During the other half of the times we talk, what will be going through your mind? Will you feel relaxed?”

Whenever we’re angry at our children, they hear us say only four words: “I don’t love you.” And then they respond with the Getting and Protecting Behaviors that are so destructive to them and to others.

“No, I’ll be waiting for you to blow up. I’ll never be sure when you’re about to get mad at me.”

“Right, and that’s how Dan feels. Also remember that if you want to estimate how much of the time you’re not mad at him, you can count only the times he’s making *mistakes* — when he’s screwing up. If you treat him nicely while he’s doing what you *want*, that doesn’t count for much, frankly. On those occasions, he can feel only like he’s buying your affection. It’s only when he’s making mistakes that he can feel whether you love him unconditionally — or you don’t. If I had to guess, I’d bet you get angry at him a lot more than half the times he makes mistakes, and that leaves him with only one conclusion: that you don’t love him. That has a huge impact on him. He’s constantly waiting for the next blowup from you.”

Most of us have said to our children on many occasions, “How many times have I told you to ____? Why do I have to keep repeating myself?” If our children had the insight and courage, they would answer, “You have to keep repeating yourself because each time you teach me that principle, you’re angry, and I can’t hear you when you’re angry. If you would speak to me with any concern for *my* welfare, I could probably hear you.”

We Can’t Be Happy

Think about the last time you snapped at a child. Did you feel a growth of your inner peace? Did you feel warm and fuzzy inside? Never. Not only does our anger have a negative effect on others, but it eliminates the possibility of happiness in our own lives.

Genuine happiness comes from feeling unconditionally loved and from loving others. Because anger always interferes with our feeling loved and loving others, it makes happiness impossible.

We Teach Our Children the Lie That Other People Make Us Angry

Every time we express anger *at* our children, we're strongly implying that they *made* us angry. We make it quite clear—with our words, sighs, rolling eyes, tone of voice, and so on—that they are responsible for how we feel. In order to remove all doubt about that, in fact, we often say, "You make me so mad."

In so doing, we are teaching our children a terrible lie, that other people can make us angry. This lie has enslaved most of us all our lives, as illustrated in the following story.

One day I heard two of my children, Joseph and Rachel, quarreling in the next room. Walking into that room, I said to Joseph—randomly choosing one of them—"You look pretty mad."

"Yeah," he said, "who wouldn't be? She borrowed my shirt again, and she didn't put it back. So I had to look all over the house for it until I figured out that she had it."

"So she made you angry, right?"

"Yes," he said emphatically, and surprised that I would question such an obvious conclusion.

"So let's do this," I suggested. "Let's go down to the hardware store, get a large brass ring, and fasten it through the hole we'll drill through your nose. Then we'll attach a big chain to the ring and hand it to Rachel."

"What?" he said, obviously confused.

"You wouldn't like being Rachel's slave?"

"No."

"But you already *are* her slave, Joseph. Any time she wants to, she can do something to make you mad. So, effectively, she owns you. Do you want to keep being her slave?"

"No."

In our society, it is almost universally accepted that other people make us angry, and we pass this belief on to our children. Regrettably, this belief makes our children captive to the behavior of every person around them, which is far from a desirable condition.

Later in this chapter, we'll prove that other people never make us angry, and in Chapters Six and Eight we'll discuss how to handle arguments between our children.

BECAUSE OF ITS CONSISTENTLY DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS, ANGER IS ALWAYS WRONG

In Chapter One, I said:

Since happiness is the central goal of life, a behavior is *right* when it contributes to that goal—in other words, when it leads to being unconditionally loved, loving, and responsible. Any behavior which interferes with those conditions is therefore *wrong*.

Because anger always interferes with our feeling unconditionally loved, loving, and happy, anger is always wrong. I am *not* saying that when you're angry, you're evil, nor am I saying that you *shouldn't* be angry—in a given moment, anger may be the best you can do. I am saying that because anger detracts from our primary purpose for being alive—because it is uniformly destructive, and keeps us from being happy—it is wrong. It just doesn't work. Anger is wrong in the same sense that saying $2 + 2 = 5$ is wrong, or that when you get a flat tire on your car, replacing the tire with a kitchen sink would be wrong.

We also established in Chapter One that our primary goals are to love our children and teach them to love others. In the presence of anger, our children cannot feel loved by us, and so, for yet another reason, anger is wrong. When we're angry, we cannot be loving, effective parents.

Take a moment and tattoo these words on the inside of your right upper eyelid, where you'll always remember them: When I'm angry, I'm wrong. Everything else we give our children—entertainment, money, a great house, the best education, and so on—will not make them happy if they don't feel unconditionally loved by us, and they cannot feel loved when we're angry at them.

Because anger always interferes with our greatest purposes in life—to feel loved, to be loving, and to be happy—anger is always wrong.

You might be tempted to think, “But what am I supposed to do

when they misbehave? I have to correct them, don't I? Sometimes they only pay attention when I'm mad. When I speak calmly, they just ignore me. Sometimes I have to get angry, for their own good—so they'll listen.”

That reasoning is seductive, but we must never forget that when we're angry, our children don't feel loved, and Real Love is the most important gift we'll ever give them. When we're angry, we're wrong. Period. It's true that when we get angry, they do sometimes move more quickly and accomplish the individual tasks we demand of them, but the long-term effects are devastating:

- First, if they consistently respond to our anger with obedience, we'll have children with clean rooms and good grades but who—without Real Love, the one element most important to genuine happiness—will be deeply unfulfilled and miserable in the long term.
- A second outcome, however, is even more likely. Eventually, most children resent the constant whip of anger as a motivation, and then they quit responding to it with fear and compliance. Instead, they protect themselves by withdrawing, acting like victims, and getting angry in return, as George's son, Dan, did.

Anger is always wrong, and it's never effective in the long term. That does *not* mean we should be permissive, which is an equally terrible mistake in parenting. Throughout the book, we'll be discussing the most effective ways we can teach and love our children, avoiding both anger and indulgence.

WHY WE GET ANGRY

If anger is so destructive—to us personally, to our children, and to our relationships with them—why do we continue to get angry? Why do we continue to use a behavior that never gives us the results we really want? We continue to get angry at our children because:

- we're empty and afraid ourselves.
- our children don't fill our enormous expectations for their love.
- anger is a response we've learned from our parents and others throughout our lives.

We're Empty and Afraid

As we described in Chapter Two, anger is a Getting and Protecting Behavior. We get angry only to fill our emptiness and to protect ourselves from fear, conditions that exist because we do not have sufficient Real Love. Anger is absolute proof that we are empty and afraid.

When we're already empty and afraid from not feeling enough Real Love, we become much more afraid when confronted with angry or disobedient children. What are we afraid of?

- We're afraid of losing control over them. Without sufficient Real Love, we enjoy the sense of power we get from influencing or determining what our children do. That's not a pretty thing to see about ourselves, but it's still true. When they behave badly, we feel helpless and weak.
- We're afraid of losing their respect (another form of power, and also praise).
- We're afraid of losing their approval and affection (praise).
- We're afraid of looking like bad parents—to our children and others (loss of praise).
- We're afraid of losing the peace and quiet we enjoy (pleasure and safety). We hate the simple inconvenience that always accompanies an angry child—we have to *deal* with his or her anger, which usually isn't easy or fun.

In other words, when children are angry we're afraid of losing the Imitation Love we get from them, a “love” we have no right to demand. And then we respond with our own Getting and Protecting Behaviors, one of which is anger. With anger we feel better in several ways:

- We feel stronger, more in control, less helpless.
- We often succeed in commanding their respect.
- If we consistently manipulate our children to do what we want, we feel competent (praiseworthy).
- We create the illusion of being disciplined and strong parents, earning the praise of other parents.
- We achieve the peace and quiet we crave (pleasure and safety).

Of course, all these effects are superficial and transient—as are the effects of all forms of Imitation Love—and when they wear off, we have to work to get them again. No amount of Imitation Love can ever make us truly happy.

They Fail to Fill Our Expectations for Love

Another explanation for our anger is the expectations we have of others. If we don't feel sufficient Real Love—as most of us don't—we're empty and afraid, a condition we cannot tolerate. It's only natural that we then expect the people around us to soothe our pain and fill our emptiness, and when they don't, we can become quite irritated. How, we reason, could other people—especially those close to us—just stand by and fail to relieve our obvious discomfort? Without meaning to, we heap some of these expectations for love—Real and Imitation—on our children, and when they don't fill them, we resent it.

Anger is always preceded by an expectation of some kind. We get angry at people only when they fail to fulfill our expectations. You never become angry at your neighbor, for example, for not taking out your garbage, while it's easy to conceive of getting angry at your son or daughter for not doing the same task. The difference? Expectations. You don't *expect* your neighbor to take out your garbage, so when he doesn't do it, there's no disappointment or irritation.

We get angry at our children because we have expectations of them. What do we expect?

- Obedience (power, safety)
- Gratitude (praise)
- Respect (praise, power, safety)
- Cooperation (power, safety)
- Affection (praise)

Certainly these are qualities children need to have if they want to be happy, but rarely do we insist on these qualities in our children solely for *their* benefit. When we don't have enough Real Love in our own lives, we demand obedience, for example, to feed our own need for praise, power, and safety. We *need* gratitude to confirm our own worth (praise). We demand respect to confirm our position of power over our children.

The Powerful Need for Our Children's Love

On many occasions, I have asked adults, “Does anyone love you unconditionally?” and a common answer is this: “Yes, my *children* do.” That belief, however, is almost always inaccurate, inappropriate, and dangerous. Our children are not responsible for loving us, and with rare exceptions they’re also incapable of doing so.

Most of us place considerable responsibility on our children to make us feel good. We prove this every time we’re disappointed in them or angry at them, because on these occasions we’re declaring that they are responsible for our happiness or unhappiness—and we’re mostly unaware of how often we do that.

Our happiness is not determined by the behavior of our children. Our happiness is a result of how much unconditional love we’ve received over a lifetime of experiences with parents, teachers, friends, and spouses—and by how loving *we* are toward others. Most of us, however, were not unconditionally loved, and without Real Love we have become unhappy as adults and parents.

But now it is not our children’s responsibility to give us the Real Love we need. Children need to *be loved* by us. They need to be filled up with the unconditional love required for their happiness. Children become whole only when love is initially a one-way flow, from us to them. That can’t happen while we’re demanding something from them in return.

Our Children Can't Love Us Unconditionally

We want to believe that our children love us unconditionally, but if they haven’t received enough Real Love from us—as few of them have—how can they give it to anyone else? In most cases, when we expect love from our children, we’re asking them to give us what they’ve never received sufficiently themselves. Their task is impossible, and the burden is crushing.

Love can be unconditional only when it’s freely given. The giver of unconditional love can’t be empty or afraid. When people are empty or afraid, they can only manipulate other people to get what they want or protect themselves from being hurt. Almost without exception, our children are both empty and afraid: They

badly need us to love them, and they're scared to death of losing our love. These are natural conditions for a child, but they make it very difficult for children to give us Real Love.

We tend to love our children more when they're good—when they do what we want. They can feel that our approval is not unconditional, but it feels better than nothing, so they do their best—in the beginning, at least—to earn more of it by giving us what we want: gratitude, respect, obedience, affection, and so on. We feel good when we get those things, and understandably we then believe that our children are “loving” us. But they need our approval and love far too much to give us anything without expecting something in return. They give us what we want so we'll give them the “love” they desperately need. Although it's unconscious, our children *trade* Imitation Love with us, and we gladly participate in the exchange, all of us just doing our best to survive in the absence of Real Love.

Is it ever possible for a child to unconditionally love his parents? Yes, but only after that child has been consistently and unconditionally loved himself for a long time. Few children have been loved in that way, and no loving parent would expect such love from a child. When a child can love his or her parents, it's just a delightful bonus for those parents, not something they have a right to expect.

How We Manipulate Them for Imitation Love

If we don't have enough Real Love in our own lives, we *will* make attempts to get Imitation Love from the people around us, and we will tend to do that most with the people who are closest to us. Later in this chapter we'll talk about the various ways we manipulate our children for Imitation Love.

Failure to See the Expectations We Have of Our Children

Most of us have expectations every day that our children will love us and make us happy. Often we express them in subtle ways. We don't say to a child directly, for example, “I need you to love me.” Instead we say, “Give Mommy (or Daddy) a kiss.” Without thinking about it, we thus place an enormous burden on children to give us affection so we won't be disappointed, and they feel that obligation. As they sense that we have any expectations for them to make us happy, they can't feel unconditionally loved—even if our expectations are unconscious.

How can we know whether we have selfish expectations of our children? Again, disappointment and anger. These feelings mean that *we* didn't get something *we* wanted. Our disappointment and anger prove that we're being selfish, and we experience these feelings in response to the behavior of our children so often that we've come to accept them as normal. We justify ourselves, claiming that disappointment is acceptable—even unavoidable—when a child makes certain kinds of mistakes, or is disobedient, or is disrespectful, and so on. When our children behave badly, it is our responsibility to correct them, but disappointment and anger are never a part of loving and effective teaching.

I'm not saying that children shouldn't be respectful, obedient, and grateful—far from it. They need these qualities in order to be happy, but they acquire these characteristics far more easily when we just love and teach them. Children don't learn real respect—and certainly don't feel Real Love—when we expect and demand it from them. We'll talk more about how to love and teach children in Chapters Five and Six.

We become angry at our children when they don't fill our huge expectations for them to love us. Those expectations are inappropriate and harmful.

Why We Have Children

Without Real Love, we try to fill our emptiness with all the praise, power, and pleasure we can find. We lie, attack, act like victims, and cling in order to earn the attention of other adults, but we soon find those efforts exhausting, and we discover that the Imitation Love we get is unpredictable. Because children are so dependent on us—because they desperately need us, and because they feel obligated to us by all we give them—we learn that we can use them more easily and consistently than other people as a source of Imitation Love. Adults resist our manipulations and require more from us than children do. And we feel safer around children: They don't ask us why we don't get a better job; they don't tell us to be more responsible; they don't suggest that we lose some weight; they don't make us feel unattractive; they don't see our fears or intimidate us

in as many ways as adults do.

We don't like seeing this, but a significant part of the motivation for many of us to have children is that we feel alone, and we hope children will love us and make us happier. That's understandable, but we are often selfishly using our children to make us feel better.

Elise and Chris had lived together for two years. Both came to the relationship without experiencing much Real Love, and each expected the other to make him or her happy. Naturally, the result was disappointment and bitterness. As their relationship began to fail, Elise thought a baby might bring them together again. Without telling Chris, she stopped using her contraceptive and became pregnant. Soon after that Chris left the relationship completely and moved away. After he left Elise said to a friend, "Well, at least when the baby comes, I won't be alone."

What a fate! Even before his birth, this child was given the responsibility to make his mother feel loved. That's a burden no child can carry and be happy, but *that's the job most children are given*, and it destroys them.

We Get Angry at Our Children Because We Learned That Response from Others

In a given situation, we have a natural inclination not to do what's most effective but to do what we've learned. Most of us can easily recall how our parents and others responded to us when we were quiet, clean, responsible, and cooperative as children. They smiled at us, spoke gently, and in other ways indicated how pleased they were with us. But we also remember what happened when we made too much noise in the car, fought with our sister, and dragged dog poop across the living room carpet. The smiles and kind words were instantly replaced with frowns, sighs of exasperation, and words spoken in a harsh tone. It certainly wasn't intentional, but we were clearly and repeatedly taught that when people make mistakes, the natural consequences are disappointment, irritation, and disapproval. It's little wonder that we learned to repeat the same pattern with our friends, classmates, co-workers, spouses, and children.

NO ONE EVER MAKES US ANGRY

Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned that in our society it's almost universally accepted that other people are responsible for making us angry. When we're mad, we're usually blaming someone for causing that feeling. All that blaming and anger *never* make us happy, but we keep doing it. Why? Because other people—being flawed human beings, and having their own needs to fill—unavoidably and regularly inconvenience us, which we believe is the same thing as causing our anger. Our reasoning might go something like this:

- All was well in my world. I was fine.
- Then that bone-headed, inconsiderate, selfish fool _____ (whatever he or she did to “make” you angry).
- Immediately I became angry.
- Because I would not have become angry if he had not behaved in that way, and because my reaction immediately followed his behavior, it's obvious that he *caused* my anger.

Because anger is so destructive, and because blaming others only makes the continuation of anger a certainty, I will present here several proofs that other people are never the cause of our anger. These will also stand as proofs that our children never make us angry. Take your time with these. As you absorb them and allow them to change your thinking, your world will change, and you will gain the ability to give your children great personal power.

Proof 1

The Self-evident Proof: We Always Have a Choice

As human beings, we have a position unique in the universe. Although there is certainly much in this world that is beautiful and awe-inspiring—the stars, planets, oceans, mountains, trees, birds, fish, sub-molecular intricacies, and so on—we alone have the ability to determine our own course. The behavior of everything else is determined by gravity, instinct, the weather, training, and DNA, but we human beings can actually comprehend our condition, ponder it, and make decisions that will change our course. In fact, we're quite jealous of that ability and will defend to the death our right to exercise it. We have fought many wars against those who would

claim to tell any of us what we can or cannot do.

As proud as we are of our ability to make our own decisions about everything else, why is it that we are so quick to claim that other people can *make us* angry? Whenever we think or say “You make me so mad”—a common expression indeed—we are giving up our right to determine how we feel, and we do this quite often.

We claim that we can make our own decisions about everything else but not about how we feel. Why is that? Because we claim the ability to make choices only when it *suits* us. We *like* being responsible for choosing what we eat, and what we wear, and where we live, and whom we’ll marry, because we like the consequences—the rewards—of those choices. But we don’t like being held responsible for our anger. We’d rather blame that choice on someone else.

Rain *makes* the ground wet. The sun *makes* the grass warm. The ground and the grass have no choice in the matter. But we human beings are not dirt or grass. We do have choices—about many things, including about how we feel. When people treat us badly, we make decisions about how we will respond. In the absence of Real Love, our ability to respond *is certainly impaired*—sometimes severely—but we can still choose to limit our Getting and Protecting Behaviors (including anger) to some degree. The more we understand about the behavior of other people, and the more loved we feel, the more able we become to make wise and loving choices. Self-control and Real Love enjoy a powerful synergy, which we’ll discuss in Chapter Four.

Proof 2

It’s *Your* Emptiness and Fear That Lead to Anger, Not What Someone Else Does to You (Two Dollars vs. Twenty Million)

In Chapter One I asked you to consider what it would feel like if you were starving and I took your last two dollars, the money you hoped to exchange for a loaf of bread. You were angry, and understandably you blamed your anger on me. But then we imagined a different scene. Again I took two dollars from you, but this time you had twenty million dollars in the next room. Your anger was either eliminated or greatly reduced, proving that your anger in the first scene was caused not by me but by *your* lack of twenty million

dollars.

As I said in Chapter One:

When we have enough Real Love in our lives, we feel as though we have twenty million emotional dollars with us all the time. With that greatest of all treasures, the little inconvenient things people do become relatively unimportant. With Real Love, we have everything that matters. Without it, we become afraid and protect ourselves with anger. Our anger is caused by a lack of Real Love in our own lives, *not* by what our children or anyone else does in a given moment.

Proof 3

You Can't Claim That Someone *Makes* You Angry If Anyone Else Does Not Become Angry When That Person Does the Same Thing

I once went with some friends on a canoe trip down a stretch of river that included some challenging white-water rapids. My friend Gene was less experienced than the rest of the group and nervous about the adventure, so I invited him to go with me in my canoe and assured him that he'd have a great time. During our passage through one of the more difficult rapids, two of the men in another canoe were goofing around and intentionally bumped their canoe into mine. Gene was startled, lost his balance, and fell out of the canoe. Of course, that tipped the canoe over and threw me into the water, too.

Gene was already anxious about this outing. He'd never canoed a river this rugged, and now he found himself bouncing between large rocks while gasping for air in the cold, churning water. Understandably, this had become a terrifying experience for him. I hurried to make sure that Gene was all right, and when he reached the calmer waters I found that he was fine physically, but he was furious at the two men who had bumped into our canoe. Clearly, he blamed them for his anger.

Unwittingly, he had proved that other people don't *make* us angry. The exact same thing happened to both Gene and me: We were both bumped by the other canoe, dumped into the cold water, and forced to swim through the rapids down the river. Our

reactions, however, were strikingly different: Gene was enraged at the men who had run into us, while I found the whole incident rather humorous and invigorating.

What was the difference? Gene was simply *unprepared* for what happened, in at least two ways. First, he was physically unprepared. He had no experience with such situations—through no fault of his own—so when he was bumped by the other canoe, he didn't know what to do, lost his balance, and fell into the water. He was also emotionally unprepared. He had not felt sufficient Real Love in his life, so he was already unhappy, and the slightest mishap was enough to push him over the edge. When he became frightened, he immediately reached for the Protecting Behavior he had always used—anger. It was the only thing he knew to do.

Because I was physically prepared for canoeing, being bumped by the other men was not overwhelming to me, although I was still thrown in the water because of Gene's reaction. Because of that inconvenience, I could then have reacted with anger to all three men, but I had been prepared emotionally by years of being unconditionally loved. Because of that love, I didn't feel empty or afraid and therefore had no need to use any of the Getting and Protecting Behaviors, including anger. I was not a better man than Gene, just better prepared to react to that incident.

We see examples all around us of people reacting differently to the same events. In World War II, for example, millions of people were imprisoned and killed in concentrations camps, by the Germans and by the Japanese. From the many oral and written accounts made by survivors of those camps, we have learned that many of those people understandably became very angry and bitter because of the unspeakably hateful treatment they received at the hands of their captors. Some of those inmates, however, chose not to become angry. Instead, they forgave their tormentors and even learned to love them. They saw the terrible effects of anger and hate—on both perpetrators and victims—and they refused to give in to those feelings. Victor Frankl spoke of such people in *Man's Search for Meaning*, as did Corrie ten Boom in her book, *The Hiding Place*.

Some of us get angry when other people are inconsiderate toward us, but others of us do not. Clearly, the problem is *not* the people who are inconsiderate. If that were so, *everyone* would become angry when he or she were treated badly, but that does not happen.

In fact, if you get angry when I do something, and we can find even one person in the world who does not get angry when I do that same thing, then I did not *make* you angry. You made a choice. Anger is always a choice. In any given situation, some people *choose* to become angry and others do not.

Proof 4

When *Imitation Love* Makes Your Anger Go Away, You Can't Claim Someone Else Caused Your Anger

One day I was having lunch with my friend Larry, and he mentioned an incident with his son Jordan. Larry had clearly told Jordan never to use Larry's expensive video camera, but Jordan ignored his warning, and while Larry was out of the house, Jordan used the camera, dropped it, and damaged it. Larry was furious at his son, and during our conversation he used the phrase, "Sometimes that kid makes me so mad."

Me: If I gave you a million dollars in cash right now—and a new car—would you be less irritated with him?

Larry: (smiling) Yes, I guess I would.

Me: Then Jordan didn't make you angry.

Larry: I don't understand.

Me: If a million dollars would make your anger go away, then obviously the real cause of your anger is the lack of a million dollars, not Jordan—right?

Other people never make us angry. Anger is always a choice.

In our society, we commonly greet people by asking some variation on "How are you?" A frequent reply to that query is "Fine" or "Good." What we almost always mean by that response is that *things* are going well. We mean that our supply of Imitation Love is adequate for the moment, and *that* is what keeps us from being angry. But if we're running low on praise, power, pleasure, and safety, watch out! That's when we become irritable. When we don't have enough Imitation Love, people who would ordinarily not

bother us suddenly become enormously irritating.

Once again, it's not the individual behaviors of the people around us that make us angry. Anger is our reaction to the emptiness and fear that always accompany the lack of Real Love. When we have sufficient Imitation Love, we can often temporarily ignore the emptiness of not feeling loved. When we run out of Imitation Love and get angry, a new supply of Imitation Love usually makes our anger go away.

Proof 5

When Real Love Makes Your Anger Go Away, Then It's Obvious That the Lack of it Was the Real Cause.

Earlier in this chapter, George was irritated with his son, Dan, and he was certain that Dan had made him angry. Over the following months, however, he learned to tell the truth about himself—which we'll discuss in the next chapter—and he began to feel unconditionally accepted by wise and loving friends. As George felt loved and happy, he no longer had a need to demand respect and obedience from his son. When compared with Real Love, Imitation Love soon loses its appeal.

As George felt unconditionally loved, he lost his need for anger, which is a Getting and Protecting Behavior. He quit being angry *even though Dan's behavior remained the same* for quite some time. And thus he proved that Dan had never been the cause for his anger. If Dan had really been the cause, George would have continued to be angry when Dan's behavior didn't immediately change.

I have observed the effect of Real Love on the lives of hundreds of people, and I can tell you that George's story isn't the least bit unusual. As we feel unconditionally loved, we lose our anger—perhaps not all at once, but it does go away eventually.

THE FREEDOM OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR ANGER

We blame people for our anger because it seems easier than taking the responsibility ourselves, a technique we learned from birth. When I blame you for my anger, however, I'm stuck. I'll be angry forever unless *you* change. That's unfortunate for two reasons: It's very impractical to have *my* happiness chained to *your* decisions,

and it's simply untrue that you cause my anger.

When I realize that my anger is a reaction to the emptiness and fear caused by a lack of Real Love in my own life, I can now do something about it. I can tell the truth about myself and get the unconditional love I need. I can quit being angry at my children and instead be a loving parent to them—an infinitely better choice.

After understanding that other people don't cause our anger, we can take the next crucial step of teaching this principle to our children. And then they too can experience the freedom that comes from take responsibility for their own anger. I suggest that you become familiar with two or more of the above proofs and use them in teaching your children in family meetings and in situations where they become angry.

We hope you have enjoyed this excerpt from Real Love in Parenting. As you learn and apply these principles with your children you will be giving them a gift that will literally save their lives.

We encourage you to continue browsing RealLove.com, where you'll be introduced to a vast array of educational tools that will assist you in all of your relationships.

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