

How To Deal with Anger That Comes From Mom or Dad

by Maria on April 23, 2011



A few years back, Jeannie contacted me for help with her “angry mother”...

“I feel like I’m going crazy, Maria, and I’m exhausting myself in the process. Ever since my mom’s health started to decline, nothing I do for her is ever enough. She’s ungrateful and nasty...I feel like I’m at the end of my rope and I don’t know how to make it better.”

Can you relate to this?

If so, then I’ve got a few tips for you...

Tip #1 on how to deal with anger: Try to connect with what’s really underneath the anger.

Okay, so this sounds like a lot of psycho mumbo-jumbo, but bear with me a minute and trust what I'm telling you here. Anger is often a cover emotion. Whether you realize it or not, it's much easier to feel anger than it is to feel some of the more heavy-duty emotions like fear or shame. So a good rule of thumb when dealing with an angry person is to try to remind yourself that he/she is most likely covering up something else. But what?

Well in the case of your aging parent, the list may very well be a mile long. That's because getting old is serious business...

Not being able to do the things you used to do with ease is serious business. Having to rely upon your children to get you to and from a doctor you don't want to have to see, only to come home and have to do things that you don't want to do (like take medications, or keep your feet up, or eat a no salt diet) is serious business.

What I'm getting at here is one of the biggest lessons I learned in working with older adults and that is this: **Most of them don't want to need your help.**

If your aging parent is angry like Jeannie's, this not wanting to need you reason may be the root of why. And if it is, then it may help to understand that it's probably not about you and how you're doing x, y, or z. Instead it's that your aging parent needs help with x, y, or z and this is really disruptive to how they think about themselves.

That said, I'm a firm believer in setting some ground rules with people who are angry which leads me to Tip #2...

Tip #2 on how to deal with anger: Don't deal with anger.

In other words, if you're in the midst of doing something for your aging parent and he or she begins hurling insults your way or verbally berating how you're doing something, stop what you're doing and walk away for a few minutes. Head to another room or, preferably, head out the front door for some fresh air.

A move like this helps you and it helps your aging parent. You get the fresh air and the deep breaths you ought to be taking to help you keep your cool and your mom or dad get's a big surprise and a moment to think about what just happened.

When you come back I'd encourage you to say as calmly as you can: "Mom/Dad, I'm really doing my best here and I'm sorry if it's not what you want from me. But this isn't easy for me either and you need to know that I'm not going to tolerate you speaking to me like that. I don't deserve it and I won't let it continue."

If the insults continue then it may be time to act on Tip #3...

Tip #3 on how to deal with anger: Enlist the help of others

I talked about taking a break from your aging parent for a few minutes when insults fly, but sometimes the break needs to be more permanent. In other words, if you believe that **you matter too** and that exposing yourself to verbal insults isn't okay, then you have to face the fact that you can't go it alone.

At the end of the day, we don't have the power to change our parents, just ourselves. So if a temporary break doesn't give your aging parent pause, then this may be a sign that someone else needs to bear the load with you here.

It's as simple (and oh-so-not-that-simple) as that...