



Anger Summary

Why Anger?

Research confirms that when teens learn to manage their emotions, it simultaneously strengthens their self-control, ability to problem solve, and the ability to focus their attention. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-teen relationship, and growing your teen's skills to manage anger provides a perfect opportunity.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *"When do you feel angry?"*
- *"How do you know when you are angry?"*
- *"What are some common things that make you angry?"*
- *"How can you tell when someone is angry with you? And, what happens for you when someone is angry with you?"*

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Trap Be sure you talk about anger at a calm time when you are not stressed or upset!

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Learn together! Anger or hurt are important messages from ourselves in which to pay attention. It means our needs are not getting met or necessary boundaries (our rules or values) are being violated.
- Model behaviors (and your teens will notice and learn!).
- Create a calm-down plan.
- Recognize your anger from physical signs.
- Practice deep breathing to calm down.
- Brainstorm coping strategies for yourself such as walking outside, moving in slow motion, distracting yourself, writing, or drawing.
- Make a list of coping strategies with your teen like counting to 50, drawing, listening to music, etc. Keep it handy!
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary. Use specific feelings words to describe your state of mind and help your teen describe theirs.
- Teach assertive communication through I-messages such as *"I feel _____ (insert feeling word) when you _____ (name the words or actions that upset you) because _____."*

- Teach your teen to repair harm. A critical step in teaching our teens about managing anger is learning how to repair harm (physical or emotional) when they've caused it.

Tip Deep breathing actually removes the chemical that has flowed over your brain so that you regain access to your creativity, language, and logic versus staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your teen can offer them a powerful tool to use anytime, anywhere when they feel overcome with heated emotions.

Tip When you are reflecting on your teen's feelings, you can think about unpacking a suitcase. Frequently, there are layers of emotions that need to be examined and understood not just one. Anger might just be the top layer. So, after you've discovered why your teen was angry, you might ask about other layers. Was there hurt or a sense of rejection involved? Perhaps your teen feels embarrassed? Fully unpacking the suitcase of emotions will help your teen feel better understood by you as they become more self-aware.

Trap Though at times it can feel like it, there are no "bad" emotions. Every feeling is a vital message from our ourself. Because feelings are an instant interpretation, we always have the opportunity to reinterpret our response.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use "I'd love to see..." statements like: *"I'd love to see how you use your chill zone to help you."*
- Accept feelings (even ones you don't like!): *"I hear you're upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better?"*
- Recognize effort: *"I notice how you took some deep breaths when you got frustrated - that's excellent!"*
- Proactively remind: *"Remember what helps you feel better? What can you do?"*

Tip After a tough day, your teen may be internally beating themselves up for what they did and said earlier. So, end the day with love. They need to hear that you love them NO MATTER WHAT on those days in particular.

Trap Don't move on or nag when teens are angry or upset. Teens often need more time to calm down, regain perspective, and move on. Be sure to wait long enough for your teen to show you they can take steps to self-manage. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to do what you need them to do.

Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"You are going to see Julie today. Do you remember what you can do to assert your feelings?"*
- Stay engaged. Try out new and different coping strategies to see what works best.
- Engage in further practice. Role play or rehearse when needed.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *“I noticed when you got frustrated with your homework, you moved away and took some deep breaths. Yes! Excellent.”*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine (game night, watching movies or shows together, a favorite dinner). Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps in your repertoire of ways to appreciate one another.

Tip Be specific. “Good job” seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - *“You took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. Love seeing that!”* - can promote more of the same.

Trap If you focus only on outcomes - *“You didn’t get mad today”* - you miss the chance to influence the process. Better to say - *“You were able to calm down, refocus, and get back to homework.”*

Trap Avoid gifts or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on teens. When you remove the money, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There’s less of a chance if you’ve offered a “bribe.” Focus on your attention as the best reward.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen’s success today and in their future!

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2019). *Anger Summary. Ages 15-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.