



Anger Summary

Why Anger?

Research confirms that when children/teens learn to tolerate, manage, and express their feelings, it simultaneously strengthens their executive functioning skills.¹ There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and growing your child's/teen's skills to manage anger provides a perfect opportunity.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your child/teen are not angry, tired, or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

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

- *"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?"*
- Use your best listening skills!
- Reflect or paraphrase back what you hear. If your child/teen says, "I'm so mad at my friend, he picked all my friends but me for his team." You could say, *"So, I hear that he picked all your friends but not you, and I imagine you felt left out."*
- Make guesses about other deeper feelings if your child/teen gives you some evidence for your guesses. You could say, *"I imagine not feeling picked made you feel hurt as well. Is that right?"*
- Help your child/teen make the mind-body connection: *"What clues did your body give you that you were angry?"* You can also say, *"What are you feeling in your body now as you talk about it?"*

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 and hurt are important messages to pay attention. They means emotional, social, or physical needs are not getting met or necessary boundaries (our rules or values) are being violated. "Why am I feeling this way? What needs to change in order to feel better?"
- Understand your mind when angry.
- Anger is not bad or negative. You should not avoid or shut down the experience of it.
- Expressing anger by yelling will not dissipate it.

- Venting, such as complaining, ranting, or even mumbling, does not get out the upset thoughts and feelings. Because venting doesn't change thinking, the feeling persists.
- Avoiding or pretending you are not angry will not make it go away in time.
- Model behaviors, and your children/teens will notice and learn.²
- 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 child/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 child/teen describe theirs.
- Create a chill zone. During time without pressures, design a "chill zone" or place where your child/teen decides they would like to go when upset to feel better.
- Design a plan. When you've learned about what happens in your brain and body when anger takes over, you know you need a plan at the ready so you don't have to think in that moment.
- Teach your child/teen to stop rumination. Discuss what they can do when they are thinking through the same upsetting thoughts.
- 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 child/teen to repair harm. A critical step in teaching your child/teen about managing anger is learning how to repair harm (physical or emotional) when they've caused it.
- Create a family gratitude ritual.

Tip Deep breathing is not just a nice thing to do. It actually removes the chemical that has flowed over your brain so that you regain access to your creativity, language, and logic instead of staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your child/teen can offer them a powerful tool to use anytime and anywhere they feel overcome with heated feelings.

Trap If you tell or even command your child/teen to make an apology, how will they ever learn to genuinely apologize with feeling? In fact, apologizing or making things right should never be assigned as a punishment since then the control lies with the adult and robs the child/teen of the opportunity to learn the skill and internalize the value of repairing harm. Instead, ask your child/teen how they feel they should make up for the hurt they've caused and help them implement their idea.

Trap Though at times it can feel like it, there are no "bad" feelings. All feelings have a positive intention. In fact, every feeling a person has is a vital message quickly interpreting what's happening around you. Because feelings are merely that - an instant interpretation - you always have the opportunity to reinterpret your circumstances and your response to your feelings.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills 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 noticed how you took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. That’s excellent!”*
- Practice deep breathing.
- Follow through on repairing harm.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s/Teen’s Development and Success

- Ask key questions to prompt thinking. *“You are going to see Julie today. Do you remember what you can do to assert your feelings?”*
- Learn about your child’s development. Each new age presents different challenges.
- Reflect on outcomes. *“Seems like you couldn’t get to sleep last night because you were feeling angry about our argument. How did it impact your day at school? What could we do tonight to help?”*
- 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.
- If there are strong feelings in your household most days, most of the time, then it may be time to consider outside intervention.

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 as ways to appreciate one another.

References

1. Council on the Developing Child (2004). *Children’s Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains: Working Paper No. 2*. <http://www.developingchild.net>
2. Miller, J.S. (2017). [Teaching young children about anger](#). Thrive Global.

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