



10 Ways to Manage Anger

Anger is a normal emotion. At times it may be helpful if it motivates us to meet a challenge or correct something that's gone wrong. But when anger becomes excessive it can be harmful to ourselves and others. Below are some ways for kids and parents to manage anger. These require practice and should be tailored to a child's age.

Anger is an emotion that is part of the "fight or flight" response. It informs us that something is threatening, frustrating, upsetting, or unfair. Many situations make us feel angry, like conflicts in our relationships, difficulties with schoolwork, feeling disrespected, unappreciated, or misunderstood.

Consequences of Excessive Anger

- **Physical Health.** Severe anger may cause high blood pressure, poor sleep, hormonal problems, or weaker immune system.
- **Activities.** Anger can interfere with the ability to complete schoolwork or collaborate with others on projects, sports teams, or a job. While thoughtful discussions may be useful, angry outbursts at peers or authorities may result in poor academic reports, being benched, or being fired.
- **Mental Health.** Longstanding anger may contribute to depression, anxiety, substance misuse, stress, clouded thinking, feelings of guilt, and low self-esteem.
- **Relationships.** Frequent outward expressions of anger in relationships can cause breakups, contribute to deeper conflicts, and negatively affect one's image. They may lead to rejection and isolation, or lack of trust from others.

Techniques to Manage Anger

1. **Know When You Are Angry.** Physical signs of anger include rapid heart rate, muscle tension, headaches, breathing faster, an upset stomach, clenching teeth. Mental signs include poor concentration, obsessing over an event or insult, feeling stressed, worried, or keyed up. If we know when we're angry, we have a better opportunity to manage it.
2. **Identify Triggers.** We all have certain things that set us off: waiting in long lines, disrespectful comments, frozen computer screens, messing up on homework or in a sports event. Knowing the prompts in daily life that set us off gives us time to plan ahead, walk away, take a time out, or use a technique to modify our thoughts, emotions, and behavior.
3. **Control Thoughts.** When we're angry, our thoughts can become distorted. A teen having a conflict may think, "They never ever respect me!" or "I never get what I need!" If you find your child thinking in dramatic, all-or-nothing ways, a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) technique may help to deflate the exaggerated thoughts. Coach your child to ask: "Is this totally true? Do I ever get respect and get what I need?" If they honestly answer these questions, it usually helps to make the thoughts more realistic. "Well, sometimes I get what I need. It's not *all* the time. But this sure feels like it!" This kind of mental restructuring is extremely valuable in tempering anger.
4. **Use Relaxation Techniques.** Regular use of meditation, yoga, or stretching is very helpful in quelling angry feelings. Think of other ways you and your child or teen relax listening to music, dancing, watching a favorite movie or show, reading a book or graphic novel. A relaxation technique is NOT turning to substances. A dangerous habit is reaching for a drug to manage feelings — over time, it may be a habit that's tough to break including chronic use or addiction.

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Ways to Manage Anger, *continued*

5. **Exercise.** Daily exercise or going for a run or working out when upset is an excellent way to calm down and reset your emotional system.
6. **Lengthen Your Fuse.** The longer time we can place between our impulse to react and our actual reaction, the less likely we are to have an angry response to a charged situation. We can all train to separate ourselves from the situation that make us angry. Take a break from a heated conversation, or physically walk away from a frustrating situation. You can try to use distraction to take your focus off what's making you angry like starting an activity that demands attention like playing a video game, working on an assignment, or going out to shoot some hoops.
7. **Use Humor.** Sometimes when we're angry, lightening the mood can help. You'll know your child best in terms of using this strategy. If you or your child is in a dispute with a friend, try making jokes about the situation and laughing about what's going on. Be sure not to laugh *at* the other person, laugh *with* them. Or watch a funny YouTube clip. The key is converting emotional energy from rage to humor.
8. **Practice Together.** It's important to talk with your kids about their anger and ways to manage it. These conversations heighten awareness the ways we can control it. For managing your own anger, there's no better way to calm down than talking things out with and feeling supported by a trusted person, but try not to let the conversation turn into a rant. Venting anger may only beget more anger. Be careful not to use your kids as confidants, but rather, turn to another trusted adult – like a partner, sibling, or good friend. It's also helpful to practice management skills with your kids. Many of the techniques may be done together. Use conversations to help problem-solve, see things differently, and put thoughts and feelings into perspective.
9. **Remember, Your Kids Learn from You.** Parents have tremendous influence on their kids' behavior. No matter how old, they watch and identify with us. This leads to them using similar ways to react to all sorts of situations and is one reason why some behaviors are repeated from generation to generation. If you lose control of your anger in response to an event, your kids – especially young children – are likely to see this as a norm, take it in, and repeat it in their own way. Managing anger is important to kids' development and learned responses to difficult, frustrating situations.

If you lose control of your anger in front of your child (and we all do at some time or another), once you are calm it's wise to apologize for the way you reacted — even if it had nothing to do with them. The more they see that we all have things to work on, the more incentive they will have to follow your lead and take control of their feelings and behavior.

When Techniques Aren't Enough

10. **Seek Mental Health Support.** Frequent episodes of anger may be a symptom of a mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance use disorder, or another disorder. Or it may be a problem with a friendship, romantic partner, family relationship, or being the victim of bullying. When you or your kids feel stuck and none of the skills are helping, seeking support from a mental health professional is important. If an underlying psychiatric or behavioral disorder is identified from the assessment, it may result in recommending appropriate medication to treat the disorder, as well as psychological counseling.

Anger is part of being human, and it may be expressed for better or worse. If your anger or your child's anger is working against you, there are effective ways of to manage it.

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