

July – August 2003



DEBORAH N. DEWALT
NEWSLETTER



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ONE ANGRY RESPONSE LEADS TO ANOTHER: COOL DOWN THE HEAT

You have seen it happen some time in your life. One person says angry words. Another responds with anger. Angry words and actions fly back and forth – pretty soon the situation is out of control.

Weren't they just venting? Shouldn't the result be catharsis on both sides?

Not so, according to Katherine J. Nevins, a psychologist, professor at Bethel College, and mediator. Venting maintains aggressive thoughts, feelings and arousal. It escalates an angry situation.

In family law cases, escalation may evidence itself in a number of different ways, reports Nevins.

- increase in pit-bull tactics;
- increase in the number of issues;
- issues becoming increasingly generalized (example: you let the children watch "R" rated movies so you are a bad parent).
- increased self-interest;
- increased emotional heat.

A better approach to venting, says Nevins, is calming down. You might *delay your response*: suggest discussing the issue tomorrow, or count to 10. You could take steps to *relax* yourself: take a deep breath, drink a soda, do some exercises, write down your thoughts and leave them on the paper, listen to relaxing music. Or if you can not immediately calm the anger, *cover it up*: tell a joke and laugh, change the topic to one less emotional (the weather is a Minnesota favorite!), move over to a different group of people, or just listen without any response. Be proactive. *Visualize and rehearse your calm response* to a situation that you believe might bring out the other side's anger – ahead of time.

Your keeping control is a triumvirate of messages to the other side. First, you are saying I expect you to keep control. Second, you are saying I will stay calm and reasonable even if you do not. And third, you are saying that you or someone else can try to help the other person de-escalate his/her anger. Then your case can stay focused on the real issues – no matter what process you are using to resolve them – mediation, negotiation with each other or through your attorneys, or trial.

For more information on the impact of anger on resolving conflict, see Social Conflict, Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement (2nd ed. By Rubin, Pruitt and Kim (McGraw-Hell).



KID-FRIENDLY "CULTURE"



This month I am sharing with you three of my favorite cultural excursions for kids.

The Stages Theatre in Hopkins usually selects plays that last an hour to an hour and a half. Ticket prices are reasonable, and many of the actors are children. Where else can you see plays ranging from Dr. Seuss to Little House in the Prairie to Shakespeare?

My kids spent a full hour or more in the activity room at the Bakken Electricity Museum in Minneapolis putting together circuits with door bells, lights and small fans. They also had a chance to re-create classic electrical experiments such as those done by Benjamin Franklin.

The Family Concert Series by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra features one hour long concerts preceded by activities relating to each concert's theme. The themes are selected to appeal to children and sometimes include dance, narration, costumes or demonstrations.

RAISING CHILDREN IN RETIREMENT

Grandparents raising their grandchildren is an increasingly common occurrence. Minnesota is fortunate to have an organization devoted to supporting their efforts – The Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association. The website for this group includes one downloadable booklet on the practical issues facing the grandparent raising a grandchild, and another on the legal issues. Check them out at www.mkca.org.

READER'S CONTRIBUTION



Dan Speegle of the Speegle Agency in Burnsville reminds recent divorcees to review their insurance policies to ensure that they are carrying adequate liability limits. He says that one way to limit liability exposure is to carry a personal umbrella policy in addition to auto and home insurance policies. The umbrella policy would cover accidents such as:



- A guest in your home falls on the stairs and suffers a debilitating back injury.
- Your lawn mower catches a piece of metal and hurls it into the air, striking a passerby.
- While giving a friend a ride on your snowmobile, the vehicle overturns and your passenger is seriously injured.

Sometimes damage awards for these accidents can run into the millions. If the judgment exceeds your current coverage limits, an umbrella policy pays the difference. It also includes protection that your other policies do not, such as coverage for incidents alleging libel or slander.



Summer Office Hours
Monday – Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Friday: 9:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.
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