

Let's Talk: Helping kids manage their anger

Presenter – Erica Hanlon, Clinical Counselor & Life Coach

So we all get angry from time to time. Anger isn't necessarily a problem except maybe when your kid is having a full on tantrum and meltdown in the middle of the store or you're getting a call from their school because they hit or bit some kid in their class. My name is Erica Hanlon. I'm a licensed professional counselor and life coach, and today, we're going to talk about how to help your kids manage their anger.

Identify the feeling

So what do you do when your child is starting to get upset? Well, a great starting point is just simply to name the feeling. So children don't have the skills to identify their feelings or manage them, and identifying feelings is really important, and the reason that it helps so much is it actually helps create distance mentally between us and the feeling. When we can see it and we can identify it, it helps create that space, and then it makes it easier to cope with it. So you probably don't want to tell your child something like you're really angry right now, and tell them how they feel. Nobody likes that. Instead, you could say something like it seems like you're really angry. It looks like you're really frustrated right now, is that correct? And you can name the feeling for them. This will give them the skill to identify their feelings in the future.

Set limits

So if your child is acting out when they're angry, it's really important to set limits on that. Describe the behavior that's happening that you don't approve of. So you could say something like it's okay to be angry, it's not okay to hit. It's okay to be angry, it's not okay to call names. It's really important to call out that behavior very specifically. You don't want to leave it ambiguous like don't do that. Children will be like do what? I don't even know what I'm doing. You want to be very specific about the behavior that is not acceptable, and if you institute consequences for inappropriate behavior, make it very clear that you're not punishing them for having feelings or getting angry, the consequence is because the behavior was unacceptable.

Calm down

So calming down is a really important skill. Nobody is born with it. We all have to learn it in one way, shape or form. So it's important to teach your child how to calm down, and this probably will look different depending on the age of your child. So if you're working with somebody who's younger, like a preschooler or kindergartner, you can teach them deep breathing techniques by talking to them about smelling the pizza, and blowing out the birthday candles. If they're a little bit older, you can try to engage that thinking part of their brain by asking them to count to 100 as fast as possible or to identify maybe five red objects in the room or three round objects in the room. This starts engaging that thinking part of their brain so that the amygdala, that kind of emotional part of the brain, is no longer in charge. Now if you're working with somebody who's maybe a teenager or an adolescent, you can talk to them about lengthening the fuse. So helping them feel the feelings before they react.

So these are just a few tips. There are lots more out there. Everything from working out to drawing pictures to just simply talking to somebody about your anger. So find the tools and tips that work best for you and your child.

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