

## Dealing with an Angry Child or Teen

At the Family Counseling & Psychological Services our therapists are often asked, what is the best way to cope with my child's behavior? Dealing with an angry child can be one of the most difficult aspects of parenting. You may find yourself constantly battling, and constantly exhausted, after repeated battles that you eventually win only because you hold the trump card - Because I said so.

Winning a battle of wills with your child simply by tossing your ace on top doesn't leave you with a feeling of confidence in your parenting abilities. After the battle is over, you often feel ashamed of yourself for handling it that way, and guilty for showing your child that you're angry.

Many of us, as children, are taught that it's wrong to get angry, that being angry is bad, or, that if we're angry, we must have done something to deserve it. These kind of mistaken beliefs are what make it so difficult for us to deal with our children when they become angry.

So, the first step toward helping your child manage his anger is to understand that it's OK to be angry. It's a normal, human emotion. What you need to do is help your child learn how to channel that anger in a more productive way.

There are many things in our adult lives that make us angry. Standing in line at the grocery store, mistakes at work, flat tires on the highway. We need to remember that there are many things in our children's lives that make them angry too, and allow them to feel those feelings of anger, but show them acceptable ways of expressing it.

Children generally respond with anger because they feel helpless. Their chubby little fingers can't seem to make that bow in the shoelace. Or they can't figure out how to button their coat. They also feel like they are helpless against you. They have to go to bed when you tell them; they have to eat their veggies. They have no control, therefore they feel helpless.

But, to understand why one child becomes angry and then quickly skips off to the playground while the other child becomes violent takes a little more time and effort. What caused the outburst? The thing to remember is that, in children, anger can be triggered by embarrassment, loneliness, anxiety and hurt. Children respond with anger in these situations because they feel helpless to understand them fully and helpless to change them.

It's important to remember that anger isn't the same thing as aggression. Anger is a temporary emotional state caused by frustration, while aggression is often an attempt to hurt someone or destroy property. Let your child know that it's OK to feel angry, but aggression is definitely not allowed.

Dealing with a child's anger and aggression requires that you first find out what they are feeling. Ask them what happened or why they are feeling the way they feel. But explain to your child that anger is OK and then let them know that you get angry too and here's how you handle it.

### Ten tips to deal with angry children

#### 1) Acknowledge and reinforce positive behavior

I'm glad you shared your train with your brother. Thank you for hanging up your coat. I like the way you handled your brother when he took your doll away. You were really patient while I was on the phone. Now, what was it that you wanted to ask me? This lets your child know that you appreciate and expect positive behavior.

#### 2) Ignore inappropriate behavior that you can tolerate.

Nagging while you're on the phone can be dealt with positive reinforcement. Thank you for waiting while I was talking on the phone. I'm finished now, so what did you need? and then ignore the behavior that you don't like, ignore your child's interruptions while you're on the phone. Now, you'll probably say that if you ignore them they only scream louder. But, they scream louder because they know they will always get your attention. Ignore their inappropriate behavior and they'll get the message.

#### 3) Just Say No!

Your child needs limits and you should set those limits and enforce them consistently. Don't say no all the time though. Say yes every now and then, when it's appropriate, and let them know why it's OK for this one time.

#### 4) Your child needs exercise.

When we adults get angry, we sometimes need a physical outlet for that anger. We jog, we take a walk around the block, and we go to the gym and hit the Stairmaster with a vengeance. Your child needs an outlet, too. Let them run around and make a little noise for a while to let off some of that steam. They're in danger of erupting just as much as you are.

#### 5) Group Hug

Keep in mind that a hug is a powerful emotional band-aid for a child. Don't hug your child, though, to make the anger go away. Hug him to let him know you understand why he's angry and that you take it very seriously.

#### 6) Show interest in your child's activities.

Attention and pride can often make it easier for your child to deal with negative emotions. When he does experience failures and frustration, knowing that you love him and you're proud of him will make these negative feelings much less significant to your child. Sometimes children express anger in an

aggressive way to attract attention from their parents. If they already have your attention, then won't need the aggressive behavior.

7) Use humor to diffuse anger.

Humor lightens any stressful situation, even for kids. Don't use humor to ridicule your child, though, use it to make light of the situation and put it into perspective. I know you're angry at that little girl for calling you names, but doesn't it make you wonder just what a purple jimmy jaws looks like!

8) When situations change, tell your child directly.

If you normally let your child play his drum in the living room in the afternoon and you all of a sudden send him to his room he's going to get angry. But if you explain to him that you have a headache and that, just for today, you need him to play quietly in his room; you can diffuse that anger and also teach him a lesson in compassion at the same time.

9) Use all your parenting skills.

If your child is in the middle of a tantrum that he's unable to stop on his own, pick him up and restrain him. Not only for his own safety, but to let him know that it's OK to step away from the situation if need be. If you have to bargain with your child to get him to stop screaming, then do it occasionally. As adults, we reward ourselves at the end of a long, hard day. Your child deserves a reward, too, sometimes.

10) Most of all, remember that your child learns his anger management techniques from you.

If you curse when you're angry, so will he. If you throw things when you're angry, you can bet he will, too. And if you strike him in anger, he'll repeat the cycle with his own children. Teach your child from a very young age how to handle his anger and you'll be better preparing him for his future.

## How To Handle Your Angry Teen

It happens almost over night. One night, you're reading them a bedtime story and they adore you, and the next night they are a teenager and they hate the fact that you even exist! Welcome to Teenage Anger. You're not the first parent to experience it, and you certainly won't be the last.

First, you need to understand that your teen's anger isn't directed at you personally. Teenagers these days have a tremendous amount of stress from sources that were unheard of when we were kids. Texting and Facebook alone are enough to drive anyone crazy. Not to mention the physiological changes your teen is going through.

You need to handle your teen's outbursts a little differently than you handle your toddler's though. Let your teen know that, while it's all right to express anger, aggression is unacceptable behavior. And then stop thinking about yourself. Stop wondering why your teens are disrespecting you; stop worrying about

why they only ignore you. Start putting yourself in their shoes and consider all of the pressures they're facing from school and friends and their own bodies.

Once you stop worrying about how they're treating you, you can step back and see more of what they're actually going through. You'll be able to communicate with them, to talk with them instead of at them. Your relationship probably won't be like any of those storybook relationships but you'll be helping your teens learn how to handle their anger just by showing them how you handle yours.

## 5 Quick Tips for Anyone

As I said earlier, you've made a great first step just by admitting you need help and reading this guide. Here are a few more tips to help you learn how to manage your anger.

### 1) Count to 10

There are two reasons this works and no one ever mentions the second reason. The first reason, of course, is that it gives you time to calm down a bit and come up with an appropriate response when someone says or does something that angers you. Better to count to ten and remain, than to blow up like a cannon. The second reason this works is because; if you take the time to slowly count to 10, if all you're able to think of is an angry or abusive comeback, think how stupid you're going to look at that point. For example, if someone says, You're UGLY! And then you have to slowly count to ten before you say, Oh Yeah? Well... Think how foolish you're going to look having to take all that time to come up with a response. Better to just keep your mouth shut and let the situation diffuse itself at that point.

Once you've calmed down, express your anger, It's healthy to be angry, it's the way you express it that counts. Do walk away or do whatever you have to do to avoid abuse and violence. But do come back after you've calmed down. Don't keep your anger inside.

### 2) Think before you speak

I realize that during the heat of the moment it's difficult to stop and think to avoid saying something hurtful. If the situation is that far gone, you need to get up and leave anyway. But, if you know you're going to have a confrontation and that it may get a bit tense, write down what you want to say before hand and stay on topic. Practice Assertive Communication techniques.

### 3) Identify Solutions

Instead of focusing on whatever happened that made you angry in the first place, work with the other person to try to come up with a solution.

### 4) Let go of that grudge

It's unrealistic to expect that someone is going to do exactly what you want him or her to do all the time. At some point they will do something to make you angry. Learning to forgive the other person will help you both.

#### 5) Learn to relax

Learning relaxation techniques to help you relax and de-stress will help you control your anger when it flares up. We discussed breathing earlier, but you can also use a relaxation technique called visualization to picture yourself in a relaxing setting or to picture a relaxing scene. Self-talk is helpful, too. Repeating phrases, such as take it easy or take a deep breath, can help you overcome your anger when it starts to get out of control. Other proven methods of relaxation include, yoga, journaling and hypnosis.

IF you need more help than this give us a call at 386-235-3831