



The angry child

Handling a child's anger can be puzzling, draining and distressing for adults. A major problem in dealing with anger in children is the angry feelings that are stirred up in adults. Many adults were not taught how to deal with anger as they were growing up. Instead they were led to believe that to be angry was to be bad. Many adults were made to feel guilty as a child for expressing anger.

Anger caused by frustration

Anger, a temporary emotional state caused by frustration, can lead to aggression, which may hurt a person or destroy property. Anger may be a defense to avoid painful feelings. It may be associated with failure, low self-esteem and feelings of isolation. It may be related to anxiety about situations over which the child has no control.

In childhood, anger and sadness are very close emotions. Much of what an adult experiences as sadness is expressed by a child as anger. Left untreated, angry feelings can result in aggressive, harmful, even criminal behavior.

An example of such behavior in children is bullying. The young victims of bullying describe their experiences in terms much like those used by adult victims of terrorism. Victims frequently blame themselves as they search for a logical reason for an illogical situation.

The root cause of bullying usually rests in the child's home. Bullies often do not receive the best care from adults. Children with tendencies to bully are likely to see the world as more threatening than it really is. Parents of bullies tend to use more criticism, sarcasm and put-downs than they do praise, encouragement and humor. These children need more compassion, respect and dignity.

Helping an angry child

In dealing with angry children, parental actions should be motivated by the need to protect and to teach, not by a desire to punish. Parents and teachers should show a child that they accept his or her feelings, while suggesting other ways to express the feelings – and they should be sincere. Strong emotions should not be denied, and angry outbursts should not always be viewed as a sign of serious

problems; they should be recognized and treated with respect.

Punishment is not the most effective way to communicate to children what is expected. Poor discipline, involving unduly harsh and inappropriate behavior, is often associated with verbal ridicule and attacks on the child's integrity.

Do you know an angry child?

Here's how to help

Suggestions for dealing with the angry child include:

- Catch children being good and praise them.
- Tell children what behaviors please you.
- Deliberately ignore inappropriate behavior that can be tolerated.
- Provide physical outlets and other alternatives.
- Be ready to show affection.
- Express interest in the child's activities.
- Tell the child you accept his or her angry feelings.
- Ease tension through humor.
- Appeal directly to the child.
- Explain the cause of the child's frustration.
- Use rewards.
- Build a positive self-image.
- Encourage children to see their strengths as well weaknesses.
- Use positive self-image.
- Model appropriate behavior.
- Teach children to express themselves verbally.

If you need more help ...

If you need more advice, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740, or toll free at (877) 346-3648. TTY users call (810) 232-6310.

Other Genesee Health System handouts include: *Dealing with discipline, Stress and your child, Confidence building blocks for children, Getting along at home, Ten stress-busters for families, Building emotionally healthy families, Before friendships can form, Dealing with differences and Path to strong emotional health.* © www.genhs.com