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Video Short

Frustration Fractures

By CWK Network Producer

"I just remember one time we had a high school dance and this one guy was really mad at his girlfriend and he put a hole through a bathroom wall."

-Justin, 21 years old

Blowing off steam once in awhile may be essential to keeping our sanity, but there are good ways and bad ways to do it. Too often, teenage boys take their frustrations out by punching a wall or a door and many break their hands along the way.

Doctors say they see it all the time.

After a fight with his girlfriend, Sean punched the shower wall. "[I] cracked the tile with my class ring," he says.

After an argument with his parents, Justin punched a door. "But it was a soft door, and my hand went through it, and it didn't really break the door. It didn't break my hand either," he says.

Blowing off steam is essential to our sanity, but both good ways – and bad ways – in which to do so exist. And when teens cope with their anger by punching objects, they often break bones – their own.

"They all have the same fracture, and there's only one way you get it – by punching something," says Dr. Gary McGillivray, an orthopaedic hand surgeon at the Emory Medical Center.

The hand has weak spots just behind each big knuckle. A break in that area is called a "boxer's fracture." Medical associations don't know how often this injury occurs, but experts say they see it all of the time, especially in boys.

"I'm one hand surgeon, but nonetheless I see one or two of these a week," Dr. McGillivray says.

If your son doesn't have access to a punching bag, teach him to try counting to 10 or taking a walk when he gets angry instead of hurting himself.

"I'm getting better at it. Sometimes I just walk away from the situation [and] come back to it later when I've calmed down," Sean says.

Managing Anger Helps Curb Violent Behavior

By CWK Network, Inc.

According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, when a person's closed fist makes contact with a hard object, a fracture of the fifth bone (the one that leads to the little finger) can occur. Known as "boxer's fracture," this condition commonly occurs among young men who punch walls or hit objects when they become angry.

In some instances, if controlled, infrequent, and not abusive to anyone, the expression of anger may be useful. The Child and Youth Health organization of Australia (CYH) says, for example, takes the position that anger can be useful in the following ways:

- Drives one to reach his or her goals, handle emergencies and solve problems.
- Helps one express stress and tension.
- Allows one to communicate to others what he or she is feeling.
- Motivate change toward social justice.
- Allows one to notice that he or she has been treated unfairly or has been emotionally attacked by others.
- Helps to protect one's emotional well-being.
- Allows one to stand up for himself or herself.
- Allows one to show disapproval when someone breaks social rules or "norms." Anger communicates a message that some behavior (abuse, illegal drug use, etc.) is not OK.

- Leads to changes in the way society runs. When people become angry over the same issues, they will often join together to change the situation.

CYH says that anger can be useful only if it is expressed in a positive way. If anger is used in a destructive or harmful manner, it can lead to the following negative consequences:

- Difficulty keeping friends, partners, family or employment
- Misery, loneliness and unhappiness
- Feelings of low self-esteem, depression or anxiety
- Long-term health problems, including stroke, heart attack and substance abuse
- Violence against oneself or others (often loved ones)

What Parents Need to Know

CYH says that it is important for parents to remember that anger is a natural human emotion, just like happiness, sadness and grief. Linda Lebelle, director of Focus Adolescent Services, says that you can help your child learn to manage his or her anger by teaching him or her to consider the following questions in order to bring about self-awareness:

- Where does this anger come from?
- What situations bring out this feeling of anger?
- Do my thoughts begin with absolutes, such as “must,” “should” or “never”?
- Are my expectations unreasonable?
- What unresolved conflict am I facing?
- Am I reacting to hurt, loss or fear?
- Am I aware of anger’s physical signals (clenching fists, shortness of breath, sweating, etc.)?
- How do I choose to express my anger?
- To whom or what is my anger directed?
- Am I using anger as a way to isolate myself or as a way to intimidate others?
- Am I communicating effectively?
- Am I focusing on what has been done to me rather than what I can do?
- How am I accountable for what I’m feeling?
- How am I accountable for how my anger shows up?
- Do my emotions control me, or do I control my emotions?

Once your child learns to analyze his or her angry feelings, he or she will be better able to resolve those feelings in a nonviolent manner. The American Psychological Association (APA) suggests the following ways to help your child deal with anger without resorting to violence:

- Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings. If your child is afraid to talk or if he or she can’t find the right words to describe what he or she is experiencing, find a trusted friend or adult to help your child one-on-one.
- Teach your child to express himself or herself calmly, without losing his or her temper or fighting. Remind your child to ask himself or herself if his or her response is safe and reasonable.
- Remind your child to listen to others. Teach him or her ways in which to listen carefully and respond without getting upset when someone gives him or her negative feedback. Help your child use critical thinking skills in order to try to see the other person’s point of view.
- Teach your child to negotiate. Help your child work out his or her problems with someone else by looking at alternative solutions and compromises.

When your child becomes angry, he or she probably experiences muscle tension, a “knot” in the stomach, accelerated heartbeat and becomes flushed in the face. The APA says that you can help your child reduce the rush of adrenaline that is responsible for these physical changes by teaching him or her the following relaxation techniques:

- Take a few slow, deep breaths, concentrate on breathing and count to 10.
- Imagine yourself at the beach, by a lake or anywhere that makes you feel calm and peaceful.
- Try other thoughts or actions that have helped you relax in the past.
- Keep telling yourself: “Calm down,” “I don’t need to prove myself” and “I’m not going to let him or her get to me.”

If your child’s method of dealing with anger becomes violent and causes concern, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry recommends you immediately arrange for a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified mental health professional. Early treatment by a professional can often help. The goals of treatment typically focus on helping your child learn how to control his or her anger, express anger and frustrations in appropriate ways, be responsible for his or her actions and accept consequences.

Resources

- [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#)

- [American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons](#)
- [American Psychological Association](#)
- [Child and Youth Health of South Australia](#)
- [Focus Adolescent Services](#)

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