

How can I help my child cope with anger?

SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health has worked with lots of families whose children struggle to cope with their feelings of anger. Many families who have worked with staff at SickKids CCMH have found these suggestions helpful. Keep in mind your child's age and abilities when applying these strategies. Give them a try and feel free to add your own!

Reflect on your own feelings. The key to helping your child regulate their emotions is to regulate your own emotions. To understand your child better, it is important to understand yourself. Everyone is more comfortable with some emotions than others. Try asking yourself:

- Which emotions do I have most difficulty dealing with in my child?
- How do I model handling difficult emotions for my child?
- What is triggered in me by my child's emotion? Am I acknowledging these feelings, or do I sweep them away? Check out this link for an animated example: <https://bit.ly/2CkyLfU>

Teach your child how to recognize their feelings. All feelings are normal, including anger. Once you have reflected on your own feelings, you can help your child recognize their own. Try these tips to help your child identify cues and triggers.

- Help your child learn how their body feels when they're starting to get angry. Do they feel hot or shaky? If they can notice the warning signs or body clues that they're getting angry, they can take time to cool down before a meltdown.
- Help your child learn to recognize their anger triggers. Do they react in anger when they have to stop using their electronics or lose a game? Knowing their anger triggers can help you and your child understand what feelings might be behind their reactions, and plan for the situation in advance.



Respect your child's feelings. Sometimes your child might feel angry because of another emotion they're having trouble expressing. Making sure your child knows that you acknowledge and respect their feelings can help them express their emotions.

- Actively listen to your child and reflect their feelings back to them. Often, children do not have the words to express how they're feeling, and it's important for caregivers to do this for them. For example, try using statements like "It makes sense that you're feeling angry" or "I understand that you're having a tough time right now." Labelling your child's feelings for them will help them feel heard and understood.
- Respond in a way that helps your child know that you are taking them seriously. Even if you might not agree with the behaviour, try to avoid reactions like rolling eyes, sighing or making a joke of the situation.
- Ask your child what they need. When your child is having a tough time, you may want to jump into problem-solving mode, but they might need some time to cool down first. Asking them directly what would be helpful can help them feel supported. Having these conversations when they are calm would be helpful so that in a difficult moment you can say something like "What do you need right now? For me to just listen and sit with you or to help you problem-solve?"

Teach your child to practice self-compassion. Your child’s mind is a powerful tool to cope with their anger. Help them learn to change their self-talk to be kinder towards themselves.

- Help your child practice affirmations like “I can work this out” when they’re having a conflict. You can model this behaviour too by encouraging them and making sure they know you believe in them.
- Help your child remember times when they’ve done a good job handling tough situations in the past. Saying something like “You can do it! Remember how well you calmed your body down last time you felt angry” will help them feel more confident in their ability to handle the situation.
- Your child may like to hear that you had a similar experience when you were their age. If it feels comfortable and safe for you to share, this may help them feel understood.
- After the situation has resolved, help your child to express their anger in creative ways like writing a letter or drawing a picture about how they feel. They can also act out the scenario with toys to help them make sense of what’s angering them, and together you can play through different endings to conflicts.

Teach your child how to manage. Your child may need your help when they feel angry and may look to you to solve the problem which triggered their feelings. But before jumping into problem-solving, try these tips to help your child manage their feelings of anger.

- Breathe. Helping your child concentrate on their breathing or counting breaths can help them focus on something other than their anger and the target of their anger.
- Count. Counting can also help your child focus on something other than their anger.
- Walk away. Encourage your child to walk away from a situation that’s frustrating them. This can help avoid confrontation or conflict.
- Help your child practice taking alone time to do activities like reading, listening to music or drawing until they feel calm and ready to come back and play.
- Give your child a safe space to go to when they’re upset. For example, a quiet spot in your home where they won’t be bothered by siblings and they can’t hurt themselves/others or destroy the room.
- Your child might have a lot of built up energy when they’re feeling upset. Encourage them to do jumping jacks, dance, run on the spot or play outside in a safe space until they feel calmer.



Further resources

Check out these links for more helpful tips on how to help your child cope with feelings of anger.

1. AboutKidsHealth: Anger Management for Young Children <https://bit.ly/2M187Iz>
 2. Kids Health: Taking Charge of Anger <https://bit.ly/2Q6kAOs>
 3. Kids Matter: The Experience of Anger <https://bit.ly/2CirPzY>
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