

RESILIENT KIDS

NEWSLETTER by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator

Grrr! I'm angry!

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."

WHAT'S YOUR CHILD LIKE?

HOW WELL DOES YOUR CHILD MANAGE ANGER?

DOES HE

1. Throw a tantrum or act aggressively when things don't go his way? **Yes [0] No [2]**
2. Generally speak to you or someone else when he is angry? **Yes [2] No [0]**
3. Bottle things up for long periods and then just explode verbally or physically? **Yes [0] No [2]**
4. Appear to be thick-skinned and not let too many things worry him? **Yes [2] No [0]**

5. Generally stand back when he is angry and calm down before acting or speaking? **Yes [2] No [0]**

SCORE:

- 10:** Anger well-managed. Maybe very little upsets this child.
- 6-8:** On the road to good management. It is difficult to get on top of.
- 0-4:** Needs some work. Start with recognising the triggers to anger.



TRY THIS...

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

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.

ACTION PLAN

First Step . . .

Next Step . . .

For more ideas about promoting resilience in children visit www.parentingideas.com.au

QUOTE

"Always forgive your enemies. Nothing annoys them so much."

OSCAR WILDE