



Helping Young Children Cope With Anger

Children become angry in a variety of situations. Suzie may be angry with Mom because she won't let her go to a friend's house to play. Paco gets angry with his Dad because he won't let him buy gum at the store. In our role as caregivers, we can give parents some skills for dealing with these situations.

Many adults have learned to ignore their feelings of anger, or to express these feelings by hitting or yelling at someone. Therefore, adults often deal with a child's anger by demanding that he or she stop being angry. They might send a child to his or her room until the child can behave better, and sometimes, an adult may hit a child. However, these actions do not help children learn to handle strong emotions such as anger.

Although feeling angry is a part of life that no one can avoid, we can teach children positive ways to cope with anger. Adults can teach children the difference between feeling angry and acting on anger. Children need to be told that feeling mad is neither good nor bad, but hitting someone out of anger is not OK. In the short run, life at home will be easier when children learn how to work through anger. In the long run, children will continue developing ways to cope with anger as they become teenagers and adults, and will pass these skills along to their own children.

Specific Ways Children Can Cope with Anger

Children can learn to handle their anger in several ways. Give children several choices so they can pick those that work best for them. Remember that some angry episodes take longer than others to solve.

Do something physical. Do something with your body such as stomp your feet (the "Mad Dance"), run around the house, or punch a pillow. Or, play with play dough, clay, or bread dough, which can be rolled out, pounded, twisted, and pulled apart. Any of these physical activities can help children focus their anger on something else and help them to calm down.

Talk about your feelings. Some young children can talk to a parent, brother or sister, grandparent, a child care provider or a friend about what is making them angry. Talking helps some people work through their anger so they can accept what is making them angry, or solve the problem in a positive way. If children can't or won't talk to a person, they can be encouraged to talk to a family pet, a puppet, or an imaginary friend.

Sing an un-mad song. Help children make up words to a song or poem that expresses what they're feeling. Words from a favorite song can be substituted with this "un-mad" song. For example, the words "I'm so mad 'cause I can't play. Go away, go away, day!" can be sung to a familiar or made-up tune.

Ask other people how they cope with their feelings of anger. Help children collect ideas from other people on how to cope with anger. Help the child decide which ones are OK based on the information in this publication. For example, some people take a fast walk to drain off anger, while others take deep breaths when they get angry.

Drain the anger from your body. Let children relax with some water play activities or finger-painting. Or let the child scribble as hard as she can on a scrap of paper and throw the paper away as if throwing the anger away. Or encourage the child to dictate a story about what has made her angry to an adult and have the adult read it back. The child can then crumple up the paper and throw it away.

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