

What is Anger?

We all become angry at times. Anger is a natural human emotion, one of many responses we can express when we are frustrated and prevented from reaching our goals. Since anger is a universal emotion, it seems logical to conclude that there is nothing wrong with feeling angry. The problem occurs when anger leads to inappropriate actions or behaviour. The problem, then, is not being angry but dealing with angry feelings in an ineffective way.

Childhood experiences as well as inborn temperament powerfully influence the way parents express anger and teach their children to manage anger. How do you respond when you're angry? Do you become cynical or overreact? Do you yell? Do you hit your children? How did your parents respond to you when you were angry as a child? Did they punish you? Did they shame or blame you? Do you have a tough time dealing with anger because your parents didn't know how to deal with it?

Teaching Anger Management

The goal of teaching children anger management is to reduce excessive reactions when angry and to develop skills to use anger as a signal to redirect their behaviour. As with learning to swim or ride a bicycle, as you begin to work with your child it is important to be patient. Not all children learn to swim in the first lesson or master riding a bicycle that first day. Some children require much longer periods of practice to develop proficiency.

Keep in mind also that some children are born more likely to be irritable and easily angered. These symptoms usually appear at an early age. Yet, it is also important to remember that some children behave this way because they live in households in which they are exposed to models of poor anger management. Some children experience both risks, leading to a significant probability that they will struggle to learn to manage anger effectively. Some of these children may require professional help. The primary goal is to help children and adolescents express anger in an assertive rather than aggressive manner. This means they are neither pushy nor demanding, but learn to be respectful advocates for themselves. This also means that they learn to cope with, not simply suppress, their anger.



Eric's anger response
was of seismic proportions

Anger Management Strategies

1. **Serve as appropriate models for your children.** Remember that children don't always do what we say. They are more often likely to do what we do. Thus, a key component of teaching anger management is for you, the adult, to manage anger and model effective anger coping strategies for your children.
2. **Be empathic.** As you teach your children to express anger constructively, place yourself in their shoes. Ask yourself such questions as:
 - o "Am I speaking to my children so they will learn from me rather than resent me?"
 - o "Would I want anyone to speak with me the way I am speaking with my children?"

If we do not consider our children's perspective, we are likely to say or do things that may actually work against helping our children learn to deal constructively with anger.

3. **Involve your child as much as possible in the process of dealing effectively with anger.** Even young children can be engaged in a discussion that includes consideration of:
 - o what makes us angry.
 - o what are different options for dealing with anger.
 - o what might be the consequence of each option, and
 - o what option might be most effective.

When we enter into such a dialogue, we reinforce the belief in children that they can learn to control anger rather than have anger control them. This provides a sense of ownership, self-discipline, and resilience.

4. **Remember the adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."** Engage in prevention and "planned parenting." Notice when certain situations are especially difficult or frustrating for your child and prepare a "plan of action" in advance. For example, if your child gets frustrated when going into a store, wishing to have every item in sight, you can say before going in, "You can select one item. You let me know which one you would like to have." If even this kind of preparation does not work, it may be a signal that your child is not yet ready to accompany you in the store. Or, if your child "fights" about going to bed and you find yourself trying to cajole him for an hour, it might be helpful to provide your child a sense of ownership and avoid a struggle by saying, "Do you want me to remind you 10 minutes or 15 minutes before bedtime that it's time to get ready?"
5. **Discipline in a way that lessens frustration and anger and reinforces self-discipline.** All parents can become frustrated, at times, with their children, but when parents respond to their children's anger by screaming, yelling, or spanking, they are unintentionally reinforcing the very behaviours they wish to stop. A parent who screams or spansks is communicating such messages as: "We handle frustration through anger," or "As long as I am bigger than you are, it's okay for me to shout and hit." Parents who remain calm while disciplining, who have clear expectations, who use realistic, natural, and logical consequences, and who remember that discipline is a teaching process, will lessen outbursts of anger in their children, while reinforcing self-control.
6. **Show your children unconditional love and spend "special times" with them.** When parents accept their children and show them unconditional love, children are less likely to become very frustrated or intensely angry. When parents spend time alone with each of their children in such activities as playing with them, reading to them at bedtime, going out for snack or to a game, they have opportunities to develop a positive relationship. Such a relationship will provide the foundation for teaching children self-discipline and assisting them in managing frustration and anger constructively.

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