

"Anger – Managing Big Emotions"

Scripture tells us, "Be angry, but do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). Yes, the Bible acknowledges that anger is a normal human emotion. Teaching our children how to manage anger is a part of equipping them with good emotional intelligence skills.

When storm clouds brew, even the most well-intentioned parent can get triggered and escalate the upset rather than calm it. But when your child wrestles with the more "difficult" human emotions, he needs your help to learn how to manage them. This is the most important time to teach emotional intelligence — meaning to help your child develop the abilities to soothe himself, regulate his emotions, and get along with others.

Here are six ways to help your child develop emotional intelligence as they deal with anger:

1. Respond to the needs and feelings behind problem behavior.

Children WANT to have happy, warm interactions with their parents. They want to be "good" people. Misbehavior comes from overwhelming feelings or unmet needs. If you don't address the feelings and needs, they'll just burst out later, causing other problem behavior. Examples of responding to needs:

- Respond to a child who regularly exhibits defiance by offering healthy sense of agency: *"It looks like you want to do this yourself! I'm right here if you need some help."*



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- Respond to clinginess by offering connection: *"It's hard to let go of me this morning. Starting school again has been fun, but you miss time with Mommy now. I will be right here to pick you up after school, and we'll snuggle and play together and have special time, ok?"*
- Respond to crankiness caused by lack of sleep by nurturing and teaching self-nurture: *"You're having a hard time this morning. I think everything is a bit too much for you because we all got to bed late last night and didn't get quite enough sleep. Maybe we need to spend some cozy time this morning on the couch reading books together."*

2. Accept all emotions, even as you limit behavior.

Of course you need to limit your child's actions. He can't run in the street, throw his dinner on the floor, hit his sister, or play on the computer all night. In every case where your child's behavior is clearly unacceptable, set a limit. (If it isn't "clear" whether the behavior is acceptable to you, just ask yourself if you're okay with being flexible, and be sure not to push yourself past your own comfort level.) Once the storm passes, your child will be cooperative and affectionate, and feel so much more connected to you because you tethered him/her through their inner tornado. AFTER the storm is the time to teach, not during.

3. Regulate Your Own Emotions.

Children won't always do what you say, but they will always, eventually, do what you do. Kids learn emotional regulation from us. When we stay calm,



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it teaches our child that there's no emergency, even if she feels like there is at the moment. Of course, you can't stay calm when you're running on empty. That's why maintaining our own sense of well-being is one of our most important parenting responsibilities.

4. Remember that anger is always a defense against deeper emotions, like fear, hurt or sadness.

When your child expresses anger, he's not being rude. He's defending himself against feeling those more vulnerable emotions of hurt or fear. Acknowledge your child's anger, but then go under it to empathize with the deeper emotions spurring the anger. Feeling those deeper emotions will melt your child's anger.

5. Don't take it personally, and resist the urge to escalate or retaliate.

Your child has big feelings. They aren't about you, even when he's yelling "I hate you!" It's about your child: their tangled-up feelings, their difficulty controlling themselves, their immature ability to understand and express their emotions. When your daughter says, "You NEVER understand!" try to hear that as information about her — at this moment she feels like she's never understood — rather than about you. Model emotional self-management by simply taking a deep breath and trying to see it from her perspective. Remind yourself that it's hard to be a kid. She doesn't yet have the internal resources to manage her emotions — but you do, right?



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6. Talk to God when you are angry.

Teach your kids to tell God about their anger. He understands so it's ok to tell Him our frustrations just as it is ok to tell Him our joys.

Tough? Yes, because most of us find it challenging to manage our own feelings so that we can tolerate our children's unruly emotions. But have you noticed the silver lining? We get a chance to grow in emotional intelligence ourselves. Which makes us happier, healthier people.

Teach your child that the feeling of angry, at times, is normal but it is important that we also teach them to learn to deal with those angry feelings in constructive ways.

Reference

Markham, L. (2020). Teaching Emotional Intelligence When Emotions Run High. Downloaded from: <https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/emotional-intelligence/child-anger>



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