

MANAGING ANGER: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS & PARENTS

Acknowledge that anger can be perfectly normal, and healthy for children if it is expressed appropriately. Acknowledge students' feelings and let them know that they are valid and that you understand. Students should know that being angry is okay, but that there is an appropriate way to deal with their feelings. Emphasize that anger can be expressed in a calm and respectful manner.

Recognize the difference between anger and aggression. Although the two are similar and may occur together, anger is an emotion that may result from frustration, low self-esteem or disappointment; whereas aggression is a negative act intended to hurt someone or something. Negative consequences should focus on aggression, and not necessarily anger.

Try to prevent conditions in the classroom that are likely to induce frustration and or anger. For example, be sure that tasks and expectations are appropriate for the student's age and abilities.

Be proactive. Before an angry outburst erupts, talk with your class about acceptable and unacceptable ways of handling frustrating situations. Once a problem surfaces, it is more difficult for students to consider better ways to handle their feelings.

Encourage anger-prone children to avoid situations that will likely cause anger and help prepare them for situations that may be unavoidable. For example, advise Marcus not to play at recess near those who he believes tease him and have him rehearse what he might do when teasing does occur (at school or home).

Recognize that students who are prone to become angry often fail to take the perspective of others and perceive situations differently than other students. By realizing these differences, you can address them with your students and offer a different way of perceiving the world. Some of these "cognitive errors" are:

- Overestimating the likelihood of negative occurrences (e.g., "I bet tomorrow will be a bad day, too")
- Believing that a negative act was done to them on purpose (e.g., "He hit me with the ball on purpose")
- Exaggerating situations (e.g., "I *never* get to pick a game") (Wilde, p.13)

These errors can be avoided, and tactfully confronted, by encouraging perspective taking and role playing.

Teach problem-solving skills. Stress the importance of listening with both eyes and ears, thinking of different ways to solve the problem that makes them angry, compromising, and evaluating their own actions.

Encourage the child to "slow down" and think before he or she acts. Often, when a child gets angry, one immediately boils over and does not think of the consequences that will come of his/her actions. Teaching children techniques of assessing the situation before acting can reduce these behaviors from occurring.

Teach basic anger management techniques (using modeling, rehearsal, and reinforcement) such as:

- Take 3 deep breaths before speaking or acting when angry
- Count to 10 (or 100 if really angry)
- Imagine a peaceful, relaxing image
- Tell yourself “It’s not worth it.”
- Write in a journal

Encourage the child to express his or her anger verbally. Rather than using physically aggressive responses, they can talk out their frustrations. For example, “I don’t want to share right now, I would rather play with my own toys instead of yours.”

Encourage the student to walk away and “cool off.” This can help him avoid allowing his anger to overcome him. For young children, create a “cool down” chair or spot in the room where they can feel comfortable while calming themselves. For older students, where appropriate, allow them to go see a counselor or interventionist.

Be an example. Model appropriate ways of handling difficult situations and frustration. Let your students know that adults sometimes have a difficult time dealing with their feelings, too. Give them examples of how you cope by “thinking aloud” when you are angry (“Okay, I’m a little upset now and need to calm down a little”).

Where appropriate, use humor when the child feels angry. Help diffuse situations by seeing the anger in a humorous light. For example, tell a student that instead of calling someone a dirt bag; just envision him or her as an actual walking, talking, bag of dirt.

Compliment the child when he or she demonstrates problem solving or anger management techniques. When the child reacts to a situation in an appropriate manner, tell him or her. It is important to acknowledge the good behaviors as well as the bad.

Where appropriate, refer the student to individual or group counseling.

Additional Resources:

- Simmonds, J. (2003). *Seeing red: An anger management and peacekeeping curriculum for kids*. Gabriola Island, BC Canada: New Society Publishers.
- Pudney, W. & Whitehouse, E. (1996). *Volcano in my tummy: Helping children to handle anger*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.
- Paul, H. (1995). *When kids are mad, not bad*. New York, NY: Berkeley Publishing Group
- Wilde, J. (2002) *Anger Management in Schools: Alternatives to Student Violence* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/anger.html>
<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/anger.asp>
<http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/Parent/ga.angry.html>
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc31_cope.anger.html

Contributors:

Jeff Duquette
Jessica Hackman
Julie Watkins