When you get angry

Everyone gets angry now and again. Even the most easygoing people will sometimes see red, and children can be experts at driving their parents crazy. Many parents wish they would never get angry with their children, but it’s almost impossible to not get angry in some situations. However, there are things you can learn to do when you do become angry. Whether you’re angry at your children, or at something else, those children are watching how you manage your anger. You are a role model for handling anger in a good way.

The first step to showing good anger management to children is to name the feeling when it is happening: “I’m getting really mad.” Children are quick to pick up adults’ anger, and might already know that you are feeling this way. Putting it into words teaches that it is OK to talk about anger.

Next, explain what made you angry. Young children are often confused by and about anger. Many children assume that they did something wrong to make you mad. If you say, “I’m mad because the washing machine won’t work,” children learn that they are not always the cause of the anger.

Last, be a good role model by using an anger management skill: take a break, call a friend, find the funny side, listen to music, take a walk, or anything else that works for you.

Will it hurt the children if we fight in front of them?

All families have arguments at one time or another. Watching parents argue can be scary for children. Children should not witness physical violence, damaging of property, or verbal abuse. But watching family members find a workable solution can help children learn how to argue in a way that builds a positive and respectful family.

Sometimes anger is destructive or frequent enough to get in the way of everyday life. When anger is very explosive, or happens often, it may be time to get help. Stressful situations like the loss of a job, an injury, divorce, or death in the family may find voice through anger. A family therapist can help the family member or the entire family through the stressful period.

When children get angry

Anger is easily contagious—parents often find themselves feeling angry when their children become angry. You can more easily handle children’s anger without becoming angry yourself if you have agreed on rules beforehand. Let your children know what you expect of them, and what the consequence will be for the mistaken behavior.
This doesn’t mean you need to have lots of rules. Too many rules can be confusing for you and the children, but a system of a few carefully chosen rules can help. For example, you might expect that when you go shopping together, children use walking feet, stay where you can see them, and look with their eyes and not with their hands. Let them know what you are there to buy, and remind them that you plan to buy only what is on the list. Then explain to your children before you go into the store that you need store behavior. Remind them of a consequence you have all agreed on previously.

When you enter the store, if your five-year-old goes running off and starts a game of hide and seek, you know what to do. You say, “I’m sorry, but...” then remind him of what the consequence is. Now instead of you feeling angry at your child, you feel in control of the situation.

Every time you become angry at your children, use it as an opportunity to think, “What can I do to prevent this from happening again?”

One mom discovered that if she took a healthy snack for her son to eat on the way home from child care, he wasn’t so likely to be angry at the end of the day. You might discover the need for a new rule or a new routine to prevent a blow-up. You might institute a regular rest time when everyone must go in different rooms to play or rest for a time so that you have a break from the children every day. One family set up fifteen minutes a day when the children had their rest time and the mom and dad had time to themselves.

 Feeling stories

Ask your children to watch for pictures in books, magazines, in advertisements, or on the internet, of people showing different feelings: anger, happiness, fear, sadness, and so on. Use the pictures as story starters. What made these people feel this way? What makes you feel these feelings? This helps children understand their own feelings and those of other people.

### When children are angry, children CANNOT be allowed to:
- Hit, bite, or hurt someone
- Break or destroy something
- Hurt an animal
- Hurt their own body
- Use rude or insulting words

### When children are angry, children CAN be allowed to:
- Play with play dough, sand, or water
- Tell the people involved how they feel
- Draw or paint a picture, write a story
- Talk things over
- Ask for help
- Listen to music
- Go someplace quiet to cool down
- Rip up or ball up paper

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