

ATC Family Hour October 2, 2014



Extinguishing Anger: Tips for Helping our Children

Google says anger is a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.

It's a natural emotion. The problem is that many of us don't know how to deal with anger. Some of us avoid it, some of us suppress it and some of us explode with it. Let's look at some healthy ways we can help our children learn to express and deal with anger.

1. Talk about anger when things are calm

Ask your child what anger means. Talk about ways anger can be good and help them see it isn't all bad. Describe different ways we might feel anger, how our face might turn red, our heart might beat faster, our hands might get sweaty or we might get a belly ache. Share about times you felt angry.

2. Recognize anger triggers

Identify the things that often lead to anger. Being aware of these triggers may help reduce their occurrence and/or the

intensity. Several examples are being over tired, hungry, having someone invade personal space, not getting their way, etc. When you recognize these triggers are present, take a break, get a snack, stop to read a book or rest together and use the teachable moment to point out what you see and help your child begin to grow in self-awareness.

3. Make an anger plan

Create a simple list with your child of ways to deal with anger. Talk before the feelings arise and come up with a plan to try. Making shapes with your fingers, taking deep breaths, coloring a picture, jumping up and down, and more can help a child take a break and begin to learn skills for managing their emotions.

4. Acknowledge feelings and use empathy statements

Empathy means understanding what another person feels and having insight into his or her thoughts and actions. Use empathy statements to build emotional intelligence and help your child feel understood. Use statements like, "You are mad! You did not like it when he took your toy."

5. Use and teach I-Messages

"I feel sad when you scream NO after I asked for your help. Let's work together on cleaning up the books so we can have lunch." I-messages help us own our feelings, communicate without putting others on the defensive, and use more concise language. When you model I-messages, you are teaching your child a simple and effective communication skill.

6. Establish what is acceptable and unacceptable

Anger is not all bad and we do not want to shame our children for having feelings. While we want to parent using the tips above in a consistent and calm way, we also want to

have clear rules for what is not acceptable. “We never hit, bite, pinch, or throw things... even when we are really angry”.

7. If you are having trouble...

If you are having trouble with your own coping skills or having trouble teaching your child these skills, ask for help. Sometimes behaviors are so engrained, we need extra support and encouragement to change them.

8. Our heart matters!

We are always modeling to our children. Please consider doing the hard work of looking at your own heart and growing in self-awareness. Keep learning new skills and set goals for the kind of parent you want to be! (See the Family Hour list from last week)

Stay calm. Consider a family rule that we only talk when we are calm. Don't forget that anger is contagious and the best way to help our children deal with anger is to not get angry ourselves. Take a minute to calm down when needed and work to be consistent. (Orange Rhino blog)

Remember, using concise statements like “Mommy is feeling very angry, I am going to take some deep breaths and get some self-control”. Or when you get a phone call that really makes you angry, model a healthy response by saying, “That phone call made me really upset, let's go for a walk so I can calm down and decide what to do next”.

Notes: