



Controlling Anger

The Facts

Anger is a completely normal and usually healthy, human emotion. But, when anger gets out of control it can become destructive. Contrary to popular belief, research has found that allowing anger to go without restraint actually escalates anger and aggression and does nothing to help resolve the problem. We all know that when we lose our temper it scares younger children, can numb older kids into tuning us out and prevents parents from thinking clearly. A better approach is to examine what triggers our anger and develop a strategy to eliminate the problem.

How to keep your cool

Calm down

The first step is to slow down and think through your responses. Don't say the first thing that comes into your mind. Take a deep breath and sit down. Your body language will show your child that your goal is not to go to combat, but rather to have a face-to-face discussion.

Use I-messages

A good way to avoid escalating arguments and putting others on the defensive is to discuss your feelings or needs using I-messages. *Example:* Rather than saying, "You always do this!" or "You're driving me crazy!" try, "I feel frustrated when I see dirty dishes left all over the house, because I worked hard to clean it up this morning. I want you to put your dirty dishes in the dishwasher." This approach gets your message across without sounding confrontational or condescending and increases the likelihood of getting compliance and cooperation.

Focus on long-term outcomes

Sometimes we overreact to mishaps because we consciously or unconsciously fear the incident is part of a bigger pattern or problem. *Example:* Your daughter can't find her shoes—again, and it's time to get out the door. Your larger concern is that she's not learning to be self-reliant. Yet, sometimes when we're under pressure it's easier for us to just do the task ourselves. Calmly resist the urge to jump in and find her shoes and remind her that it's her job to keep track of them. By allowing her to become accountable and suffer some unpleasant natural consequences (perhaps by being late for school or a party), she will learn to take responsibility.



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Time out for yourself

If possible, give yourself time to step-away from the really tough issues. If you attempt to discipline when you're emotionally charged, you may respond in ways you later regret. Disciplining when you're angry also gives your kids an excuse to tune out and remain angry with you. Let your children know they did something wrong and that you'll discuss it with them very soon-within a half an hour with small children, an hour for grade-schoolers and up to 24 hours with teenagers.

Ask your child for help

Seek your child's help when you lose your temper. For *example*, The school bus is due to arrive in 10 minutes and your second-grader is still in her pajamas. First, set an example by apologizing for your yelling. Then explain why you are upset and seek her help in finding a solution. Be genuinely curious; ask specific questions, "How do you think you could make sure this doesn't happen again?" If she can't figure it out, give multiple choice solutions. "Do you have too many chores in the morning? Should we select your clothes together the night before?" Help kids learn to identify a problem and a solution; for *example*, "I think you are moving slowly because you didn't get enough sleep last night, so tonight you'll go to bed earlier."

Develop clear consequences

Once you've agreed upon a plan, discuss what will happen if your child ignores or defies it. The best consequences have a logical relationship to the behavior. For *example*, If your child is a dawdler and your patience is wearing thin, try using penalties you've thought up during calm, rational moments. *Example*: If she's taken too long to get ready for bed, she'll have to skip the bedtime story. By choosing penalties that she wants, she will be motivated to comply. Predictable consequences help you keep your sanity and discipline with love and consistency.

Avoid immediate deadlines

Beware of insisting things be done "now!" Deadlines work best when kids get plenty of advance notice. When you demand immediate compliance, it can backfire and put the kids in control. All they have to do is say "no," and you become angry. You'll get better results if you first give them a warning. For *example*, "I need you to be dressed and ready to go in a half-an-hour. I'll remind you to start getting ready in 10 minutes."

Reward kids for a job well done and try to catch them doing things well. Praise them when they follow-through on rules without being reminded.

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