

Teaching your child to deal with anger

Anger is a normal reaction to frustration. As a child grows, he (or she) must be taught to tolerate frustration and, when possible, to change events for the better. You, the parent, can help him discover that he is not the only one who gets angry and that anger and frustration are normal parts of life that everyone must face. While it is important for children to express their emotions, many children can be taught positive and socially acceptable strategies to deal with the instant when they start getting angry or frustrated.

Teaching strategies to children for dealing with their anger is particularly difficult because, often, you don't know ahead of time when your child is going to become angry. You have no choice therefore, but to use the time between outbursts to help your child learn how to deal effectively with angry feelings. Providing consequences for acting on anger, or discussing the situation after it's over—common parenting practices—will not teach your child how to deal with anger. In fact, such discussions may, over the long term, make him angrier.

Use the four Ps (**Practice, Praise, Point out, Prompt**) and follow the five steps for teaching your child how to deal with anger. Each step is important.

Step 1. Practice blowing bubbles

As strange as this may sound, at first, practice blowing real (soap) and imaginary bubbles with your child every day. Blowing bubbles teaches your child a behavior that is incompatible with getting nervous, anxious, or angry because it teaches your child to breathe slowly by taking deep breaths—a coping method he can use to defuse anger as soon as it starts. Notice, then identify, the first signs of your child's anger—expressions such as a sigh or a grimace.

Step 2. Praise your child and then identify rewards

Sit down with your child and set up some rewards that he can earn by practicing blowing bubbles every day, not just when he gets frustrated or angry. Don't skip rewards! Rewards are essential to teaching your child the skills he needs to deal with anger.

Step 3. Point out your own successful coping methods

Try to identify times when you deal effectively with your own stress, and point these out to your child. Mention how you are coping in a given situation so that he can see how he could deal with a similar experience. Then enlist your child's help in blowing your imaginary bubbles when you are frustrated, so he can learn that you also use strategies to help you keep your temper.

Step 4. Prompt, and then remain calm

When your child starts to get upset, encourage him to practice blowing bubbles to calm himself down. Then stay out of the situation completely. The sooner you prompt your child, the easier it will be for him to try it

on his own. If you wait until your child completely loses his temper, the exercises probably will not help.

Remember: Don't allow your dread of a "meltdown" to keep you from enforcing discipline! When your child is upset, it is especially important to address him quietly, in a matter-of-fact manner.

Throughout the day, whenever your child starts getting angry, mention how he can blow imaginary bubbles. And then be patient. It will take time for your child to be able to catch himself as he starts to get angry.

Step 5. Don't get drawn into your child's situation

Avoid eye-to-eye confrontation whenever your child is angry. Everyone loses during a confrontation. Try to stay with whatever disciplinary strategies you've agreed on, and don't suddenly start changing strategies just because now you are angry. Don't be drawn into negotiations. Doing so only makes it harder for you to avoid getting angry.

Because anger-management skills are difficult to learn—and because they are so very important—practice them with your child often during the first month.

Remember: The sooner a child notices that he is starting to get angry, the easier it is for him to do the

bubble or breathing exercises, and the more effective the exercises will be. The more you concentrate on teaching these skills, and the less you intervene when your child is angry, the quicker your child will learn to deal with his own anger. Once he has dealt with his own anger, he won't need nearly as much help from you. Then he will be able to use his new coping skills for the rest of his life.

To underscore what you have taught your child, remember the four "Ps":

Practice the new behavior

Praise your child for practicing

Point out examples of people losing their temper or maintaining their calm when this happens in everyday situations

Prompt your child when he needs to use his self-calming skills

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