



Child Builders

Houston's Advocates for Mental Health in Children

Dealing with an Angry Child

Dealing with angry children is the most difficult part of a parent's job. It stirs feelings ranging from exhaustion to nerve wracking aggravation. Often parents and children get locked into a contest of wills, and the parent wins with a "Because I said so", argument. Many of us were taught as children that we were not allowed to be angry, that being angry was bad, or that it was our fault if we were angry. It will be easier to deal with our children's anger if we get rid of this notion.

Parents must remember that there are many things in our adult lives that make us angry (i.e., being cut off in traffic, losing something important, or waiting for an appointment). Becoming angry at these types of events is normal. Likewise, there are many things in children's lives that make them angry, and their reactions are normal. Adults must allow children to feel all of their feelings, and offer appropriate ways to express their feelings. A parent might say, for example, "Let me tell you what some children would do in a situation like this. It is not enough to tell children what behaviors we find unacceptable. We must teach them acceptable ways of coping.

A child's anger can be triggered by embarrassment, loneliness, isolation or hurt. Children often respond with anger to these types of situations because they feel helpless to understand the situation fully and helpless to change it. It's important to remember that anger is not the same thing as aggression. Anger is a feeling, while aggression is a behavior. Anger is a temporary emotional state caused by frustration; aggression is often an attempt to hurt a person or to destroy property.

The following suggestions for dealing with your angry child should be considered helpful ideas and not be seen as a "bag of tricks".

- Comment on your child's behavior when it is good. Ignore inappropriate behavior that you can tolerate. Say "NO!" as needed. Limits should be explained clearly and enforced consistently.
- Provide physical outlets and exercise, both at home and at school.
- Take an interest in your child's activities. Failures and frustrations often mean less when a child knows his/her parent loves him/her and is proud of him/her for other things he/she does and knows.
- Use humor. Teasing or kidding can often defuse an angry situation and allow a child to "save face". Don't use humor to ridicule your child; use it to make fun of the situation.
- When situations change, tell your child directly. Tell your child how you feel and ask for consideration; i.e. "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?"
- Use physical restraint if needed. Sometimes a child can't stop himself or herself once a tantrum has begun. Physically removing the child from the scene or intervening isn't a type of punishment; it's a way to help your child stop his/her behavior long enough to gain some control over it.
- Acknowledge your children's angry feelings. I.e. "You seem really angry". Ask them what's happened, what went wrong, or why they are feeling what they feel.
- Use modeling. Be aware of the powerful influence your actions have on your child. What children see their parents do when they are angry is most often how they will act when angry.

One of the most important things you do as a parent is to help your child respect themselves and others so they can be happy in the world. Teaching your child to manage anger and talk about feelings can prevent many angry outbursts in their future years and will assist them eventually in their relationships with their own children.

Source: Richard Niolon, Ph.D.

ChildBuilders (formerly known as HAMIC), founded in 1974, is a non-profit organization that provides innovative programs to educate parents, children, teachers and the community about the emotional well-being of children and their families. www.childbuilders.org ChildBuilders Community Education.

For further information & referral
call your child's school counselor

DePelchin Children's Center	713-730-2335
ESCAPE Family Resource Center	713-942-9500
Harris County Psychiatric Center	713-741-5000
Jewish Family Service	713-667-9336
Mental Health Association	713-522-5161
MHMRA of Harris County	713-970-7070
NAMI Metro Houston	281-579-3750
United Way of Texas Gulf Coast	211 or 713-957-4357

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