

How to Help Your Child Recognize & Understand Anger

Calming your angry child can feel like one of the biggest challenges of parenting. There are many things that make children angry, and children feel anger in different ways — just as adults do. Perhaps you were taught as a child that being angry was not “allowed” or that anger was “bad.” It is important to help children understand that it is normal and okay to feel angry. Often, the first step a parent must take is to set aside what they themselves were taught as children and choose to support their child in new ways. As with all emotions, when you help your child notice and name their anger, you have helped them take the first step toward being able to control their own behavior. When your child can recognize the feeling and say, “I’m angry!” it reduces the chances that they will act out.



Suggestions for Families

Notice and name when you, your child, or others are angry. You might say:

- About yourself: “I feel angry in my body. My heart is beating fast, and I feel like I might explode. I am going to take some deep breaths to calm down.”
- About your child: “I can see that you are angry! Your hands are making a fist and your eyes are big.”
- About others: “I see that little girl looks angry. I wonder what happened? What do you think might help her to calm her body?”

Encourage your child to move. Just as adults release stress at the gym or by going for a run, physical movement helps children change their body experience. Perhaps your child can yell into a pillow or push on the wall. However, make it clear to your child that it’s not okay to hit others or hit objects (we want children to let go of their anger without hurting others).

Read books about being angry. Talk with your child about what the character is feeling and experiencing and come up with ideas that might help. The librarian at your local library can help you find books.

Regulating your body and returning to a calm state is a skill that children must learn. Young children do not understand when adults use the words “calm down.” Tucker Turtle is a story that can help children understand and learn this skill. Download and print Tucker Turtle for **free** at: https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TuckerTurtle_Story.pdf

Puppets and toys are also a great tool for role playing situations that your child can relate to. “Wow, this lion is very angry. Her sister took her toys! She is stomping her feet and roaring very loudly! Let’s help her to calm down.”

Suggestions for Educators

Children can become angry at school for a variety of reasons. Educators can help children understand that everyone feels angry and show children positive ways to calm down, such as taking deep breaths, finding a quiet place, reading stories, or role playing with puppets. Children have the opportunity to practice different techniques and find what works for them. By encouraging children to find a solution that helps them calm down, educators help children feel in control of their feelings and confident in their ability to handle difficult emotions.

The Bottom Line

Anger is a feeling all people experience sometimes. The goal is not to try to get rid of anger in your child or yourself, but to help them identify and express their feelings. You can remind your child that anger is a natural, healthy emotion and like other emotions (e.g. joy, sadness), anger needs to be expressed appropriately. A child who recognizes anger in themselves and others will be less likely to express their anger in aggressive and destructive ways. The ability to express your feelings and solve problems is a life-long skill necessary for children to be happy and healthy.

