

Anger Management

Helping people to manage their angry feelings can be a trying problem for most of us. Some people have not learned how to express anger in acceptable ways. When they get angry, they are likely to take it out on another person, to blame someone else, scream, perhaps hit others, or display some other inappropriate behavior. Some people grow up ashamed of their feelings because they have been taught that it is "bad" to feel or show anger. It is much more emotionally healthy for people to learn that everyone has angry feelings at times and that there are appropriate ways to express anger. Parents can help children learn to manage their feelings of anger and to express them appropriately by remembering when dealing with the angry child to always focus on the behavior. It is not children that we want to change, rather, it is the inappropriate behavior that we want to change. We want to support appropriate behavior and calling attention to inappropriate behavior lets the child know that the actions are not acceptable, but that the child is still loved. Praise and reinforcement let children know which behaviors are appropriate and acceptable. Remember, it is not "bad" to be angry, but it is "bad" to express angry feelings in ways that hurt others. We should teach the child to consider angry feelings as a problem to be solved and teach them coping skills when angry. Adults can encourage children to use their minds to solve problems and to think about solutions or alternatives to their angry feelings and help them see that "getting mad" does not solve the problem.

We can help the child express angry feelings in words. We can be a role model for children by using words that tell how the child feels, not what the child thinks about another person. For example, "I am sad when you won't let me play with you;" not "You're mean and I hate you!" Words that hurt others are not acceptable ways of coping with anger. We can use "You-messages" to encourage children to express their feelings in words. "You-messages" describe the child's feelings and help you and the child focus on the inappropriate behavior. They encourage children to express their troublesome feelings. Many times, when children are allowed to express angry feelings, the feelings tend to disappear. An example of a "you-message" is, "You must be really mad that Ben wouldn't share his new books with you."

We should allow children to make acceptable choices and give them the responsibility for their behavior whenever possible. Allow the child to make acceptable choices by offering only choices you can live with.

We teach by example and good role models for children are always the best teachers! If children hear you using words to express your anger, they are likely to do the same. On the other hand, if they hear you scream or see you throw something when you get mad, then they are likely to think those behaviors are acceptable. Likewise, if you hit children or animals when you get mad at them, you are teaching them to use violent behavior to express their angry feelings.

Helping a child learn to get rid of angry feelings through vigorous physical activity such as running, bike riding, skating will help children forget about angry feelings by interesting them in activities which will take their minds off the feelings. Young children forget about angry feelings quickly, especially if something else seems more exciting. We can help the child get rid of tense feelings through soothing activities such as: playing in the sand and making mud pies, taking a warm bath, playing with play dough, or finger painting. It is always easier to talk to children about their feelings once they have calmed down. Use closeness and touching to calm an angry child. Angry, impulsive behavior often goes away when an adult soothes and comforts the child.

Catch the child being good and be sure to support and reinforce appropriate behavior. Comments such as "You did a good job cleaning your room," "I am glad you remembered to wash your hands," or "I like the way you shared your toys today," help children understand acceptable behavior. Most adults tend to comment on undesirable behavior, but forget to verbally reinforce good behavior. If adults praise good behavior more often, the child will have fewer reasons to be angry.