

PARENTING TIPS

Be Careful with Triangles

Triangles in relationships happen often in family life. Conflict between two people can become an invitation for another person to join in. If parents aren't careful, and create triangles inappropriately, people get hurt. But if triangles are used properly, they become great opportunities for healing and learning. Here are some examples to watch out for:

- * A child who is unhappy with Dad's discipline may go to Mom and try to get her to overrule a decision.
- * A dad may criticize the way Mom is handling a situation.
- * A child may go to Dad with a proposal to get around Mom's instructions.
- * A teen may get angry with Mom for the way she's treating his brother.
- * One child may tattletale on another.

Each of these situations represents an opportunity. Some advice suggests that triangles are always wrong and warn not to get involved. We don't believe that's the answer. Rather we suggest you triangle in as a counselor or coach instead of a critic.

When you decide to triangle into a relationship, be careful. You may be right, but being right is not enough. You also need to be wise. Be careful about taking sides and creating more division in the strained relationship. Instead, look for ways to bring healing.

The key is to focus on the issue of the person who comes to you. When Billy tattletales on his brother by saying, "Mom, Sam left the light on again," take time to talk to Billy about how he should handle the situation. Maybe the right thing is for Billy to go turn it off. Your role in the situation is important because you work with the problem from the perspective of the person who comes to you. Invariably, that person needs help and guidance to know how to respond to the challenge.

Triangles are opportunities for people to learn and grow. Identify them and take advantage of them, but be careful not to get sucked into the conflict in unhealthy ways.

For more practical ideas on developing honor in your family consider the book [Say Goodbye to Whining, Complaining, and Bad Attitudes in You and Your Kids](#) by Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN. In Chapter 4 you'll find more helpful ways to think about family dynamics.