



Helping Children Manage Anger

It's OK to be angry

We need to help children understand and expect that they will experience a variety of feelings as they go through life, including anger. It's normal to feel angry at times. It's what you do with those feelings that matter.

Quick Ways to Help Children Express Their Anger

- Rip paper
- Pop bubble wrap
- Squish playdough
- Wrap your arms around yourself and squeeze
- Jump on a trampoline
- Do wall push-ups
- Write down what's bothering you and rip it up
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Talk about it
- Scribble on paper and crumple it up
- Do jumping jacks
- Do breathing exercises

Keep talking to a minimum

When a child is in fight, flight or freeze mode, they can't process information as well as when their body is in rest and digest mode. This is not a teachable moment, and they can't take in a lecture at this point. Your goal is to get them through this rough moment. It's best to keep talking to a minimum. When you do speak, make sure you use a neutral, calm, and quiet tone. Keep it short and repeat the same phrase. Repeating it is helpful because they aren't processing information and words as they usually would. Repetition makes it more likely that they'll hear what you are saying. Phrases that you can say at that moment:

- "I'm here for you."
- "I love you."
- "I want to help you."
- "Let me know when you're ready."
- "You are mad; I get it."
- "I understand."



Get them to a calm, safe area

When some children get big feelings, they destroy items around them – rip books, throw toys, etc. If that's the case for your child, it may be helpful for you to set up a safe spot where children can go when they are angry. In that space, take everything out that can be destroyed or thrown that might injure someone or damage property.

If you aren't in the safe spot when your child is dealing with big feelings, move harmful objects out of the way and try to get them to that safe place. Doing this helps to keep everyone, including your child, safe.

Be Preventative

One of the best things you can do is work on teaching coping skills your child can use before things escalate to epic proportions. The trick is practicing when they are in a calm and relaxed mood, not in the moment when they are angry.

Identify triggers

Start by talking about what's making them angry. Help them identify those triggers, so you both know for the next time. Is it a particular school subject that makes them frustrated? Perhaps being hungry or thirsty? Are their specific noises or locations that are frustrating?

Help them identify where they feel angry in their body

Sometimes, children don't know they're angry until after the explosion has happened. Help them identify the signs their body gives them that they are feeling angry. Over time, they'll start to recognize that feeling and ideally use a coping skill before things get too overwhelming.

Explore what other emotions they may be feeling

When children are angry, there are usually other feelings that they are experiencing too. But anger is easy to see and often hides different feelings that lie below the surface. It's sometimes referred to as the "Anger Iceberg." It takes a bit of time to figure it out, but when your child is in a calm place, talk about what other feelings may be hiding underneath their anger.

Read more about the [anger iceberg here](#).

Identify and practice coping skills

Now that they know what causes those big feelings and how to identify them, help them figure out ways to deal with those feelings in safe and healthy ways. Go through the **Coping Skills Checklist** (handout) and have your child check off the skills that work for them, cross off the



ones that don't and circle the ones they want to try. Take a few minutes during the week and practice the coping skill with your child that they may be able to use next time.

Using coping skills to deal with big feelings will not go perfectly every time. Learning to manage anger is a work in progress. Little by little, with practice and time, children will get better at it. Encourage them when they make safe and healthy choices. When they don't, continue to work with them to figure out better steps they can take the next time.

Use a feelings thermometer

Using a feelings thermometer can help children make the connection between their feelings and their coping skills. Here's how you can make an anger thermometer.

HOW TO MAKE AN ANGER THERMOMETER:

- Have the child pick out three colors, one for each section of the thermometer and color it in. Then talk about each section.
- Ask what it looks like when they are just a little angry, at the bottom of the thermometer. Do they sigh loudly, growl, etc.?
- Then move on to the middle section of the thermometer. If they are medium-sized angry, what does that look like? Does their voice get louder? Do they stomp their feet, etc.?
- Finally, talk about what it looks like when they are experiencing big anger at the top of the thermometer. What does that look like? Is it yelling, throwing things, etc.?

It isn't always easy for children to do this. If they are having a hard time identifying what the behaviours were, try telling them what you noticed the last time you saw them get angry. Once you have gone through and identified the behaviours on the thermometer, then work on identifying coping skills they can use to calm down. Some examples include getting a drink of water, taking deep breaths, shredding paper, or taking a break.

Make sure they have coping skills that will help them at each level of anger. It's essential to have a variety of coping skills for each level because not all coping skills will work all the time. For some children, taking a drink of water can help calm them down when they are just slightly angry. However, when they are furious, getting a drink of water won't help. They need to do something different at that point, like take a break.

If you'd like to make your own feelings thermometer, use the template included in this section of the school website.



Keep Yourself Calm

It's common for parents to struggle with staying calm when their child is angry. But it's important to learn to do it. You have to get yourself calm before you can help your child. **One of the best ways to help your child is to make sure you stay calm yourself.**

Use Self-Talk

Here are some phrases that may help you as you are working with your angry child:

- They're having a hard time, not giving me a hard time.
- Share my calm, don't join their chaos.
- I am in charge of staying calm, no matter how my child is acting and behaving.
- All feelings are OK. My job is to help my child manage them.
- I can remain calm, and be a good example for my child.
- Be the thermostat, not the thermometer.

Take Deep Breaths

If you're getting upset and about to blow up, try deep breathing, it does make a difference. When you are feeling overwhelmed, your body can go into fight, flight, or freeze mode, but in situations like these, you want to stay in rest and digest mode. By taking deep breaths, you're signalling your body to go back to rest and digest mode. Expand your belly as you inhale, and contract your belly as you exhale. Try taking several deep breaths before you take steps to intervene.

Find Your Support System

Know that you are not alone. Talk to family member, a friend or staff at school. We are all here to support.