

Managing Anger



Understanding anger

Anger and frustration are completely healthy, normal emotions and everyone feels angry sometimes. Anger is not the same as aggression or violence: anger is an emotion, aggression and violence are actions.

Helpful actions that can come from anger include:

- We can use it to stand up for ourselves or others.
- We can use it to help us in a situation that is wrong or unfair.

Unhelpful actions that can come from anger include:

- Lashing out at others, frightening, hurting or upsetting them.
- Turning anger in on ourselves.
- Damaging things.

It's important that your child knows that....

- It's fine and totally normal to feel angry.
- It is what we do with our anger that is important.
- We need to learn how to manage anger so it does not control us and we behave/act in ways that are good for us and others.

Fight or flight response

Anger and anxiety are closely linked emotions and anger (like anxiety) is the body's response to a perceived sense of threat. This reaction is sometimes called the 'fight or flight' response and our body automatically gets ready for action. Because of this reaction we often feel the following things when angry:

- Heart pounding
- Breathing fast/tight chest
- Tense muscles, clenched fists
- Tunnel vision and dry mouth
- Inflexible thinking/single minded
- Butterflies in the tummy

Helping your child to manage anger

The best place to start helping your child learn how to manage anger is to talk to them about it when they are not actually feeling angry. It can be hard to think straight when feeling angry, and it can be hard to act rationally or even to want to act rationally!

Find a time to talk to your child about their emotions when they are feeling relaxed and when they are not tired. This leaflet includes some ideas of things you can do with your child to help them recognise anger and build strategies for managing it.

Recognising anger

We feel most emotions in the body and anger can have a particularly strong body reaction. Helping your child to recognise how anger makes them feel physically can help them spot early warning signs anger is building and manage their feelings.

Activity: Draw around your child's body on a big piece of paper or print out an outline of a body. Ask them to draw or colour in to show how their body feels when they feel angry.



Ask about different parts of the body, share how you feel when angry or you could ask them to remember a time when they felt angry to help them do this. Even thinking about a difficult situation can often impact on how the body feels and can help them remember how they feel when angry.

Anger triggers

Knowing what triggers anger can help you and your child anticipate anger and manage difficult situations. There might be different triggers at school and home, or in other situations. You could write a list with your child or make a picture, like the one below.



Strategies for managing angry feelings

When anger is starting to build, energy levels may be low and some simple breathing exercises might help. When anger is strong and energy levels are high doing something physical may be more helpful.

1. Slow breathing down: There are a number of breathing practices you can try. One tip is to breath out for longer than you breath in, to counter the automatic increase in breathing rate when angry.
 - Guide your child to breath in for four counts through the nose, and then out for eight through the mouth. It might be helpful for you to do it with them.
 - Ask them to take a long breaths out, imagining they are trying to blow up a balloon.
 - 'Five finger breathing': you can find a short video guide on You tube.
2. Do something physical to calm the body, e.g. run around the garden, jump on the trampoline or do an energetic dance.
3. Focus on the here and now (and unhook from angry thoughts): get your child to splash water on their face; have a cold drink; stamp their feet and

notice how they feel; or notice the environment - 5 things they can see/hear/smell/feel.

4. Letting anger out in a safe way: Some examples include punching or screaming into a pillow, ripping or scrunching up scrap paper or an old newspaper, play with a stress ball or playdough. You could prepare a bag with things they can do when angry.

Anger thermometer worksheet

The anger thermometer is a technique that will help you and your child learn about their anger symptoms and warning signs, and how these progress as anger builds. See the example and worksheet.

Some Do's and Don't

DO....

- Talk to your child about anger when they are feeling calm, but....
- Wait for the meltdown to be over before talking about it.
- Help your child notice the early warning signs and triggers for anger.
- Prompt them to do things which will help them calm down.
- Give them some space: anger can build if we feel trapped and our sense of threat increases.
- Keep yourself calm: think about your tone of voice and body language.

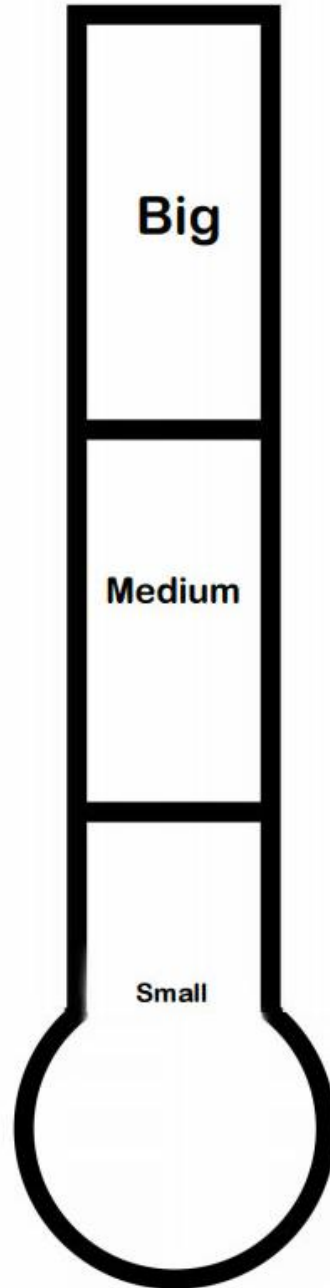
DON'T...

- Try to teach them about anger when they are feeling angry. When emotions are high children (and adults) cannot process information well: this is not a good time to talk about managing anger.
- Ask them to take a deep breath. When we are angry or stressed our breathing rate naturally increases and slowing breathing down can be more helpful.
- Backdown/give in to unreasonable demands. If anger is in response to something you have said they can/can't do, backing down is likely to result in your child viewing their behaviour as helpful.
- Ask them to sit still. If they are in 'fight or flight' the body is automatically getting ready for activity and sitting still may be very difficult for them.

My _____ Thermometer

What I look like

What I can do



My Anger Thermometer

What I look like

Slamming doors
Shouting
Heart racing

Going Red in the face
Raised voice
clenched fists

Not talking
Grumpy Face



What I can do

Scream into a pillow
Squish a stress ball

Take slow long breaths
Relax your fists

Relax muscles in your face

Go Somewhere Quiet

