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Parenting Your Child

Learning to Manage
Anger

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Introduction

Anger in Children

Anger is a feeling that everyone from infancy to adulthood experiences from time to time. We have all seen a child express their anger in a hungry cry, a temper tantrum, pushing, taunting and a teenager's hostility of slamming doors or giving the silent treatment. However it is displayed, anger is a very real and very scary emotion for a child/teenager to experience.

At a very early age, children observe how adults manage anger, and it becomes a role model for how children will manage their anger both in childhood and adulthood. Using punishment such as spanking will teach children that it's accepted to be aggressive when they are angry.

As an alternative to physical punishment, work on using time out's as a way to discipline your child. A time out is not a chance to make your child sit for hours on end without contact. Depending on the age of your child a time out might be 5 minutes for very young children and a half hour for a teenager. Children need a consistent place for a time out. The place you choose should be without noise, stimulation or temptation of toys and activities. A teenager usually finds the safety of his/her room the best place to get away from difficult situations.

The purpose of a time out is to take the child away from problem behavior and allow him/her to sit quietly and think or problem solve by himself. One of the nice things about having a time-out is that it allows the child to calm down, and it lets the parent calm down too. It is very important for children to see us as role models in handling uncomfortable emotions such as anger. As role models, the best thing we can do is try to stay calm and focus on the problem just like we are asking our children to do in their time outs.

Checking in with your child after a time out is just as important as the time out itself. You can't demand a time out and naturally expect your child's thinking to be exactly like yours. Just because you instituted a time out doesn't necessarily mean problem solved and your job is complete. After the time out, check in and follow up: How do you feel now that you had time to think? What did you think about on your time out? I realize you are angry, but hitting doesn't solve the problem. It's okay to feel angry, but it isn't okay to act out because you are angry. What can we do better the next time you feel angry?

You might need use negotiation with a teenager after the time out: Where do we stand after we both had time to think? Do you see things differently now that you had time to think about it? Do you have questions for me? I understand why you are angry, but we need to live in a solution rather than simply have anger.

Whatever your child's age group, you need to check back in after a time out and work from a standpoint of solution rather than sitting in the problem without resolve.

Anger for children, as well as adults, can be the result of feeling afraid or helpless. When the family is engaged in battle or when parents are fighting children want to "fix it." Children crave stability in their lives so that they can do their job of being a kid without feeling fear. Showing your child they are loved and cared for creates a secure environment and they become less likely to feel angry out of insecurity. Reinforcing that your child is important and they are worthy of your love and respect is one way of making him/her feel secure. By finding out what children are thinking and feeling and by spending time with them, we show that we care and are interested in their lives.

When your child feels safe and secure they feel more in control over what happens in their lives. Feeling safe and secure involves providing structure in your family life. Bedtime, mealtimes, school and weekend activities should all happen regularly. There will always be changes in life and as parents we need to help children be prepared for unexpected changes.

If you are sure that you will be moving or changing jobs, let children know what is going to happen in their lives. Even when a child doesn't like the idea of change, you can still answer questions and assure them that there will be a routine again. By providing children with love and security and helping them understand how to stay calm and solve problems, parents can help children manage their anger.

Why teach anger management to our children?

Anger is an inevitable part of life. We all have anger from time to time and there are ways of dealing with it that help us stay in control of the emotion rather than it being in control of us. In today's world, learning to deal with anger and stress in a positive way may be one of the most powerful tools your child can learn.

Goals of anger management for children:

- Learn how to problem solve without acting out.
- Learn to remove themselves from angry situations.
- Learn to communicate angry feelings in positive ways.
- Recognize angry feelings in themselves and others.
- Learn that it is okay to "feel" angry, but not okay to "act out" physically.
- Learn to control angry impulses.
- Learn to find solutions for problems.
- Learn calming techniques such as self initiated time outs.
- Learn to set boundaries and ask for what they need and want in their life.

Teaching children to cope with emotions is different for each child. One way of handling angry feelings may work well for one child in a family, but not another. Everyone is unique in handling emotions and it might take some trial and error experimenting to find what works best for your child.

Learning to Relax

Everyone experiences anger and everyone knows what it feels like to be angry. Anger produces many physical responses such as muscle tension, rapid heart beat, shaking, flushing, stomachaches... Just like you learned to recognize your physical signs and symptoms when you are angry, children can be taught to recognize their physical reactions to anger and learn to calm themselves. When anyone, adult or child, is in the midst of feeling powerful anger it would be ridiculous to think they might be able to lie down and relax. Think about the times when you have felt tremendous anger. What did you need to do to calm yourself? Would sitting down or taking a nap help? Probably not. Telling someone to go lie down when they are feeling physically ready to explode is asking for trouble.

One of the best ways to deal with a physical respond to anger is to do something physical.

- Running outside
- Playing a favorite sport
- Listening to music
- Shooting basketball
- Taking a walk
- Riding a bike
- Squeezing something such as a stuffed animal or play dough
- Taking slow, deep breaths
- Drawing or creating something about how they feel
- Eating a healthy snack

“Why don’t you go outside and run around a little bit so can you feel better?”

“Sit with me and take some slow deep breaths and let’s calm down together.”

“Would you like to draw a picture about how you are feeling?”

“Maybe you are hungry and need a snack.”

Teaching Your Child to Communicate

Children often experience anger and even act out on it without being able to tell you what their anger is all about. Children are not always able to realize when they are angry

because their ability to think and reason logically is not fully developed yet. You can teach your child to identify his/her angry feelings by using the following sentence:

I feel _____ when _____
because _____.

Using this type of communication with your child helps them realize their hidden feelings and actions beneath angry emotions.

For example: "I feel angry when Billy comes into my room and handles all of my toys because he never puts them back where they belong."

In this example, an outsider is handling personal belongings and not respectfully replacing them in their proper order.

Learning to recognize hidden emotions causing anger is an important first step to learning how to resolve anger. Encourage your child to communicate their feelings. Never disregard or dismiss their feelings by laughing or making them feel ridiculous for having a feeling. Try to remember what you need and want when you are having a bad feeling (support, guidance, love, respect) and try to give it to your child in need.

Teach Your Child to Solve Problems

Problem solving steps:

- Stop the action
- Take a time out
- Listen to each other
- Think of different ways to solve the problem
- Resolve the problem

Most children will need your help and guidance through the problem solving process. Solving problems takes time and energy, but in doing the process over and over helps children become good at identifying the problem and coming up with creative ways of solving the problem. A child with a lot of practice in thinking different ways is more likely to solve conflicts with a positive twist.

You may need to intervene when you hear a problematic situation happening and remind your child of the following steps:

- Stop the action
- Listen to each other
- How can you solve the problem
- How will you solve the problem and move on in your day
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Change the Environment

Sometimes it is best to walk away in angry situations to cool off. Encourage your child to walk away when situations are becoming heated and their feelings are out of control. Help your child pick a place where he/she can cool off and calm down. “Why don’t you go to your room for a few minutes and then come back when you are ready.” “I think you should go outside and swing.” It gives guidance and structure at a time when your child feels most out of control.

Encouraging statements:

“Take a break and try to cool down.”

“It’s okay to walk away now.”

“When things feel all wild and crazy, it might help to slow down and do something quiet.”

“I realize you are upset when your toys get broken so let’s prevent your bad feelings by picking up your toys and putting them in a safe spot.”

Most children won’t know what to do with themselves when they are feeling intense anger or rage. You need to be the person who guides them and let’s them know what is or is not acceptable when they are feeling anger.

Not Acceptable:

- Breaking things
- Hitting
- Screaming
- Biting
- Abusing a pet
- Hurting self
- Temper tantrums

Acceptable:

- Drawing a picture
- Crying
- Talking things over
- Walking away
- Hugging a favorite stuffed animal
- Taking slow, deep breaths
- Ask for help
- Listen to music

- Time out
- Physical activities like playing basketball, swinging, jumping rope

It's okay to feel angry. Parents get angry too, but you need to make sure your anger doesn't take over your rational thought process. Show your children the positive ways of dealing with anger. Teach your children how to deal with anger by showing them the positive way you handle your anger.

- Identify that you are angry: "I'm angry, I feel really angry right now, I'm upset" teaches your child that it is okay to feel angry and talk about it openly.
- Explain why you are angry: "I am angry that my computer quit working" helps children to understand what is behind your anger and gives them an example of how to look for the root of their anger.
- Express your anger in a positive way. "I am really angry that my computer quit working and I am going to take a few minutes to calm down outside" sets a good example.

Discipline is no time for anger. Discipline is a time to select an appropriate consequence that will encourage thinking in your child. Although there are times when your anger may feel so overwhelming that you want to act out yourself in response to the misdeed; keep your hands to yourself.

- Never lay angry hands on your child to get his/her attention.
- Never use angry hands to shake sense into your child or express your frustration.
- Never use angry hands to threaten physical harm.
- Never use angry hands to strike a child in retaliation for wrongdoing.

If you feel as though your child is experiencing frequent anger which is extremely intense, it may be time to get help. Many situations in life cause extreme anger: divorce, death, loss, past feelings of hurt... Left unattended, anger can feed on itself and destroy families in the process. Seeking the support and guidance of a counselor or family therapist may help you to put resolve on anger issues and move your family into healthy balance.

For a complete parenting class, please visit <http://www.parentingclass.net/>
You can learn to raise a child who is self sufficient, confident and successful. We can help.