



# Anger Management

For the entire month of May, we are focusing on our *Mind*. This week is Anger Management. Anger is just another way we feel. It's perfectly OK to be angry at times. Anger can be powerful and managing it is sometimes

challenging; however, at MMDC we want to offer alternative ways of managing our feelings in more productive ways not only for the kids, but parents as well. Living in the time of reality TV shows, YouTube, and other social media sites, we've seen a change in the way our youth and young adults deal with anger. Recording fights, saying cruel things on Facebook, yelling and screaming because someone made you mad, are all very common ways our youth deal with anger. Instead of lashing out, why not use our words, be respectful, and try to use anger management tools to help relay your viewpoint and discuss how something makes you feel, instead of lashing out. Anger can also be a response to our own feelings. So when our own fear, hurt, disappointment, pain or grief is too upsetting, we tend to lash out to keep ourselves from feeling pain. We mobilize against the perceived threat (even our own upsets) by attacking.

Parents who have little kids can find themselves very frustrated trying to understand why a toddler is so upset. Due to the fact kids don't have a fully developed frontal cortex to help them self-regulate, they're even more prone to lashing out when they're angry.

Below are some ways to help parents handle your little or big kid's tantrums and children management their anger.

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*Anger must be released in the right way. Otherwise you'll be like a pot of boiling water with the lid left on. If the steam doesn't escape, the water will finally boil over and blow its top! When that happens to you, it's no fun for anyone*

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Here are some tips from Super Nanny...

## 1. Change the way you view your child's behavior

Parents often say "he's winding me up" or "she knows how to press my buttons". If you believe your child is deliberately seeking to upset you, then their behavior is bound to infuriate you!

Let go of the idea that your infant or toddler is scheming about how to drive you crazy; this kind of manipulation is developmentally impossible as it requires a child to be able to understand that other people have beliefs and intentions different from their own – in developmental psychology this is called "theory of mind", This relatively advanced type of thought process does not develop until around age three or four years.

Try to view your toddler for what he is; a little person enjoying his new found ability to move around and explore with huge curiosity the fascinating world around him. Remember that the little person causing such havoc simply can't understand that his actions affect other people, has not developed the ability for self-control so will act on impulse. He also has no sense of time, so will just not be able to wait.

If you have an older child whom you feel is deliberately winding you up, try to look at why they may be behaving like this. Perhaps they have learnt that pushing you to the edge is the only way to get what they want? Make sure your child gets attention for all the positive behaviors you want to see more of.

## 2. Reduce stressful moments

Use clear, brief, simple commands and keep your tone polite, calm but firm. Children will pick up on any hints of stress, wavering or anger in your voice and this may make them more agitated or more persistent.

Avoid sarcasm ("Great, I just love clearing up your mess!"), threats ("If you don't hurry up, I'll go without you"), labelling ("you're so selfish") or criticism ("you're taking forever, you're always lazy") when speaking to your child. In the short term these kinds of comments will upset and provoke



your child and in the long term they may cause a damaging erosion of their self-esteem.

Parents are often aware of the importance of praising good behavior, but feel resentful about dishing out compliments to the little terror who's causing so much grief. Set yourself small goals e.g. initially aim to praise just four good things a day, then gradually increase this. The more you praise, the more good behavior you'll see so this should be fairly easy!

Agree a set of house rules and consequences – write these down and post them somewhere obvious. If you have a pre-agreed plan, your child knows where they stand, and you're less likely to react hastily in the heat of moment.

Set aside weekly relaxation time – this is not a luxury for you but a necessity. This may be a massage, a nice walk, listening to music or just a relaxing bath. Set up a babysitting circle with a group of friends if you are struggling with childcare.

### 3. How to cope if close to snapping

State your feelings, without attacking. Use 'when...then': "When you call me names I get upset".

Now is not a good time to get into a debate. Show willingness to resolve things but just not now – "We can talk about this tomorrow over breakfast, but right now I'm feeling too wound up".

If your child is safe, take time out, saying "I need some time to cool down". Remove yourself from the situation. Take deep breaths; in through your nose and out through your mouth, trying to slow your breath as much as possible.

If it's hard to leave your child, use distraction techniques (counting, reciting song lyrics or a poem in your head) to stop yourself from reacting rashly.

Use positive self-talk – say to yourself "I'm doing the best I can" or "Keep calm!"

Displace your anger by whatever means works for you – vacuuming, singing along to a favorite song, doing exercise. Some parents find it useful to keep a journal to jot down how they feel after angry outbursts.

### **The Anger Rules**

**It is OK to get mad, BUT**

**1. Don't hurt others**

**2. Don't hurt yourself**

**3. Don't destroy property**

**And**

**DO talk about it!**

### 5 Strategies for Children to practice:

**It is never too soon to teach your child how to control her anger so that it doesn't control her. Remember, however, that it is difficult for young children to master these strategies. Your child will need your help—and a lot of practice:**

1. **Stop.** If your child is feeling out of control, she should be separated from the person she feels like hurting. She should leave the room. As often happens with children, Sophie and Henry needed a parent to get them to stop.
2. **Calm down.** Teach your child to use some calming strategies when she feels the physical symptoms of anger. She can try taking deep breaths, drinking a glass of water, distracting herself with a song or a story, or playing alone.
3. **Think before you act.** Encourage your child to ask herself, "What do I want to happen?" Explain that vengeance and retaliation are not worth acting on. Being understood and making things right are worthwhile. Henry's scribbling can't be erased, but Sophie can still show her dad her work and how Henry tried to help.
4. **Consider the other person's feelings.** Children can begin to show empathy as young as 3 years old, but they need your help. Try to get her to understand the other person's point of view, just as she wants her point of view understood. Sophie wanted her birthday card to be perfect. Henry knew his efforts could never live up to hers. See if your child can figure out why the other person doesn't understand her side. Could she find another way to get her view across more clearly? Can she try to let it go?
5. **Look for possible solutions.** Help your child see beyond "I hate you and you're no good." See if you can find a compromise that both parties can agree on. Apologizing often helps. By this stage maybe Henry could come to understand that he must let Sophie make her own card, and maybe she can help him with his.