

Tips For Handling Anger

Handling Your Anger

Anger. It's real. It's normal. Everyone experiences it. However, you can find ways to express your anger that doesn't hurt, belittle, or insult your children.

Anger in its destructive form can make a child's misbehavior worse. If you control your reaction to something your child does, the behavior will stop sooner, won't last as long, or be as severe. Both you and your child will feel better about how you handled the situation.

This does not mean that you shouldn't get angry when your child misbehaves. Children need to understand that their behavior upsets you. Most importantly, they need to understand why you are upset. For example, if your child lost a pair of scissors, you need to say, "I'm upset because I need those scissors for my sewing project," rather than name calling.

All children will misbehave and anger is inevitable. If you are having trouble handling your anger, here are a series of techniques to help you keep calm and plan your reaction to their behavior.

Four Steps to Control Your Anger

Stop	Pause for a moment and cool off. Don't discipline the child while you are angry.
Think	Read the situation quickly. Try to determine what is really happening.
Plan	Form a plan. Evaluate the problem, have a purpose, set goals, think of alternatives.
Act	Carry out your decision.

Calm Yourself

- Count to ten very slowly. Concentrate on the counting, regardless of what your child is doing.
- Put your hands in your pockets to help you resist the urge to use them to threaten or hit your child.

- Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Pretend you are releasing steam from your body.
- Get away from the situation. Go into another room or take a walk. This gives both you and your child some time to cool off.
- Talk with your partner, a close friend, or a relative. Talking it through will help you develop creative ideas for dealing with the situation.
- Take time to think about how you're reacting to the situation. Why are you angry with your child? Is the child misbehaving because he wants attention, is angry himself, feels discouraged, frustrated, or does not have his needs met?

For example: Tory was angry that his father would not let him go out to play after supper. Tory: "You're dumb. I hate you!" Father: "Tory, no name calling. Say, 'I don't like it cause I want to go out.' Then it's easier for us to talk."

Say You're Sorry

There is no doubt you will get angry. There may be times you say something you regret saying to your child. If your child said something similar to you, you would expect an apology. The same expectation also applies to parents.

Many parents worry that apologizing will undermine their authority with their children. Perhaps their parents never apologized or admitted they were wrong to them. An apology serves several purposes.

- Restores good feelings between you and your child.
- Reduces resentment a child may feel because of your outburst.
- Gives a chance to talk things over, understand what caused the behavior, and discuss what to do instead.
- Teaches children how to behave when they make a mistake.

Dealing With Your Child's Anger

Because anger is inevitable, parents should also help their children learn how to deal with this often confusing and frightening feeling.

What Causes Anger in Young Children?

- Frustration
- Needing attention
- Feeling powerless
- Being misunderstood
- Not feeling good about themselves
- Feeling helpless
- Being belittled or made fun of
- Not having physical needs taken care of
- Having a parent take over instead of asking if the child wants help
- Being disappointed
- Having difficulty saying what they need
- Being punished

What Can Parents Do When a Child Starts Getting Angry?

- **Show affection.** Sometimes all a child needs to help regain control when frustrated or anxious is a sudden hug or some other show of affection.
- **Ignore minor misbehavior.** Often children misbehave to get your attention. Ignoring behavior that both of you know is inappropriate is one good way to send your child a message that you don't approve. Make sure you don't ignore the child, just the behavior.
- **Appeal to the child's sense of right.** Tell your child how you feel about a particular behavior and ask him to consider your feelings. For example, if a child is making an annoying noise, ask him to stop it and explain how the noise is making your headache worse.
- **Say NO!** Limits should be clearly defined for children. When a child breaks a rule, letting her know she has stepped over the line is important. This helps remind her of the rule and lets her know she is responsible for the consequences of breaking the rule.

What Should Parents Do When a Child Has a Temper Tantrum?

- **Accept your child's anger.** Let your child know it is OK for him to feel angry, but let him know that having such feelings is different from expressing them inappropriately. Make sure your child knows you are there to help him with the problem when he is ready. If the anger is being expressed in inappropriate ways, suggest other ways the child can express his feelings.

- **Teach a child how to express anger with words.** Talking is a good way to get rid of feelings of anger and frustration. When your child becomes worked up, encourage her to use her words rather than hitting, grabbing, or using some other physical action.
- **Respond to temper tantrums with care and concern.** When your child resorts to a tantrum to express his needs, your response is critical. This is the time your child needs you most. He needs you to remain calm (not an easy thing to do), he needs to be comforted, and he needs your help to regain control. Some strategies include:
 - ▶ Ignore the tantrum if you can.
 - ▶ Use a time out to give your child a chance to calm down.
 - ▶ Take a time out yourself.
 - ▶ Remove your child from the situation.
 - ▶ Hold your child closely. This can be especially effective for younger children.
 - ▶ Talk softly to your child.
 - ▶ Try to figure out what your child wants and needs.
 - ▶ Help your child find other ways to express his needs.
- **Avoid physical punishment.** Hitting or spanking a child for acting aggressive or doing something wrong is guaranteed to backfire. Avoid demonstrating behavior you don't want your child to imitate.

Your Attitude Is the Key

Anger is a feeling we all have. It is normal for children to feel anger. When they do, they often find it frightening. Parents need to help children learn how to manage their anger and how to channel it into positive action.

Don't Take Everything Your Child Says Personally

Children learn the power of words at an early age. They also learn what things they can say to hit your "hot" buttons. Keep in mind young children have less skill than you in dealing with anger and frustration. Your best strategy is not to react when your child calls you a name or tells you you're a lousy parent. Let the words and negative comments slide off. Your child may mean it at the time, but won't feel the same in five minutes if you don't react.

Remember, your words are powerful, too. When a child says something hurtful, let her know how you feel and give her another way to say it.

Source: "Anger: A Guide for Parents" and "Dealing with a Child's Anger" Positive Parenting; a video-based curriculum, Minnesota Extension Service and University of Wisconsin-Extension 1995.

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