

# Parent Pages



## Handling Anger in Children

Many parents get frustrated when faced with their Mown or other children who are angry. As parents and caregivers, it is important to learn ways to help children understand their angry feelings and to teach them how to express their anger in healthy ways. This can be done by role-modeling healthy expressions of anger and by respecting any and all feelings children may have. Strong feelings of anger do not need to be seen as a sign of a serious problem, but do need to be attended to.



Children do not have the emotional maturity to understand feelings such as grief, sadness, depression. Anger can be a "mask" for the above feelings. Temperament, illness and medicines can all impact how a child responds to a situation. Teenagers experience physical/hormonal changes, test new situations and worry about the future, often causing anger and confusion.

**Adults should also understand the difference between anger and aggression.** Anger is brought on by frustration, while aggression is an attempt to hurt a person or to destroy property. In dealing with angry children, our actions should be motivated by the need to protect and to reach, not by the desire to punish. The goal is to understand what is making them angry, teach them acceptable ways of coping and to tell them what we expect.

### Ideas for preventing angry outbursts in children:

- ◆ "Catch" the child being good. Tell the child clearly what behaviors please you, based on your child's age and development.
- ◆ Ignore negative behavior that can be tolerated. The "ignoring" has to be planned and consistent.
- ◆ Provide physical outlets. Children need physical exercise and movement.
- ◆ Change the surroundings. Sometimes rules are too strict and physical space is too small.
- ◆ Teach children how to express themselves verbally. Talking helps a child have control and reduces "acting-out" behavior.

- ◆ Be sure anyone who is caring for your child gives the same messages every time.
- ◆ Encourage children to see their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Help them to see that they can reach their goals.

### Ideas for responding to a child who is angry:

- ◆ Identify your own angry feelings. Calm yourself first and don't get defensive. Listen to the sound of your own voice and try not to use threats.
- ◆ Don't invade your child's personal space; move and speak slowly.
- ◆ Let the child tell you how they feel and look him in the eye. Listen and wait until he has finished. Let the child "run out of gas." Then ask if he is finished before you begin speaking.
- ◆ With elementary age children, use play activities to refocus the child in a more positive way.
- ◆ Seek to understand what the child feels is out of his control or unfair.
  - ◆ "If you could change one thing about this situation, what would it be?"
  - ◆ "I want to understand why you are upset. Can you use your words?"
- ◆ Take a deep breath and count to ten. Teach the child to do this as well.
- ◆ Admit a mistake, apologize once and make corrections.
- ◆ Ease tension through humor. Kidding the child out of a temper tantrum or outburst offers the child an opportunity to "save face." Never use sarcasm, teasing or ridicule, though.
- ◆ Say "No!" Limits should be clearly explained and enforced. Children should be free to function within those limits.
- ◆ Tell a child you accept his or her angry feelings but offer other suggestions for expressing them.

The above was adapted from "Dealing with the Angry Child," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, found online at [www.childdevelopmentinfo.com](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com). ■