The Angry Child

Strategies for teaching your child self-control
One of the major problems in dealing with anger in children is the angry feelings that are often stirred up in us.

We were not always taught how to deal with anger during our own childhood.

We may have been led to believe that anger was bad, and we were often made to feel guilty for expressing anger.
The Angry Child:  

*Anger can be a difficult feeling to manage*

- Our goal is not to repress or destroy angry feelings.
- As adults, we accept the feelings and help children learn to channel and direct them to constructive ends.
The Angry Child:

Anger can be a difficult feeling to manage

- Parents and teachers must allow children to feel all their feelings.
- Adults can show children acceptable ways of expressing their feelings.
- Strong feelings should not be denied, and angry outbursts should not always be viewed as a sign of serious problems; they should be recognized and treated with respect.
Our children are facing much more pressing types of daily stresses than most of us ever dealt with in our childhood.

Just think of the kinds of horrific images our kids are exposed to on the nightly news: riots, hate crimes, random shootings, bombings, kidnappings, senseless murders.

Kids today are facing a troubling increase in bullying, name-calling, and prejudicial slurs among schoolchildren.
Anger may be a defense to avoid painful feelings.

- It may be associated with failure, low self-esteem, and feelings of isolation.
- It may be related to anxiety about situations over which the child has no control.
Angry defiance may also be associated with feelings of dependency, and anger may be associated with sadness and depression.

- In childhood, anger and sadness are very close to one another.
- It is important to remember that much of what an adult experiences as sadness is expressed by a child as anger.
Biological or environmental stresses may also trigger symptoms of anger.

- A physical factor like an allergy, learning disability, or developmental disorder can be a key element of a child’s anger.

- Environmental factors may also trigger anger – Does your child have a new teacher at school? Has his best friend been away for awhile?
The Angry Child:

Why do kids show anger?

- Do a little detective work. Look back over the past several months to determine:

  When the anger began;
  In what context the anger occurs;
  Seasonality or regularity to the behavior; or
  The occurrence of any health problems (head cold, lack of sleep, hunger).
There is a difference between anger and aggression.

- Anger is a temporary emotional state caused by frustration; aggression is often an attempt to hurt a person or to destroy property.

- Anger and aggression do not have to be dirty words. Be careful to tell the difference between behavior that indicates emotional problems and behavior that is normal.
Remember, as with any other type of inappropriate behavior:

**Focus on the behavior, NOT the child!**

It’s not bad to be angry, but it is bad to express anger violently or in a way that can hurt someone.
When dealing with angry children, our actions should be motivated by the need to protect and to reach, not by a desire to punish.

Show the child that you accept his or her feelings, while suggesting other ways to express the feelings.

It is not enough to tell children what behaviors we find unacceptable. Show them what is acceptable.

Use pre-teaching and SODAS frequently!
Teach the child acceptable ways of coping. Find ways to communicate what you expect of them.

The most effective way to communicate to children what we expect of them is to TEACH them. Help them to work on their skills consistently.
Steps you can take to prevent anger outbursts:

- **Catch the child being good.**
  Tell the child what behaviors please you. Respond to positive efforts and reinforce good behavior. An observing and sensitive parent will find countless opportunities during the day to make such comments.

- **Deliberately ignore inappropriate behavior that can be tolerated.**
  This doesn’t mean that you should ignore the child, just the behavior. The “ignoring” has to be planned and consistent.

- **Provide physical outlets and other alternatives.**
  It is important for children to have opportunities for physical exercise and movement, both at home and at school.
The Angry Child: *Responding to anger*

*Preventing anger outbursts*

- **Manipulate the surroundings.**
  Try to plan the surroundings so that certain things are less apt to happen. Stop a problem activity and substitute, temporarily, a more desirable one.

  Sometimes rules and regulations, as well as physical space, may be too confining.

- **Use closeness and touching.**
  Move physically closer to the child to curb his or her angry impulse. Young children are often calmed by having an adult come close by and express interest in the child’s activities.

- **A child about to use a toy or tool in a destructive way is sometimes easily stopped by an adult who expresses interest in having it shown to him.**
The Angry Child: Responding to anger

Preventing anger outbursts

- Be ready to show affection.
  Sometimes all that is needed for any angry child to regain control is a sudden hug or other impulsive show of affection.

- Ease tension through humor.
  Kidding the child out of a temper tantrum or outburst offers the child an opportunity to “save face.”

- Appeal directly to the child.
  Tell him or her how you feel and ask for consideration.
  For example, a parent or a teacher may gain a child’s cooperation by saying, “I know that noise you’re making doesn’t usually bother me, but today I’ve got a headache, so could you find something else you’d enjoy doing?”
The Angry Child: *Responding to anger*

*Preventing anger outbursts*

- **Explain situations.**
  
  Help the child understand the cause of a stressed situation. We often fail to realize how easily young children can begin to react properly once they understand the cause of their frustration.

- **Use teaching.**
  
  Planned teaching and role plays will help a child to visualize situations and what the appropriate response would be.

  SODAS will help a child think through situations before making a decision; instead of reacting to situations, the child will stop, think things through, and come to a rational decision.
The Angry Child: **Responding to anger**

**Preventing anger outbursts**

- **Reinforce appropriate behavior and set the child up for success.**
  
  Know what the child likes, and reward him or her for their positive behavior with something that is of value to them.

- **Say “NO!”**
  
  Limits should be clearly explained and enforced. Children should be free to function within those limits.

- **Tell the child that you accept his or her angry feelings, but offer other suggestions for expressing them.**
  
  Teach children to put their anger into words, rather than fists.
Teach children to express themselves verbally.

Talking helps a child have control and thus reduces acting out behavior.

Encourage the child to say, for example, “I don’t like your taking my pencil. I don’t feel like sharing just now.”
Model appropriate behavior!
Parents and teachers should be aware of the powerful influence of their actions on a child’s or group’s behavior.
The Angry Child: Using Discipline

- Be consistent with your expectations and your teaching!
- Good discipline includes creating an atmosphere of quiet firmness, clarity, and conscientiousness, while using reasoning.
- Bad discipline involves punishment which is unduly harsh and inappropriate, and it is often associated with verbal ridicule and attacks on the child’s integrity.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger: 

*Why kids need to learn about anger*

- Anger is part of life.  
  Sometimes life hurts. Sometimes life is not fair. All children will experience anger in one way or another. And all children will learn how to cope with their anger – sometimes in a way that is “helpful” and sometimes in a way that is “hurtful.”

- We live in a violent world.  
  Some children live in violent families or communities, others see violence graphically depicted on TV.
  The average child in the U.S. witnesses 45 acts of violence on TV each day.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:

Why kids need to learn about anger

- All of these influences can have a powerful effect on how children relate to their world and solve problems.

In today’s world, learning to cope with anger and frustration in a positive way may be one of the most important tools your child learns.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:

*Why kids need to learn about anger*

Adults should teach children to:

- **Express and communicate anger non-violently in a positive way**
- **Recognize anger in themselves and others**
- **Control angry impulses**
- **Use self-calming techniques**
- **Problem solve**
- **Remove themselves from angry or potentially violent situations**
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger: 
*Managing feelings & learning to relax*

Taking charge of angry feelings means developing a “bag of tricks” or coping skills that can be used for different situations.

- Anger causes a very physical response from most children.

  Muscles tense, hearts pound, and stomachs ache.

  Children can be taught to recognize these physical reactions and learn how to relax.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger: Managing feelings & learning to relax

One of the best ways to cope with a harmful physical response to anger is to do something else physical.

Typical stress relievers for kids:

- Squeezing play dough/stress balls
- Splashing water
- Running outside
- Listening to music
- Drawing a picture
- Tensing and relaxing muscles
- Taking slow deep breaths
- Eating a healthy snack
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:

Managing feelings & learning to relax

- Children who respond well to touch can be taught how to massage their own neck or arms as a self-calming technique.

These same children also may find a great deal of comfort in stroking or caring for a pet.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:  

**Communication skills**

- Children can be taught to communicate their feelings in a variety of ways.

Children can often explode in anger, yet not be able to tell you what their anger is all about.

This may be because their abilities to reason and think logically are not yet well developed.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:

*Communication skills*

- Teach children to identify their angry feelings by using the following statement:

  I feel _____________
  when _____________
  because _____________.

The idea here is to help children realize that there are always hidden feelings and actions beneath angry emotions.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger: Communication skills

- You can help by teaching children the words they need to say and by coaching them as they learn to interact with others.

You might say:

- “Ask if you need help.”
- “Say to Sara, ‘May I please play with you?’”
- “Tell Martha, ‘I won’t play with you if you call me names.’”
- “Say to Jon, ‘I am playing with the puzzle now; you may have it after lunch.’”
- “Tell someone how you feel before you lose control.”
Most young children will need adult help to think through the problem-solving process.

Even though it does take time, doing this process over and over helps young children become fairly good at identifying a problem and coming up with ways to solve the problem.

A child who has lots of practice in thinking of different ways to solve a problem is much more likely to solve a conflict in a positive way.
Steps for modeling problem-solving behavior:

1 - Stop the action.
2 - Listen to each other.
3 - Think of ways to solve the problem.
4 - Choose an idea everyone can agree on.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:  
*Change the environment*

- Children can be taught to change their environment. Sometimes in an angry situation it is best to walk away until everyone can cool off.

- Encourage children to remove themselves from the situation if their strong feelings are getting out of control.

  Help them identify special “cooling off” places where they can safely regain control.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:  

*Change the environment*

- Adults also can help to structure the overall environment so that it promotes good behaviors. Clean, orderly rooms and regular routines go a long way in creating a peaceful atmosphere.

Chaotic schedules and cluttered environments often leave children feeling confused and frustrated.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:

*Look for humor*

- Humor is a great antidote for anger. Whenever possible, help children to see the humor in a tense situation.

- Responding to an angry outburst in a calm way with a gentle smile will often help diffuse the anger.

- Learning to laugh or joke about your own anger helps children put things in perspective.
Helping Your Child Cope With Anger:

Dos & Don’ts

Telling a child **not to do** something works best when it is followed by something they **can do**.

**DON’T**
- Break something
- Scream at someone
- Bite someone
- Be mean to a pet
- Hurt yourself
- Throw a temper tantrum
- Hit somebody

**DO**
- Hug a stuffed animal
- Have a good cry
- Draw a picture
- Rip up old newspapers
- Walk away from the situation
- Play with clay or water
- Bounce a ball
- Take deep, slow breaths
- Ask for help
- Listen to music
- Go someplace quiet to cool down
Anger Management Strategies for Children:

*Modeling appropriate responses to anger*

- Parents get angry, too! Use this time to model behavior for the child.
  - Identify your own angry feelings.
    
    Children quickly sense when you are angry. Saying, “I'm mad,” teaches children how to talk about their own anger.
  
  - Explain why you are angry.
    
    Remember that young children often think they are the cause of your anger. Clearly stating why you are angry helps children understand what is really behind your anger.
  
  - Deal with anger in a positive way.
    
    For example: “I am going to take a few minutes to calm down and then we will talk about what happened.”
Anger Management Strategies for Children:  
*Modeling appropriate responses to anger*

- Showing you can keep your cool, even in crisis, is an important way to help your children learn self-control.

You send a clear message:

“It may look like a crisis, but by staying cool I’ll be in a better position to solve the problem.”

"Come on, Wendell — surely we can settle this like mature adults."
Anger Management Strategies for Children:

*Develop a feeling vocabulary*

- Many kids display aggression because they simply don’t know how to express their frustrations any other way.

They need an emotion vocabulary to express how they feel.

- Examples of feelings the child should be able to identify:
  - angry, upset, mad, frustrated, agitated, furious, apprehensive, tense, nervous, anxious, irritated, furious, ticked off, irate, incensed.
Anger Management Strategies for Children: Develop a feeling vocabulary

- Write the feeling words on a chart, hang it up, and when your child is angry, use the words so that he can apply them to real life: “It looks like you may be feeling angry.”

Keep adding emotion words to the list whenever new ones come up in those great “teachable moments” that come up throughout the day.
Anger Management Strategies for Children:

Identify the warning signs of anger

- Explain to your child that we all have our own little signs that warn us we’re getting angry, and that we should listen to them because they can help us stay out of trouble.

- Help your child recognize what specific warning signs she may have that tell her she’s starting to get upset.

Anger Management Strategies for Children: 

*Identify the warning signs of anger*

- Once your child is aware of the signs, start pointing them out whenever your child first starts to get frustrated.

- The more we help kids recognize those early warning signs when their anger is first triggered – usually when they first show signs of tension and stress – the better able they will be to calm themselves down and learn to regulate their own behavior.
Experts suggest that another way to help kids stay in control is to teach them to say affirmations – simple, positive messages – to themselves in stressful situations.

- “Stop and calm down,” “Stay in control,” “Take a deep breath,” “I can handle this”

Suggest a few phrases to your child, then have him choose the one he feels most comfortable saying. Help him rehearse it a few times each day.

You might post the words she chooses throughout the house as a reminder.

The more your child practices the affirmation, the greater the likelihood he will use it during a difficult situation in which he needs to stay cool and in control.
Anger Management Strategies for Children: Teach abdominal breath control

- Learning to breathe the right way – especially in stressful situations – is one of the most effective ways to stay in control, and so it’s an important technique to teach kids.

- Experts advise you to teach the relaxation method with your child sitting in a comfortable position, back straight and pressed into a chair for support.

  Show your child how to inhale slowly to a count of five (“one Mississippi, two Mississippi”), pause for two counts, and then slowly breathe out the same way, again counting to five.

- Repeating the sequence creates maximum relaxation.

  The trick is to help your child learn to breathe very slowly and deeply and then practice it over and over in a calm, relaxed setting so that he/she can remember to use the technique during a stressful time.
Post-Test

1. You should always try to repress anger in children. True False
2. When addressing anger in a child, you should focus on the behavior, not the child. True False
3. The most effective way to control anger in a child is by modeling your own actions. True False
4. Anger causes a physical response in the body, so it’s important to learn to relax. True False
5. A child should be allowed to walk away to “cool off” when experiencing anger. True False
6. What are three reasons a child may exhibit anger?
7. Name one step you can take to prevent anger outbursts in children. Why is that effective?
8. What words should you teach your child to use to identify their angry feelings?
9. Why is it important to help a child develop a feeling vocabulary?
10. What is an example of positive self-talk that a child can use to calm themselves down?