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GUILT VS. ANGER PROBLEM

A very common and very upsetting problem arises in the course of many relationships, such as husband/wife or parent/child. It occurs when one person offers another person the choice of feeling angry or feeling guilty. This problem then involves an interaction between two testing tactics: Intimidation and Martyrdom.



Here's how it goes: 13 year old Kristina walks into the room where her father is busy watching his favorite football team. With an innocent question, Kristina offers her father the choice of whether he wants to be angry or guilty:

"Dad, can you drive me to Jenny's?"

"Kristina, that's clear across town."

"It will only take forty minutes."

"You know, you pick the worst times to ask me for rides."

"Your stupid football's more important, huh?"

"Why the heck can't you ever plan ahead?"

"You never do anything with me anyway."

"OK, OK. Let's move before the darn game is over."

"No, hate to ruin your day. Thanks anyway—I'll just stay home!"

When his daughter asks him for a ride, Dad can either take her, or feel resentful, or he can refuse, and feel guilty. The choice is clear; what to do isn't.

ISN'T THERE A MORE RATIONAL SOLUTION?

Whatever the reason, you often wind up with two people sort of jockeying for position, trying to take the angry position and at the same time put the other person in the guilty role. When Dad says, "You pick the worst times...", or, "OK, OK. Let's move before the game is over," he is saying, "I'll be angry and you be guilty." But Kristina isn't about to stand for this so she comes back with, "Your stupid football is more important," and "I'll just stay home." She, in other words, is now saying, "No way buster I'll be angry, you be guilty." If she does stay home, she may become the official winner of this match: she can be angry and Dad will feel guilty. [Continued page 2](#)

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You're probably thinking, "This sounds pretty stupid." It is, but it happens a lot. Isn't there a more rational solution than two people trying to guilt each other to death? Certainly it would be better to negotiate (or to plan ahead). Perhaps Dad could have responded by saying, "I can take you if you can hold on till halftime," or something like that.

If you are the parent on the receiving end of a spontaneous request like the one above, or in some other situation that might involve this kind of jockeying, your best bet is to say "No", or make a reasonable counter offer. Then—if your child is still unhappy—live with the guilt if you have to, and avoid coming back with intimidation to eradicate your discomfort.

STUDIES SHOW 1-2-3 MAGIC WORKS!

Parents are often enormously stressed by their children. And it's painfully obvious that stress from kids can aggravate depression, anxiety, impulse control disorders, marital discord, substance abuse and a host of other psychological problems. Studies show that [1-2-3 Magic](#) cannot only improve children's cooperation and reduce misbehavior, but it can also improve a parent's mental health.



[Mooseheart Child City and School Study](#)

"...the program made parenting easier and more flexible, while at the same time it significantly reduced problem behavior in the children."

[Medicine Hat Study](#)

"Over 90% of the parents felt that the 1-2-3 sessions had made a significant difference in their child's behavior."

[Brief Psychoeducational Parenting Program \[1-2-3 Magic\]: An Evaluation and 1-Year Follow-up](#) Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: Volume 42 (10) October 2003

[Summary Toronto Hospital for Sick Children Study \(above\)](#)

"A major and statistically significant improvement in the children's behavior and a large drop in parental stress, depression and hostility."

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