



Phoenix Associates, Inc.

Anger Management for Older Children

Anger is a normal, healthy emotion that is part of life. But, it can become more complex if it is aggressive, impacts relationships, or is expressed in an unhealthy way. It is important to take an informed approach to your child's anger-one that helps both of you!



The first thing to know about anger is that working to improve it is mostly accomplished while your child and you are both calm. When your child is escalated, planning, care for consequences, and openness to feedback are unlikely to be present. Alternatively, if you and your child have already discussed how to handle conflict and you have already laid out healthy expectations and boundaries, the conflict is likely to have a better outcome.

The following are some tips to use to turn unhealthy anger into productive conversations.

Focus on helping your child manage anger when he or she is not escalated. Help your child recognize the signs of anger such as fists clenching, hot chest or head and tenseness. Also help your child recognize triggers. Examples of triggers include: Not getting what I want, not feeling heard, not feeling understood.

Encourage open and honest conversation. Set a time to talk to your child about anger and your relationship. During this time, use your curiosity to help your child identify and express the core root of their anger. Resist the urge to get defensive, criticize, or condemn. The goal is to encourage healthy emotional expression of anger.

Set clear expectations prior to anger outbursts so your child understands the consequences of their behaviors prior to an angry outburst.

Consider enrolling in family therapy to address communication, conflict, and underlying reasons for anger. Therapy is a good way to help address conflict between family members, help your child learn to express their emotions to you in a healthy way, and address any trauma that may be impacting your relationship. A family therapist can help you identify issues that may be connected to your child's angry behaviors. For example, chronic anger reactions may be connected to undiagnosed ADHD and co-occurring Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Or anger can stem from school problems such as bullying, feelings of being overwhelmed, or a perceived sense of unfairness. A family therapist can assess your child objectively and help you make a plan for what to do.

Use a trauma-informed approach. If your child has experienced trauma, they may not be able to regulate their emotions effectively. Research the impact that trauma has on the brain and work to understand your child's trauma triggers.

Parenting Tips for De-escalation

Learn, use, and teach "I statements" to your child. "I feel" statements can help you and your child take ownership for feelings, and does not blame the other person for what has happened.

Validation is often an effective way to deescalate. You do not have to agree with all of your child's words to validate them. You can validate with phrases like "I know you feel disappointed that you cannot go out tonight, but it is a school night." "It's normal to feel hurt when a friend betrays you."

Connection is another effective way to deescalate. Using humor, validating your child's feelings, and being an active listener to what your child is saying are all ways to increase connection.

Model the behavior you would like to see. Calm yourself first before engaging with your angry child. Take several deep breaths and remind yourself of your goal to connect with your child. Avoid defensiveness and focus on remaining calm.

Remind yourself of the underlying reasons for angry and/or controlling behavior. Even older children may not have the knowledge to communicate or express their needs effectively and may instead default to angry behaviors.

At times, you may need to contact the police/emergency services. This is usually in cases where your child is threatening or enacting harm to self or others.