

## Helping Your Child with their Anger

More and more we are hearing news reports of senseless violent crimes being perpetrated by angry teens and there is cause to pause and wonder, "What is it that makes these young people behave this way?" We are often asked, "What can we do to tame anger when it appears in our children?" We hope the following article will help.

It is important to recognise that anger is a normal and healthy emotion. People who find it difficult to manage their angry outbursts usually lack the strategies to do so. These strategies can be learned from a young age through simple emotion coaching techniques that give children the words and the appropriate skills to express their feelings.

When dealing with anger in your children, the following tips may be useful:

- Wait for your child to calm down. It is very hard to talk about feelings in the heat of the moment. A safe space is a good idea and even stress releasing activities like scrunching paper or popping bubble wrap can help relieve tension.
- Acknowledge the anger and encourage your child to talk to you about what has happened to make them angry.
- Empathise with the feeling by letting your child know that you understand that certain situations or incidents can be upsetting. Teach them words to describe and label their feelings e.g. hurt, frustrated, disappointed, scared, sad, powerless, and insecure. You do not have to excuse aggressive behaviour or bad language, but helping a child to understand how they are feeling and to express these feelings appropriately can be very calming. It also helps them to feel understood and loved.
- Help your child to learn and maintain control when they are experiencing angry feelings by talking to them about what they think they can do to stay in control e.g. counting to 10, taking deep breaths. Support and encourage them in their attempts to do this and congratulate them when they manage a stressful situation well.
- Model the behaviour you would like to see in them. Children learn by watching how others behave and react in certain situations. Talk about your feelings and how you find solutions to help you feel better.
- Encourage physical activity. Research has shown that exercise is an effective tool to calm down, improve mood and reduce negative feelings. Any activity which gets the heart pumping is good e.g. skipping rope, trampolining.
- Distract them: Doing an "angry drawing" or doodle may relieve tension. Older children might like to write about what has happened and how they feel in the form of a journal or poem.

Remember there are many things that can make children angry. Learning about what they are feeling as well as the tools to deal with these feelings is an important life skill. We can help children by equipping them with appropriate

language and by teaching and modelling problem solving behaviours. They need to know that it is OK to have angry feelings and that how they act and react in a situation can make it better or worse.

You will also find useful articles at [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org) written for children, teens and parents.

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