

How to Handle Anger

► What is Anger?

Anger is a natural emotion felt by everyone from time to time. Like other emotions we experience, such as happiness and sadness, anger can affect our mood. Since our mood influences our actions, it is easy to see how feelings of anger can affect how we behave. Anger can be defined as a “strong feeling of displeasure.” However, this dictionary definition cannot describe all of the effects of anger.

Sometimes our anger can be used as positive energy: to help us exercise harder, work faster and accomplish more. Other times, anger can be harmful to ourselves and those around us, including children. Because parenting is challenging and can cause feelings of anger, this brochure was written for parents and other caregivers (foster parents, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, teachers, etc.). Included is information about the effects of anger, warning signs of anger (which can help reduce or prevent anger), and a section on how to control anger.

► How are Children Affected?

Children can be affected by parents’ and other caregivers’ anger both directly and indirectly. The direct way can take different forms. Sometimes parents and other caregivers may find themselves so angry that they may become physically aggressive toward their child. However, physical harm is not the only way that a child can be hurt. Parents and other caregivers may say things, in the heat of anger, that can hurt a child’s feelings or damage self-esteem.

Children can be indirectly affected as well. By watching a parent or other caregiver successfully handle a stressful situation, a child could be positively influenced. Other times, children can be negatively affected by indirect actions. For example, when watching two adults arguing, the child may think that is the only, or best, way to solve problems. Since the indirect effects of anger can be easily overlooked, it is always helpful for parents and other caregivers to pay attention to their actions when around a child.

► How are Parents and Other Caregivers Affected?

Parents and other caregivers are also affected by anger. When using anger as a way to deal with tense situations, a parent or other caregiver often becomes angrier. When angry, you may find it more difficult to perform everyday respon-

sibilities in the home, on the job, running errands and parenting. Therefore, knowing some of the warning signs of anger can help reduce, if not prevent, angry feelings. The following checklist can serve as a guide in recognizing some of the warning signs of anger. Can you think of others?

- anxiety • overcommitment
- trouble sleeping • overwhelmed
- displeasure • depression • irritation
- sorrow • frustration • fatigue
- hopelessness • insecurity

► How to Control Anger

Sometimes feelings of anger build up without us even knowing it. Therefore, it helps to know how to control anger. It may be helpful to think of your anger management as a traffic light.

Red light represents extreme anger; **immediately come to a stop**. Try one of the following:

1. Take a time out.
2. Talk with a friend, relative, counselor or church member.
3. Splash water on your face.
4. Get away from the place of tension — if you cannot leave because you are watching children, walk into another room.
5. Walk around the block.
6. Write down your feelings, possibly in a diary or journal.
7. Take a deep breath.
8. Count to 10.
9. Exercise.
10. Do something constructive, such as gardening, reading or other hobbies.

Yellow light represents moderate anger. Now is a good time to organize your thoughts **before** trying to talk to the person with whom you are angry. Sharing your problem with others and seeking advice may also be helpful. Next, try to figure out the needs of the person(s) with whom you are angry. Why did they act that way toward you? Do they have certain needs that you were not aware of at the time? In addition to their needs, what are yours? Knowing your needs and those of the other person(s) involved is helpful in understanding the source of your anger. In organizing your thoughts, remember the ABCs of communication:

ASK yourself three simple questions:

- What am I feeling?
- Why do I feel this way?
- What is the source of my anger?

Writing about your feelings is a good outlet.

BEFORE talking to the person(s) with whom you are angry, think of some ways to prevent the anger-producing situation in the future:

- Remember how you felt during the situation.
- Put yourself in the other person’s shoes and try to understand why he or she acted that way.
- What would you have done in their position?

COMMUNICATE your feelings in a positive manner. Things to remember:

- Listen to the other person’s side of the story; listen with an open mind.
- Stick to one issue at a time. Digging up old arguments won’t help.
- Explain how you feel without blaming the other person. Try to stay calm and control your voice.

— *Good approaches:*

- “In my opinion...”
- “The way I see it...”
- “It seemed as though...”
- “I was wondering...”

— *Approaches to avoid:*

- “You never...”
- “How am I supposed to...”
- “Why don’t you just...”

Remember how you would want the other person to approach you if he or she were in your shoes.

Green light is a signal that you are **ready to communicate**, but you should still **proceed with caution**. When you have reached a green light, you have:

- identified that a problem exists;
- determined the cause of the problem;
- identified your needs, as well as those of the person(s) with whom you are angry; and
- thought of possible solutions for preventing this situation in the future.

The following examples show how the **ABCs** can help you reach the green light (communication stage).

I. Partner conflict

A. Ask, “What is the source of my anger?”

- “My partner and I don’t spend as much time together as we used to.”

B. Before you act, think of some possible strategies.

- Write a letter to your partner; express how you feel and ask when you can talk about your concern.
- Arrange a time to get together in a comfortable setting for the two of you (dinner, going for a walk).

C. Communicate your needs.

- “What do you think we can do about this situation in the future?”
- “I would like for us to spend more time together.”
- “I was thinking that we could set aside Saturday evenings as our time. What do you think?”

II. Conflict between Children

A. Ask “What is the source of my anger?”

- “My children are always fighting. I become very angry when the children are too noisy and fight with one another.”

B. Before you act, think about some possible strategies.

- Talk with them over an ice cream cone.
- How is their relationship developing?
- Do they get along well most of the time?
- How do they deal with arguments?
- How do they get along with other boys/girls at school and in the neighborhood?

C. Communicate your needs.

- “I love both of you very much and would like to see the two of you get along. How do you think we can do that?”
- “Mary, Joe, I would like for you to get along better. How about making a contract; writing down what you are willing to do to get along better?”

III. Job conflict

A. Ask, “What is the source of my anger?”

- “I don’t understand the task my supervisor has given me.”

B. Before you act, think about some possible strategies.

- When would the supervisor have time to discuss your situation with you?
- Put yourself in your supervisor’s shoes. How would you explain to an employee what to do?
- Prepare specific questions to ask your supervisor.

C. Communicate your needs.

- “I do not think I understand exactly what you would like me to do with this project. Could you provide a few more guidelines or examples? I want to make sure I am doing this correctly.”

IV. Not enough personal time

A. Ask, “What is the source of my anger?”

- “I feel overcommitted.”
- “Although I enjoy spending time with my family, I would also like some time for myself.”

B. Before you act, think of some possible solutions and places in which to talk about those solutions.

- During or after dinner might be a good time to talk.
- Arrange some personal time before or after you work (i.e. exercise, reading the paper, etc.).

C. Communicate your needs.

- “I’ve decided to join a bowling league. If it’s okay with the family, I’ll be gone Wednesday evenings from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.”

People often say that the best offense is a good defense. The best way to control anger is to reduce or prevent it. By taking the time to read this brochure, you are already taking a step toward managing your anger. For more information on how to handle anger and other parenting needs, call the **ParentLink Connection Center** at 1-800-552-8522.

References

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