



*"Supporting Parents' Involvement
in the Development and
Education of Their Children"*



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Angry Kid, Calm Parent

Your child is furious! Yelling, stomping and losing control. How do you react?

Many parents automatically respond with their own anger. Typically a parent will scold, yell or punish. This doesn't help. Your anger only pushes against the child's anger and escalates the problem. What can you do?

Keep proper perspective.

Kids get angry over things that are insignificant from an adult point of view - you won't give him a cookie, her sister wore her socks, his baseball glove is lost, you won't let her wear lipstick. When you see these issues as they really are it can help prevent you from becoming emotionally involved. On the flip side, understanding that these issues are truly important to a growing child can help you empathize with your child's anger.

Plan ahead.

Don't wait until an angry explosion to deal with anger. Kids need to learn coping skills at a calm time so that they can apply what they learn to angry times. Teach a child how to identify angry feelings: tight muscles, fast heartbeat, shallow, quick breaths. Then brainstorm ideas on how to release anger in a healthy way: walk away from the person, run around the house, throw hoops, listen to music. You may want to talk about specific issues that anger your child and make a plan for what to do next time. Often role-playing the situation helps a child learn what to do.

Watch media influence.

Kids see violence as a way of handling anger via television, movies and video games. You can control this influence in several ways. First, screen what your child sees when possible. Set rules about appropriate TV and movie watching.

Don't let your child watch endless hours of unsupervised television. Another powerful tool is to take advantage of the scenes you view together. Discuss what happened and why and promote discussions about alternate solutions to the problems.

Stay calm.

Even with all your preparation you'll still have to deal with your child's anger - kids are human, after all! The first step is to do your best to remain calm. When you keep a level head you are better able to keep control of the situation. Remember that you should permit your child to have angry feelings, but limit angry actions. When you're in control you can help your child find self-control.

Model proper skills.

"Children learn what they live." Are you modeling the behavior you would like to see in your children? If you find that you are reacting in unhealthy ways to your anger perhaps its time to make some positive changes. Read a book on anger control, take a class or join a support group. When you control your anger its easier to teach your children how to control theirs.

Affirm your love.

Kids often judge themselves harshly after a bout with anger. They feel guilty, ashamed and unloved. (They may show you none of these emotions!) Let your child know that your love is unconditional. Your child needs to know that even when you are unhappy with his actions, you still love him. This is especially important when your child's anger has been directed at you. At those times, you, as the adult, must clearly differentiate between short-term angry feelings and long-term love.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting