

Managing Your Child's Anger

Anger as an emotion is normal human behaviour. The way we deal with our anger is often the problem. Anger in a family or in a child is often a sign that something needs changing. Addressing what is causing the anger and trying to change it has got to be more productive than outward displays of anger such as shouting or hitting out.

We also need to understand that there's 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.

Before you can correct or challenge your child's angry behaviour, you must have set clear boundaries and rules. Letting your child know what is acceptable and how far they can go is really important.

You must also be aware of what may trigger your child's anger as it is often easier to avoid the trigger points than to deal with the consequences once it's too late. Dealing with an angry child can wear you out and often invoke your own feelings of anger.

Practical Tips for dealing with an angry child

1. Be able to identify the signs that your child is starting to get angry – unkind or hateful words, growling, screaming, tense body and clenched teeth for instance.
2. Don't tell your child what not to do – *"Don't hit your brother like that"* – try to tell them what they should do – *"If your brother does something you don't like just come and tell me and I'll deal with it"*.
3. Comment positively on the child's behaviour when it is good – *"I'm really proud of the way you came to tell me that"*.
4. Providing physical outlets for your child's aggression and anger works well – punching a pillow or a cushion for instance.
5. Be able to show affection. Sometimes all that is needed for an angry child to regain control is a sudden hug or other impulsive show of affection.
6. Never try to reason with a child who is enraged and ranting or screaming – give them a time out – a naughty step for instance – for 2 to 5 minutes. Explain clearly what you are doing – *"Because you won't stop shouting/screaming/hitting I am going to ask you to sit here for 3 minutes."* Make sure they do their time – keep putting them back there if they get off and keep any siblings out of the way. After the time ask for an apology. If you get the apology then say *"thank you"* and hug the child. (Please note this works only if the child is old enough to understand the relationship between the naughty behaviour and the time out.)

Understanding your angry teenager

Be mindful of the fact that your teenage child is maturing intellectually and is beginning to think and reason through issues independent of your guidance. The decisions they are making are new territory for them and this creates anxiety and confusion at times. They are just as likely to be angry about something you have done or said as they are at their teacher for giving them homework or their football team for losing!

On their part they want to be treated as adults and not children anymore, but are often not able to respond in an adult way or do not have the freedom to make adult choices.

Try not to worry about the small stuff – accept that you may never get them to put their dirty clothes in the wash basket – and always resist the temptation to make an example of what you did when you were their age.

Make sure you have time for your teen, talk to them about issues that are important to them and as they get older start to acknowledge this and adjust your behaviour towards them and the way you speak to them accordingly.

Ask questions but then leave it alone for a while if you don't get the answer you wanted or you get no answer at all. For instance – *“Are you ok, only I noticed that..... Is there anything you want to talk to me about?”*

Once your teenager gets angry, you can't always make it better. But unfortunately as parents we can make it worse and even reinforce angry behaviour if we shout, insult or argue back.

What teenagers say about being angry

“I get so frustrated and my mum makes it worse – she just won't leave me alone.”

“What am I supposed to do when I know there's nothing I can do about it?”

“Sometimes I get really upset about what I've just said to my mum but when I'm angry I just can't think.”

“I get angry when my parents make me feel guilty for something that already happened. I get tired, bored and angry and I forget to do things and that just makes it worse.”

A lot of the time your teenager will appear to be angry when they are really upset or very frustrated about something they have no control over.

Finally remember not to take things personally – your child's anger may be targeted at you but that doesn't always mean you are the source of that anger.

For help and support

Try the following websites:

www.nhs.uk – enter “anger” in the search box

www.supportline.org.uk – click on “problems” then on anger management in the A-Z list

You can also phone their helpline number **01708 765200** or drop them an e-mail at info@supportline.org.uk

Sheffield Information Link Library

We have a number of books in our library which you might find useful. The library is free to join, just ring us on 0114 275 6699 to find out how.

The Good Behaviour Book: How to Have a Better-Behaved Child from Birth to Age Ten
(Sears, W & Sears, M.; 2005)

When Your Kids Push Your Buttons: And What You Can Do About It
for parents of toddlers to teens (Harris,B; 2003)

Don't Pop Your Cork on Mondays! The Children's Anti-Stress Book
(Moser, A; 1988)

Getting Your Little Darlings to Behave
(Cowley,S.; 2004)

Laying Down the Law
Not as scary as it looks – this book is a no nonsense handbook which explains how to bring effective consequence-based discipline into every home. From toddlers to teens. (Peters,R; 2002)

Understanding Your 12 to 14-Year-Old
(Waddell, M.; 2005)

Talking to Tweenies
(Hartley-Brewer, E.;2004)

How to Behave So Your Children Will Too
(Severe, S.;2004)

How To Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk
(Faber, A. & Mazlish, E.; 2001)

Also coming soon to our library:

The House of Tiny Tearaways
(Bryon, T.;2008)

Anger Management: A Practical Guide for Teachers, Parents & Carers
(Faupel, A.; 1998)

I Feel Angry – Your Emotions
(Moses, B.;1994)

Healthy Anger: How to Help Children & Teens Manage Their Anger
(Golden, B.:2006)