

ANGER

Managing anger is the biggest emotional issue that most children face

Children who can learn to manage their anger have a head start on handling fears and other emotions.

Currently, our community is undecided about how to handle anger. In fact, anger is discouraged as we see no place for it in homes, schools or community. 'Civilised people don't get angry' seems to be the accepted wisdom so we tend to encourage children to bottle up anger rather than let it out.

There are four ways anger is dealt with and only the fourth one in this list should be considered healthy: These are:

- 1. Muzzle it** - Bury anger deep-down and it will go away is the attitude! This doesn't work for many children as anger just simmers and doesn't dissipate.
- 2. Muscle it** - Some children lash out physically so that a friend, sibling or parent literally feels their anger.
- 3. Mouth it** - Verbal abuse is usually hurtful and backfires on the angry person.
- 4. Manage it** - Anger can be expressed in ways that are not hurtful to anyone including themselves.

THE FOLLOWING FIVE STEPS CAN FORM THE BASIS OF AN ANGER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS:

- 1. Recognise it** - The first step is to help children recognise when they get angry. What are the physical signs? What are they thinking? We are all different but tension, heavy

breathing and clenched teeth are common reactions.

- 2. Name it** - Develop a vocabulary with your child around anger. "Mad as a snake", "about to lose it", "short fuse" are some possibilities. Children can probably generate more! Giving the emotion a name is the first step to recognising anger.
- 3. Choose it** - Help children recognise that they have a choice to stay in control or lose control when they get angry.
- 4. Say it** - Encouraging children to express how they feel verbally is healthy. Yelling at someone when they are angry is not. The use of *I statements* is one way of letting others know how they feel. *'I feel really mad when you say nasty things to me. I feel like ...'* is one way of being heard and letting the anger out.
- 5. Let it (out)** - Help children find a legitimate physical outlet for their anger. They may go for a run, belt a pillow or play a physical game to let their frustration out. They may even pour their anger into a letter, some work or a productive activity.

The maxim for managing anger in healthy ways should be: "There is nothing so bad that we can't talk about it. However there are behaviours that we don't engage in when we are angry."

TO HELP CHILDREN HANDLE THEIR EMOTIONS:

- 1. Build** a socially-appropriate vocabulary for their emotions based on their age and stage of development.
- 2. Help** children recognise when they are angry. **Physical** signs differ for all children but generally muscles tense, teeth clench and fists tighten.
- 3.** Teach kids how to **calm** down. Deep breathing is one way of relaxing. Encourage them to think of the color RED when they get mad. Maybe give them a red button, which they are to take out of their pockets when they feel angry. When they have calmed down they can put it back in their pocket and figure out what they may do next.
- 4. Tell** children some of the ways you manage anger and the triggers you use to recognise that you are angry.



Parenting *ideas*
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