

Some suggestions for parents on helping your child control his/her anger

Managing and controlling anger can be a very difficult task for children. It is so much easier to lash out, than to attempt to control angry feelings. As adults we sometimes struggle to control our anger. Our children can only learn to do this if we teach them strategies for managing their anger and consistently model those strategies everyday. The following is a list of activities and skills that we can all utilize to control our anger. Please use the ones that seem appropriate for the age of your child.

Blow up your balloon: pretend that you are blowing up a balloon. What color is it? What shape will it be? How big can you make it before it pops? Can it twist into an animal or shape?

Balancing act: take out a selection of items (book, spoon, plastic cup, etc.) and see which ones the child can balance, and for how long.

Robot/Rag Doll: Walk around the room like a robot, stiffening your body and using big and calculated motions. Now walk around the room like a rag doll, relaxed and swaying your body. Try to do different activities as each person (go from being seated on the floor to a standing position, do a dance step, etc.)

Blowing Bubbles: Blow bubbles or have your child blow bubbles, and before he/she can pop them, they have to complete an activity (turn around 2 times, count from 10 backwards, skip in a circle, etc.)

Variation: if you have access to bubble wrap, popping the bubbles can be very therapeutic!

Elevator: Step into your elevator and press “down”: Once you get inside it is warm and soft music is playing in the background. At the top floor you are angry and out of control. As you go down each floor your body begins to loosen up, you become less tense, you imagine your body riding gently downward and your anger is lessening with each floor. When the door opens, what do you see?

Honey Jar: Imagine you are diving into a honey jar. How does it feel to walk around? Can you turn around? Use your 5 senses, what do you see, smell, hear, taste, feel?

Visualization: Think of a place that makes you happy (vacation spots, with a special family member, on a baseball field, a stream, etc.) Again, use your 5 senses to describe what you see, feel, taste, smell, & hear.

Variation: Carry your special place. Carry a picture, drawing, or memento, from your special place with you. Whenever you feel angry, stressed, or sad, place your hand on it or look at it and remember this place.

Relaxing Retreat: Create a special place in your house, in your room, in your classroom. This is your place to go to calm down. Keep the following items in your special retreat: pillow, journal, book, pictures, stuffed animals, coloring books, cards, &/or a game.

Try to say the alphabet backwards.

Take a hop, skip, and a jump. Then take a skip, hop and a jump. Then take a jump, a hop, and a skip.....

Make something out of clay or playdough.

Write in a journal (that can be kept private).

Write a letter. What you chose to do with it is up to you....

Go for a walk.

Squeeze a stress ball.

Start an exercise program.

Play a team sport.

Learn about meditation and yoga.

Buy (or download) some relaxation music, sounds (thunderstorms, rainforest, ocean, crickets, etc.).

Take a bubble bath.

Paint, do arts and crafts.

Volunteer! Helping others who are less fortunate, makes us appreciate what we do have and how lucky we are. Participate in a community service project. The United Way publishes lists of volunteer opportunities for youth on their website:

www.unitedwaycm.org

***Most importantly: give your child the chance to cool down and think about what they want to say, before the conflict gets too heated. Children need time and space to calm their bodies down and process through the conflict. Making a list of possible solutions and consequences will help. Sometimes a trusted adult or older sibling, cousin, aunt, uncle, etc. can help them. It is easier to talk to someone who is not directly involved, and has your best interest at heart, to help you see the other person's side of things. Also, it's not always easy to express true emotion and feelings to a parent. And, remember, kids are egocentric! The whole world revolves around them and their problems. It is very hard (impossible for young children) to see anyone else's point of view.

Remember:

- Children have a strong sense of what's fair and just, so consistency is extremely important!
- Actively listening to your child will help them to feel validated. A small insignificant problem in our eyes, is a traumatic (and dramatic) issue for them.
- Try to find out what the anger is really about. It may be directed at you, but may have nothing to do with you. Try to get to the bottom of what is really bothering your child.
- Children practice what they see in their everyday lives. If they live with verbal abuse, physical aggression, indifference, disrespect, or intolerance, they will model those behaviors. If they live with tolerance, respect, communication, and consistency, they will model those behaviors.
- Learning to apologize is very important. Teaching your child to recognize when he/she did something wrong, and appropriate ways to apologize should also be modeled by adults. Saying "I'm sorry" is not always the best apology. Kids are taught to say the words, but not the true meaning of apologizing and really meaning it. Paying some sort of restitution may be more appropriate. For example, if a child says something to demean another child, he/she should be asked to think of some nice things to say to make the other child feel better about himself/herself. If a child calls their younger sibling "stupid," they could be asked to teach the child a skill, like tying his/her shoes, helping with their homework, teaching them a card game, etc. The restitution should always be directly related to the inappropriate act. The point is to learn a lesson, not to be punished.
- Always debrief afterward. Once your child has cooled down and is able to talk calmly, process through the issue/argument with them, stopping at certain points and say "what could we have done differently here?" "What if we had tried (or said) this instead?" "Where do you think the situation started going downhill?" "Could we have done something to change it into a more productive conversation?"

The following is a typical problem solving model, please encourage your child to use this when confronted with a conflict:

S = State the problem and be specific

O = Outline your options, brainstorm all of the possible ways that you can respond to the problem

L = List the options that you like

V = visualize the outcome: Think: "What will happen if I..." "How will it effect me and the other person involved if I..." "What would my family think if I..." etc.

E = Evaluate the results. Make the decision to act on one of your options and decide if it helped you or not.

*We have peer mediation available for students who have conflicts here at school, as well as a support staff of qualified individuals who would love to help in any way we can!

Resources: Lisa Dirsra, MA, C.A.G.S. Guidance Counselor SHCS
The Anger Workout Book for Teens
Calm Down and Play! Leave No Angry Child Behind