



Anger Summary

Why Anger?

Research confirms that when young children learn to manage their feelings, it simultaneously strengthens their executive functions.¹ They are better able to use self-control, problem solve, and focus their attention. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and growing your child's skills to manage anger provides a perfect opportunity.

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

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

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

- *"When do you feel angry?"*
- *"What time of day?"*
- *"What people, places, and activities are usually involved?"*
- *"How does your body feel now?"* (in a calm moment) *"How does your body feel when you are angry?"*

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 and hurt are important messages to pay attention. It means emotional, social, or physical needs are not getting met or necessary boundaries (rules, values) are being violated.
- Anger is not bad or negative. You should not avoid or shut down the experience of it.
- Expressing anger in a manner such as yelling will not dissipate it.
- Venting such as complaining, ranting, or even mumbling does not get out the upset thoughts and feelings.
- Avoiding or pretending you are not angry will not make it go away in time.
- Model behaviors, and your children 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 like count to 50, draw, color, or build something. Keep it handy!
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary. Use specific feeling words to describe your state of mind and help your child describe theirs.
- Play feelings guessing games with the family. Ask each family member what they did today and see if you can guess their feelings from their expression.
- Create a safe base -- a place in the house where your child can choose to go when they want comfort.
- Teach your child to stop rumination.
- Reflect on your child's anger so you can be prepared to help. "What needs is my child not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my child alone or do they need to communicate a need, ask for help, or set a boundary?"
- 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 to repair harm. A critical step in teaching your children about managing anger is learning how to repair harm (physical or emotional) when they've caused it.
- Create a ritual for expressing gratitude so that it actually happens and becomes a habit. You might say what you are grateful for before each family meal together.

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 versus staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your child can offer them a powerful tool to use anytime, anywhere when they feel overcome with heated emotions.

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

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

- Use "Show me..." statements like, "*Show me how you use your safe base to calm down.*"
- 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!*"
- Practice deep breathing.
- Follow through on repairing harm.

- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine: “*What happened today that made you feel happy? What are you looking forward to tomorrow?*”

Tip Remember how you typically feel at the end of a long day before bedtime when you’ve gotten really angry with your child or other loved one? You may be internally beating yourself up for your own words and actions. Consider that your child might do the same. End the day with love. Although they need to hear it every day, they need to hear that you love them NO MATTER WHAT on those days in particular. If you do, you can rest assured that making a point of it will add to their resilience and strength.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’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 if you start to get angry?*”
- Learn about your child’s development. Each new age presents different challenges.
- Stay engaged. Try out new and different coping strategies to see what works best.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.
- If there are high emotions in your household on 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. Consider a hug when the routine is accomplished.

References

1. National Scientific 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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