

How to deal with an angry child

Does your child get upset easily? Do they lash out in anger with words or actions that concern you? How you been called to your child's school multiple times to deal with aggressive behaviors your child was involved in? If so this article is for you.

Anger has been around since the beginning of time. In biblical days Cain was jealous and angry of Abel and he killed his brother. That is extreme anger. If you turn on the TV, at any time you will see evidence of people making very poor and even dangerous choices due to them not showing self-control and reacting in anger. In the world of reality TV, a show seems to be popular when the stars engage in argumentative, aggressive and violent behaviors. Many people can't seem to get enough of watching this type of materials. Video games can be extremely violent, and our children spend many hours engaging in playing these games. Popular games Grand Theft Auto or Call of Duty are two just of the high violent games that many children (yes children) play daily. Videos of students fighting at school or outside are posted on social media and receiving thousands of likes. No wonder our children are angry.

What should a parent do and how can they help their child manage their anger?

1. Model anger management? How do you respond when you get upset? Be honest. Do you yell, curse, scream, threaten, hit, throw things, or respond in some aggressive manner? If you do then bingo, your children learn their own anger management from you. I know it can be a challenge for us all to maintain our composure when we feel an injustice has occurred, however we must actively work on this. Yes, road rage does count. I know I have been guilty a time or two, of calling someone an idiot or yelling at a driver in front of my children. This sends a message to them that I am not being patient and that errors in driving are an unforgivable offense. Which is of course not true. Some techniques are ignoring people, measuring the level of anger and taking deep breaths to calm down and think before your respond, walk away, listen attentively to make sure you are accurate in your assessment of the situation. See counsel from an outside person who is neutral and wise. Admit we all make poor choices and need grace and forgiveness.
2. Do you yell at your children or partner when you are upset? Most if not all parents at some time have lost their cool. Is this a habit or a rare occurrence? Has your child been the focus of a tirade of insults from you? Kids will misbehave and will make poor choices and they should be taught discipline and be held accountable for their actions, but they are learning. No one goes to a job and performs perfectly. We learn as we work. Children must learn as they develop. I like to use the scale of 1-10 on volume to help me access the tone I am speaking at. 1 is low and 10 is shouting. When you are upset rate yourself. Anything over 5 means you need to apply an anger management strategy and lower you voice. Ask yourself "Am I talking loudly or yelling?" Be honest. Your child's demeanor is usually a key signal. If your child is a fighter, then they will escalate as you do. If they are passive, they will withdraw and retreat. They may express fear. Look at their body language and check yours. If you are up in their face, then you must step back because YOU are out of control. No, you don't have to be in their personal space to ensure they can hear you. When you yell and shout you are teaching them to tune you out, to become

manipulative, sneaky, to lie and to avoid and fear you. They may comply to your requests or demands but what lesson have they really learned.

3. Talk to your children about the triggers and source of their anger. Do they feel mistreated? Are they being bullied or harassed? Are they being neglected or left out? Their feelings matter. Often there are other feelings other than anger, but children don't always know how to express or communicate those feelings. (Ask about my angry feelings words activity). Frustration, desperation, isolation, fear, anxiety and many other emotions can be the real feeling but manifest as anger. Process and talk to your children about what they are truly feeling and walk them through the incident to find out their true feeling. If it is truly anger, then help them see why they are angry and how they can respond to that situation in the future.
4. Use scenarios to provide options for children to express their anger in an appropriate manner. I know many parents would not like to admit this, but we do anger our children and they need an outlet to express that. I do believe it must be respectful, but they should be allowed to talk to you about their feelings in a calm manner. I like to have family meetings where each person can share a concern or issue they want and you as a parent need to listen attentively and provide feedback. You can share your perspective on the subject and even your disapproval of what happened but be careful not to minimize or demean your child. Perspective is reality for everyone. Even when they differ. If you agree you reacted inappropriately then apologize. If you don't agree, make sure you provide security to your child by acknowledging their feelings. We won't always agree; however, children must feel loved, valued, secure, and that they belong. Communication is key to bonding.
5. Praise your child when they display appropriate responses to situations when they are angry. Praise goes a long way and increases their likelihood of repeated positive behavior. Catch them using anger management strategies and discuss briefly how they feel and why they choose to respond in the way that they did. This is teaching them a good habit which they will continue into adulthood. Praise needs to be sincere. Phrases like, "Wow I saw you take some deep breaths and not yell at your sister when she turned off your TV program." "I liked the way you left the room to avoid arguing with your younger brother." "I really see you calmed yourself down and didn't yell back at your friend when he called you a name. Way to handle that." "I am so proud of you not hitting Bill, when he threw away your paper you worked hard on." "I know you didn't like me taking away your cell phone for three days, but I appreciate you not rolling your eyes or pouting. I know you can make appropriate choices." All these statements put the choice on the child and teach them accountability. (see my article on consequences vs. punishment).
6. Admit that hurting people hurts people. There are truly mean things people do that must be addressed. Your children should feel safe and protected always. When these things are violated, as a parent you must intervene. Contact the school administration if it is a problem at school. Have family meetings and implement family rules of respect and consequences. Involve everyone. Let the children talk and make suggestions. This is their buy-in to the process. Be honest and admit when you drop the ball. We all do mess up! This is teaching your children how to not only learn self-control but problem-solving skills. If you are in a bad mood, it is easier to get upset than when you are happy. If you are hungry or ill, it also affects your temper. Children are the same. If a sleepy child is asked to do a lot they might respond in anger.

7. Don't ask them to do something they are not capable of doing. A child's brain is developing until the age of 25 so they do not have the impulse control, logic and emotional processing ability that adults do. (check on more information about brain development.) A five- year- old can't think the same way as their 12-year-old sibling. They might fight to gain attention. You must talk to them both but they older child needs to understand their sibling is probably trying to be like them and annoying them is a way to show it. You can separate them and set boundaries for them based on their ages.
8. Don't fight with your child when you or they are angry. I know many parents say this is not how they were raised, but it is a different time. What is your goal as a parent? Is it to be respected, revered and obeyed? Is it to be your child's friend? Is it to allow them to be whoever they want without restriction? Is it to teach them boundaries, and to be authentic and responsible? Some children will fight you back. We have heard about the fight or flight response system. Well now we say fight, flight or freeze. Children will respond in one of those ways. If your child is a fighter, then arguing with others fuels them. They get a rush from it and they don't know how to back down. They want to win and show control. Don't engage them. Simply state your point and apply a predetermined consequence and walk away. It is not productive to berate or over power your child. You may win the fight, but the war is on. Especially as they age. When both of you are calm then talk about the situation maybe in the next day but not when you are both angry. Did your child embarrass you? This does upset parents. Don't allow them to push your buttons. Again, argumentative kids like to see you react negatively. Children who are more passive will withdraw, cry, whine or not speak. This is a time to build your child up. Provide a safe environment for them to express their true feelings. Maybe they use a journal to write down their thoughts or write you a note. Maybe they lack the vocabulary they need to express themselves. Help them process what they are feeling and what they desire to happen. It might not be an option, but at least they will be heard and empowered by expressing themselves.
9. Get outside support. Sometimes a parent and their child needs assistance. You have tried to the best of your knowledge and ability, but it is not working. Seek a person who can help you that is neutral. Maybe a friend or relative. Maybe the other parent. Maybe at school a teacher, administrator or counselor can help. Sometimes you need to go to a professional counselor to help you both. Don't blame the child. If they have a problem, the family has a problem. A professional can be objective and provide options you might not have considered and give a different perspective. It is not always the parent's way or the highway. Children have thoughts to contribute to their behaviors and to their expectations. A professional will be able to help you sort through this.
10. Did you drop the ball as a parent? This is hard to admit but we are humans who make choices that do affect our children. If you have suffered from substance abuse and did it around your children, they can become angry. The corrective measures are to get help for yourself and the for your children. If the county has been involved in your family and had to remove your child, they might feel abandoned and have resentment towards you. If you were in an abusive relationship this also can cause anger in your child. If they were neglected or abused in some manner they will become angry. If you grew up in a dysfunctional home and didn't learn how to conquer the curse, then you will perpetuate this cycle with your children. It is learned behavior. We only do our best with the tools we have. Don't beat yourself up. Get up, admit your issue

and get help with it. If you are angry, chances are so will your children be. Apologize for your wrong choices and move forward. Get the tools you need to succeed!

The goal of this article is to learn how to help children express anger appropriately. This is something we all need to exercise and often daily. Communication is critical. We need to understand as parents, we are our child's first model of learning and we should show self-control. Society today often shows poor examples of anger management, but children can be taught to be different and problem solve in a calm manner. Family meetings are a good way to discuss issues from home and school. Praise helps encourage children and increases the likelihood of appropriate behaviors in the future. Open discussions about emotions and triggers of anger also help kids with emotional regulation and learn problem solving skills. Children take up to 25 years to achieve brain development and their responsive system is developed in advance of their logic and emotional regulation portions in the brain. Journaling is a way for some children to express themselves and they can share it with their parents. Argumentative children enjoy engaging in escalations, so parents shouldn't give their power away by agreeing to yell or argue with their child. Overall this is a process of trial and error and parents can help their children by being an example to them and being patient and consistent with them.