

iBlankie

every parent's security blanket



ANGER MANAGEMENT FOR CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

Children's angry feelings, children's angry words, and children's angry actions can be a frequent and upsetting occurrence in families with young children and in classrooms caring for young children. Anger Management for Children explores how parents, teachers, and early childhood professionals can help children deal with their angry feelings. This two-part article focuses on anticipatory strategies and rehearsals for dealing with your child's anger beforehand, as well as words and strategies to use in-the-moment.

Techniques are explained to channel your child's angry feelings into appropriate verbal expressions and physical outlets. Alternatives to time-outs and spanking are discussed. A detailed 21-step plan for working with children's physical aggression at home and in the classroom is also outlined. An agenda for a parent-childcare staff meeting for dealing with physical aggression is presented.

PART 1

YOUR CHILD'S ANGRY FEELINGS & ANGRY BEHAVIOR

"Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy."

—Aristotle

Anger is often an uncomfortable feeling for adults and for children. It is comforting to know that Aristotle, one of the most highly-respected philosophers in western civilization, also struggled with how to deal with angry feelings. And it is also comforting to know that there are words, strategies, and techniques to help you guide your child in expressing their angry feelings in a socially-appropriate way.

Children's angry feelings, children's angry words, and children's angry actions can be a frequent and upsetting occurrence in families with young children and in classrooms caring for young children. Although it's not always easy, you and your child's teachers can deal effectively with your child's angry feelings by exploring anger as an emotion, by setting clear goals for both you and your child, by practicing anticipatory strategies with your child, and by using appropriate words and techniques in-the-moment of angry conflicts.

OVERVIEW

Culture & Gender

Many cultures and some religions are uncomfortable with the expression of angry feelings; it can be discomfoting not to feel in control. In addition, one research study showed that there is a difference between how genders experience their anger. This study of adults showed that when women expressed their angry feelings in words, their blood pressure went up and when men expressed their angry feelings in words, their blood pressure went down.

When I first read this study, it started me thinking about cultural attitudes toward anger. I had previously observed that many women, more than men, struggled with accepting their angry feelings and I realized that I was less comfortable with young girls being angry than with young boys being angry. In being honest with myself, I was less patient and less accepting of my daughter when she was angry than I was with my son when he was angry. I also did some self-examination when I was teaching in the classroom and realized that I was less patient and accepting of the anger expressed by the girls in my classroom than when boys in the class became angry. Self-monitoring in angry situations helped me become more egalitarian in my working with boys and girls with their angry feelings. It helped me be more accepting when girls became angry.

Family of Origin

Just as attitudes concerning anger and the expression of anger can differ among cultures, so can the attitude within individual families. In thinking about our own personal attitudes and comfort level with anger, it is important to consider the family in which we adults grew up. When you were a child, what were your family's attitudes toward feeling angry, talking about anger, and acting out with angry behavior? Did your mother or father get mad? How did they express their anger? How did they respond to your own anger?

These attitudes have a significant impact on how we feel, or don't feel, about our angry feelings and how we express those angry feelings. It is important to be willing to do some introspection to discover more deeply your own attitudes about your angry feelings and your feelings about your children's anger.

In my own family of origin, anger was not acceptable. My authoritarian father would literally say, *"Who are you to get angry? You have no right to get angry!"* For years I felt uncomfortable being angry and as a child I often got stomach aches that were probably from "swallowing" my angry feelings. I struggled with feeling bad when I got angry. I never expressed my angry feelings in words.

It took much introspection as an adult to get more comfortable with my anger and with expressing my anger to others. I had to learn that it's not bad to be mad. Sometimes I would get angriest with the people that I loved the most. I had to learn to accept the fact that, even in my most loving relationships, it was okay to get angry.

Anger is a Human Emotion & A Positive Signal

All people get angry at times. Anger is a natural emotion that can be set off by many external and internal triggers. Often there is a physical response in our bodies when we feel angry—we can clench our fists, our necks can tense up, we can get red in the face, our breathing can get faster—that can add to the discomfort of feeling angry. So for many, being angry is not a comfortable feeling, on an emotional and even a physical level.

To be human is to be angry at times. It is important to be able to accept the fact that: *"It's okay to be angry." "It's not bad to be mad." "Anger happens." "We all get angry sometimes."*

In addition, anger can be viewed as a positive signal. Often you and your child get angry when something is not going right—perhaps you were disappointed in your child's behavior at Grandma's or your child didn't want to go to bed—so it is important to also consider angry feelings as a positive signal or a wake-up call. Angry feelings can be viewed as a barometer—something is not working here. And then the question is: *"What is not working? What is the wake-up call here? What is the positive signal?"*

Mom Jane would often be short-tempered and angry when preparing dinner for her family of two young children, especially after a long day of work. Often one of her children would do something to set her off, such as crying or demanding to be held. Jane decided to look at her anger as a positive signal; she began to examine what wasn't working in her after-work scenario of going from work to pick up the children at daycare to going home for dinner.

She decided that her angry feelings were telling her that she was "running on empty" at the end of the day and needed ten minutes to herself somewhere in her end-of-day routine. Jane began giving herself a short after-work break before picking up her children—ten minutes with a latte at a coffee shop, fifteen minutes with the daily crossword in the car in the daycare parking lot. Jane's anger was signaling her to make a positive change in her life.

Three-year-old Jacob would have a meltdown while getting dressed for preschool every morning. His dad Ronald would then get angry at his temper tantrum and that began a negative spiral that continued through breakfast. Ronald decided that Jacob's anger was a signal that Jacob didn't want to be rushed in dressing and that Jacob really wanted some one-on-one time with his dad. Ronald began reading two books to Jacob quietly in bed each morning before starting the morning routine and that stopped Jacob's angry outbursts. Jacob's anger was a positive signal to Dad saying, *"Hey, this isn't working for me. I need something else."*

Anger as a Protective Coating for Other Feelings

Adults and children often feel vulnerable and exposed when feeling hurt or sad or afraid. Sometimes it is easier to feel angry than to feel hurt or sadness or fear; feeling angry is a more powerful and less vulnerable feeling. So when your child expresses anger, sometimes it is not really about anger; sometimes the anger is a cover, or a protective coating, for feelings of hurt or sadness or loss or fear. Anger can be different for different children in this regard; it is important to know your child and to explore what possible underlying feelings lie beneath the anger.

Young Keisha started throwing a temper tantrum when her mom Alicia told her that her friend could not come over for their scheduled playdate. Alicia said to Keisha, *"I see that you are angry. I can imagine that you may also be very sad and disappointed that Eliana is not coming for a playdate. Let's write Eliana a note telling her how sad you are."* Keisha felt understood. She felt calmer and began drawing a picture to accompany the note to Eliana.

TRIGGERS

It is important to look first at possible biological, physical or nutritional triggers that may be contributing to your child's angry or aggressive behavior. If there are biological or medical factors to your child's anger, then it is important to address these underlying issues so that these issues can be resolved and then the strategies and techniques for anger management can be used most effectively. Only when you examine and deal with these concerns first can you effectively work with your child. And it is often easier to be more patient and understanding of your child's behavior when you are more aware of the triggers contributing to the challenging behavior.

It has been my experience in working with young children that when a child's behavior is erratic and unpredictable, that is, the behavior seems to "turn on a dime," then it is important to look closely at biophysical triggers to that behavior. If your child's behavior changes without any warning or situational triggers, then it is important to look closely at the impact of possible allergies, medication or nutrition as being an important factor in your child's angry or aggressive behavior.

Allergies

Some children have a low tolerance for frustration and are quick to anger as a result of their allergies, possibly allergies undetected by you. When your child is confronted with an allergen, be it environmental or food or chemical, then your child's immune system spends valuable resources dealing with that allergen.

In this case, your child has fewer resources to bring to a challenging situation; your child often has less impulse control and less verbal ability. Angry feelings and angry or aggressive behaviors are sometimes linked with allergies.

When I was a classroom teacher, I saw the connection between angry feelings or aggressive behavior and allergies. In a typical classroom of 15 children, it empirically evolved that about 1/5 of the children (20%) had behaviors that were affected by allergies. Some of the effects were attentional issues or lack of energy, but some of the effects were angry or aggressive confrontations with children and adults. I have seen aggressive children who go gluten-free or dairy-free become much calmer and controlled within several days of dietary changes.

In focusing on the possibilities of food or environmental or chemical allergies affecting your child, you can visit a pediatric allergist and you can also do your own detective work relating to your child's possible allergies. Also be aware that it is possible for your child to have negative results for a specific food allergy, but still have a sensitivity to a specific food that affects your child behaviorally.

I have worked with children who test negatively for lactose intolerance, that is, allergy to dairy products, but it is clear anecdotally that these children are more aggressive and have a lower tolerance for frustration when they are eating dairy. An elimination diet is the best indication of this link between a sensitivity and your child's behavior.

A good resource book to help in pinpointing possible allergies is [*Is this Your Child? Discovering and Treating Unrecognized Allergies in Children and Adults*](#) by Doris Rapp; this book is available in many libraries in their Resource Section. In this book, Dr. Rapp describes how to be your child's food detective by keeping a food diary of your child's foods for a period of time and noticing your child's behavior; if your child has a low tolerance for frustration or a temper tantrum or angry outburst, examine your child's diet for the previous two meals and in-between snacks.

Try to find a pattern between food and your child's angry or aggressive behavior. Then, as difficult as it may be, try eliminating the suspected allergen from your child's diet for at least a week to see if your child is calmer and less aggressive and less prone to temper tantrums.

A tendency toward allergies can also be inherited, so it is also helpful to examine both parents' allergies to try to discover any allergens. For example, if either parent is allergic to tree pollen, it is important to recognize whether your child is more angry during pollen season and if your child has less impulse control on the days when pollen count is the highest.

Medication

It is empirical that medications can have a strong effect on your child's resources, lessening their self-control and causing additional meltdowns or temper tantrums. An antibiotic that your child has tolerated well previously can suddenly affect your child's behavior. Even over-the-counter medications can affect your child's impulse control and mood.

It has been my experience that asthma medication, as necessary as it is, can have a powerful effect on behavior, sometimes resulting in meltdowns and angry outbursts. If your child does have a behavioral reaction to any medication prescribed by a pediatrician, it is important to discuss this with your child's pediatrician. There may be a possible adjustment in dose or change in medication so that your child's behavior is less affected.

It is important to be aware of this medication connection. When dealing with an angry or aggressive child, it is important to know whether you are dealing with your child or your child's medication. Also, be sure to inform your child's teacher of any medications, even over-the-counter medications, that your child has taken so that they can be alert to any possible impacts of the medication on your child's behavior. Often both parents and teachers can be more patient with a child if they are aware of the medication factor.

Nutrition

Food affects behavior, especially for young children who are working on impulse control as a developmental issue. If your child is having continuous issues around angry outbursts, temper tantrums and meltdowns that go beyond age-appropriate behavior, it is important to examine your child's diet.

It can be very helpful to consult a nutritionist. A good nutritionist can recommend eliminations and supplements that can greatly affect your child's behavior. Many parents are very careful about their children's diet in terms of offering healthy and organic food choices; a good nutritionist can go far beyond healthy food choices in helping ensure that your child is provided with everything that their body needs.

Some children are sensitive to sugar. There have been conflicting research reports about the effects of sugar on children. In my experience, when a child has sugar, their behavior changes within approximately 30 minutes. When I taught preschool and we celebrated birthdays, we always served the birthday cupcakes 20 minutes before the children were picked up by their parents at the end of the school day so that we didn't have to deal with the sugar high! I even tested this 30 minute sugar kick-in time at my own children's birthday parties and found that the time frame post-birthday-cake was the same up through age 10!

Family Stress

Family stress can often be absorbed by your young child and this stress can be acted out in angry or aggressive outbursts or meltdowns. Family stress can be the result of challenging issues or the result of positive changes that involve challenging transitions. These include changes such as separation or divorce, birth or adoption of a sibling, extended illness or hospitalization of a parent, extended absence of a parent due to travel or military deployment, death of a family member, or death of a family pet. Additional stresses for a young child may be the transitions involved in celebrating a birthday, moving to a new home, travel, vacation, changing daycare or babysitters, or an extended visit by a friend or relative.

I have known many three-year-olds who have a particularly difficult time transitioning to their fourth birthday. Although they are excited about the celebration and turning four, often the several weeks before that fourth birthday can be accompanied by many meltdowns and angry moments.

Childcare

If your child is in a daycare center or school or home daycare that is not a good match, this can cause stress and angry or aggressive behavior. If your child comes home from group care and is then aggressive toward a younger sibling or you, it is important to take a close look at your child's care situation (also see [FAQs](#) regarding this concern).

If an adult is unhappy in their work situation, they sometimes come home grumpy; the same can be said of your child if their childcare situation is not fulfilling their emotional, social, cognitive, verbal, and physical needs.

If your child's group care situation is a good match, then it is important to talk with your child's teacher. Sometimes there may be some bullying, subtle or overt, that is happening in your child's classroom or home care situation. Bullying is an adult issue that needs to be managed and remedied by adults. If a child is bullied at group care, sometimes they then turn around and start acting out this aggression by being a bully at home to siblings or parents (see [FAQs](#)).

For some young children, too much group childcare can be overstimulating and challenging and result in meltdowns and angry outbursts. Too many hours per day of group care and too many days per week of group care can sometimes be an issue.

There is the question of how many hours per day and how many days per week of childcare are optimal for your child. The answers to these questions are twofold and can often be in conflict: what works best for your child and what works best within the context of your family's needs. In the best of all possible worlds, if only the needs of your child were being addressed, these are the recommendations for group care:

- ☑ 2 year-old: 2 mornings per week
- ☑ 3 year-old: 3-4 mornings per week, a lunch bunch once or twice a week
- ☑ 4 year-old: 4-5 mornings per week, a lunch bunch one to three times per week

If only addressing the needs of your child, it is important to note that most young children do not need intensive group settings and intensive group care, but thrive with some group care and a considerable amount of one-on-one time with a primary caregiver, be it a parent or another family member or a nanny. Most young children need that important individual attention in the comfort of their home for the majority of the week.

However, given the structure and financial needs of many families, two-career parenting or single parenting make the above childcare recommendations difficult for many. If both parents are working or if the parent is a single working parent, then full-time childcare may be the only option. Given this context, then it becomes even more critical that your child be in a developmentally appropriate childcare setting because of the many hours your child will be spending in group care. See our [article on choosing childcare for help with this](#).

Situation

Some angry conflicts arise from the immediate situation or environment. Young children often have challenges with transitions and there may be frustration and anger involving transitions. Your child may be very quick-to-anger when tired or hungry or dehydrated. Your child may have trouble knowing the words to gain entrée into a play situation and may hit to establish contact, not knowing that "Can I play?" is another way to make social contact. You need to identify what these situational triggers are and try to arrange your situation, schedule, etc., to minimize these environmental stresses that can lead to angry confrontations.

Developmental Issues

All children need to learn to separate from their parents as part of their normal development. Sometimes this separation is a gradual process, as when your child learns to eat independently over time, and sometimes this process is more sudden, as when your child separates from you at school or daycare drop-off.

For some children the separation process is about internal factors, such as the bedtime routine being a time of separation; for some children the separation process from parents is determined by external factors, such as mom or dad going on a business trip or leaving for military deployment.

The separation process between you and your child may be a challenging developmental step for your child. Sometimes this important separation transition is accompanied by angry feelings. This anger can stem from feelings of abandonment. The anger can also stem from your child's developmental need to push you away in order to become more independent. Often, times of separation can be swirled with anger; in this case your child's angry feelings may be originating from an important and necessary step in their developmental progress.

Delayed Speech

If your child has experienced delayed speech, this issue can sometimes contribute to your child's lower tolerance for frustration and this can lead to anger management issues. Young children have so much to communicate that if there are delays in your child's speech frustration can be experienced continuously throughout their day and this can lead to acting out with temper tantrums or physical aggression. Even after your child no longer has speech delays, anger management issues can emerge for your child at age four, five or six; it's as if there is a stockpile of frustration and anger from the early years that is unresolved. If this is the case, you may need to consult an early childhood specialist.

Sensory Issues

Sometimes a child can have challenges with sensory issues that can cause frustration and issues with impulse control. You can speak with your pediatrician concerning these issues and see if you should seek an evaluation with an occupational therapist to see if there are sensory concerns that are contributing to your child's impulse control issues.

Special Note: In the United States, every county in every state, including The District of Columbia, is federally mandated to provide free assessments for testing children up to the age of 4 years 9 months. These programs, often called INFANT AND TODDLER for younger children and CHILDFIND for older children (in Washington, DC, called DC Early Stages), provide free sensory integration evaluations, among other evaluations, and can be very helpful in assessing your child's challenges with impulse control. Contact information for CHILDFIND can be found through the internet.

YOUR CHILD'S GOAL: EXPRESS ANGRY FEELINGS IN WORDS

Communicating: Your Child's Sensory Sphere

Your child explores the world with their senses. In communicating and working with your child, respecting the power of your child's senses is paramount. Your child is extraordinarily tuned in to their visual, tactile, olfactory (smell), auditory, and gustatory (taste) self. When communicating with your child, conceptualize a sensory sphere surrounding your child, that is, think of an egocentric sphere within which your child is the center and wherein your child is engaging with the world by vision, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

For your two-year-old, conceptualize a sphere that is two feet in diameter surrounding your toddler; for your three-year-old, imagine a three-foot diameter sphere encapsulating your child; for your four-year-old, that sensory sphere expands to four feet, and so forth. In order for you to be sure that you are relating to your child, it is crucial that you be within that sensory sphere to be seen and heard and related to.

You must be up close and personal to your child to ensure that you are communicating. You must enter that two-foot or three-foot or four-foot sensory sphere to be sure that you are heard, seen, and on your child's radar. Often, when you are outside your child's sensory sphere, you and your child are not communicating. To be talking to your young child across a room or across a hallway and not looking directly into your child's eyes and face often makes for a confused or non-existent communication.

Just because you say something, doesn't mean that your voice is heard. You need to enter that sensory sphere and engage your child within their smaller egocentric world. With your very young child you may need to look at them eyes-to-eyes, perhaps touching them gently below the eyes, or touch their earlobes if you want them to listen or gently stroke their cheeks or lips if you want them to respond.

Communications need to be within your child's sensory sphere to be received.

"Use Your Words"

The ultimate goal for your child is to express their angry feelings in socially-appropriate words. Young children are often not able to identify their feelings. Your child may not have words for their feelings; sometimes your child's feelings other than anger are experienced all together in a mush and emerge as anger.

It is important to provide your child with the words for their feelings. By putting words to your child's feelings, you are providing a role model for expressing feelings in words. By putting words to your child's feelings, you are also accepting their feelings.

In addition, sometimes feeling angry is such a visceral, body-centered emotion that is so uncomfortable to your child that they feel bad about the feeling —the double whammy of feeling angry and then feeling bad about the angry feeling itself.

In helping your child learn to put their angry feelings into words, it is important to encourage their putting any feelings into words. Your child's behavior is shaped in your every interaction; recognizing your child's positive behavior and acknowledging this is extremely important in guiding and shaping your child's behavior.

Your child's behavior can be changed by positive comments independent of angry situations. This is sometimes difficult because it requires adults to change—to become aware of your child being good and your child using their words. This requires that you become additionally conscious in focusing on the goal of putting feelings into words even when there are not angry situations. Adults change children's behavior when they change their own behavior.

If we want a child to begin using angry words instead of hurtful angry fists or kicks, then it becomes necessary to focus on words, words, words in an intense way. Think of this as waging peace, a serious campaign to channel your child's angry feelings into angry words. Many times per hour, in situations independent of angry conflicts, it is important to reinforce your child's use of words.

- "Josie, I really like your words. When you use words to tell me what you want, it makes it so easy to help you."*
- "Great words that you are using with your little brother."*
- "Your words are wonderful, Jennifer."*
- "I hear your words. Good words."*
- "Great control. Using your words isn't easy when you're frustrated, but, Jason, you did it!"*

You cannot underestimate the power of shaping your child's behavior with positive attention-getting. So much change can occur by verbally encouraging words, words, words.

What is Developmentally-Appropriate?

"It's a good day if I didn't hit or bite or kick someone." —Ethan, age 4

Young children bite, kick, hit, scratch, pull hair, choke, and pinch. The laundry list of possible physical attack modes by a child is long. And the fact that your young child may bite, kick, hit, scratch, and pinch is age-appropriate, even if it is not socially-appropriate. By the time a child is four or four-and-a-half, then the majority of physically aggressive angry behavior

should usually be under control. Certainly occasional slips occur, but if a child is very aggressive at age four or more, then you need to consider professional help for your child.

But, just because your young child's bites and kicks may be age-appropriate, that doesn't mean that hard work on your part can't have an effect on helping your child change and control that behavior. In fact, that work is necessary for your child to develop more appropriate and mature ways to control their angry impulses.

I often receive calls from parents who are concerned that their two-year-old is about to be expelled from daycare because they are biting. Two-year-olds bite—toddlers explore the world with their mouth and they also express their frustration and aggression orally. When this occurs, the two-year-old should not be expelled for acting like a two-year-old; there needs to be a plan implemented to work with that behavior. The behavior will not change immediately, but there can be significant changes in a two-year-olds behavior with a specific plan in place (see below, in [Part 2: Physical Aggression at Home and in the Classroom: A Detailed Plan for Waging Peace.](#))

Six Levels of Angry Expression

There is a hierarchy of how children express their angry feelings, starting with the most primitive expressions and moving toward the more socially-appropriate, more developmentally mature expressions. As a child moves through each level, more and more impulse control is needed. It is important to recognize this hierarchy since each level indicates more maturity and even the smallest steps in your child's progress needs to be noticed and acknowledged.

Often a young child is expected to transition from hitting to using words. This is unrealistic; impulse control and mastering angry feelings takes time, often many months for a young child, and it is important to recognize the interim progress through the hierarchy of levels of angry expression until your child uses words exclusively.

The biggest developmental leap in working with angry feelings is when a child moves from physical expression of angry feelings to non-physical expression of angry feelings. The toughest challenge is to move from physical aggression to verbal expression. This is HUGE progress and may take a good deal of time to solidify for your young child. Once your child makes this leap to verbal expression, you can slowly refine the appropriateness of the verbal expression over time (see [FAQs](#) below.)

SIX LEVELS OF ANGRY EXPRESSION

PHYSICAL EXPRESSION		
Level 1	Aggression Upon a Person	Biting, hitting, kicking, pinching
Level 2	Aggression on an Object	Ripping a painting, breaking a toy
Level 3	No physical contact	Tantrum, crying, pointing finger as a gun
ORAL EXPRESSION		
Level 4	Non-verbal	Spitting, shrieking, growling
Level 5	Verbal, inappropriate	Cursing, screaming words
Level 6	Verbal, appropriate	Expressing anger in acceptable words and tone

It is very important to recognize that your child may need to experience each level and that moving to another less primitive, more appropriate, level is progress—not perfection— but definite progress. If your child has been hitting and then your child begins screaming instead of hitting, it is important to recognize and speak to that progress. If you tell your child not to scream, then you have cut off that more mature outlet—which is actual progress from hitting—and, since that level of expression has not been accepted, often your child will revert back to the lower level, hitting.

Starting Where Your Child is Now

Jackson was a young three and sometimes hit his mother. His mother worked hard by encouraging his words. One day Jackson got angry at Mom and said, *"I hate you!"* Mom said, *"Don't say that to me!"* Jackson then began kicking her. Later Mom realized that the angry screaming was actually progress on Jackson's part; Jackson was putting his angry feelings into words. The words were not the words she wanted to hear, but the words were a major developmental leap from hitting. The next time Jackson said, *"I hate you!"* Mom responded, *"You sound angry. I like the way you put your feelings into words. Great control, Jackson."* Jackson continued to scream, but he did not revert to hitting. Jackson had made progress toward putting his angry feelings into words. At a later, cooler moment, Mom practiced more appropriate words for Jackson to use when he was angry.

It is important to start where your child is now. If your child is biting or hitting, then moving to the next step—not being physical with a person, even if it involves smashing someone’s playdough snake—is progress because your child showed control in not hurting someone’s body. If your child has been breaking toys when angry, then your child’s shrieking when angry is progress, as it is progression from a physical expression of anger to an oral expression of anger. If your child has been kicking when angry and then starts crying when angry, that shows a tremendous amount of control; crying is a physical, but harmless, non-aggressive means of releasing angry feelings. It is important that your child’s angry expressions be viewed within the above [hierarchy of angry expressions](#) so that progress can be recognized and encouraged. Your child needs to be moved along from their current behavior and the progressive steps along the way need to be noted.

Realistic Expectations: What is Progress?

It takes time for your child to change. It takes time for your child to gain more impulse control. The developmental milestone of moving from the physical aggression of angry feelings to the verbal expression of angry feelings is perhaps one of the most challenging behaviors for your child. You will feel less frustrated in realizing that this developmental progress can take time—weeks, months, sometimes years. It is important to realize that when working with your young child concerning aggression that you are planting the seeds; you will probably not see immediate results.

One of my favorite quotes about young children is from a National Association for Young Children (NAEYC) brochure about developmentally-appropriate practices: *“Young children do not always understand and remember the rules.”* I wish I had a neon sign in my office that said *“Young children do not always understand and remember the rules.”* And it is also true that we adults do not always understand and remember that young children do not always understand and remember the rules.

In order to measure progress, it is important to notice changes in the frequency, duration, and intensity of your child’s behaviors. You should note:

FREQUENCY

Take note of how often your child’s challenging behavior occurs. Are there tantrums six times a day or once a day? Is there backtalk every hour? At the end of several weeks, take note of the frequency of your child’s problem behaviors over the course of a day or two. The frequency may have diminished—fewer tantrums, less disrespectful language.

DURATION

How long does your child's challenging behavior last? Does the screaming last ten minutes or two hours? Does the name-calling occur for one sentence or several sentences? Are the angry outbursts five minutes or twenty minutes? At the end of several weeks, notice if the duration of the behavior has diminished—shorter tantrums, shorter backtalk, shorter outbursts.

INTENSITY

The intensity of your child's challenging behavior is harder to observe. Does your child's temper tantrum shake the house, or does the temper tantrum occur at a medium level of noise and flurry? Does the anger seem like a wrath of fury or is it of medium intensity? At the end of several weeks, re-assess the intensity, as it should begin to diminish.

YOUR GOAL: BE PARTNERED WITH YOUR CHILD IN THEIR ANGER

Emotional Partner: Accept Angry Feelings

When I present the Anger Management Workshop for parents and teachers, I start the workshop by asking for a volunteer and I have that adult stand face-to-face with me. I ask that adult to put their fist up between us as if they are angry. I say that often, when our children get angry, they put up their fist (either literally or figuratively) and we put our fist up to counter that. Then they may put up their other fist (which the volunteer does) and I put up my fist to counter that. Often then a power struggle or difficult conflict situation arises as if we were going push-to-shove with our fists.

Then we repeat the exercise. This time, when the volunteer puts up their angry fist, I don't engage them with my fist. Instead, I come to them side-to-side and put my arm around their shoulder. I don't want to engage in conflict. I want to be PARTNERED with them around their angry feelings. I want to be EMOTIONALLY PARTNERED with them about understanding, acknowledging, verbalizing, and accepting their feelings and I want to help them with their feelings. I also want to be BEHAVIORALLY PARTNERED with them in finding socially-appropriate ways to express and channel those angry feelings.

Then I talk about how when I turned 50, my daughter turned 20. I realized then for the first time that if my daughter and I were lucky enough to have another 40 years together, 2/3 of our relationship would be adult-to-adult, not adult-to-child. Then I asked myself the question: what can be done in the first 1/3 of parent-child relationships to form a strong foundation for the next 2/3 of the relationship when it is adult-to-adult? The answer I arrived at: Being emotionally partnered with my daughter as a child—understanding and supporting her on a deep level—was the key to a strong bond for our adult years.

Partnering with your young child around their angry feelings is important and challenging. This is not easy—it also involves reaching a certain place internally to be fully present with your child.

Differentiating between angry feelings and angry actions is important. Angry feelings can be part of any relationship. An important message for your child to hear is: *“It’s okay to be angry....It’s not bad to be mad....People sometimes get angry at their friends and family...Anger happens.”*

Angry feelings don’t always lead to angry actions. Sometimes expressing the angry feelings is a way to pass through those feelings to a better place. Sometimes your child’s angry feelings will make you uncomfortable. Although hearing your child say *“Grandma makes me mad!”* is difficult, it is important to listen to your child’s angry feelings rather than shutting them off. Responding, perhaps, with a simple concerned, *“Oh,”* can give your child room to explore and pass through their anger on the way to other feelings. If you are unaccepting of your child’s verbal expression of anger, your child will sometimes resort to the more primitive expression of anger in a physical manner.

Behavioral Partner: Limit and Redirect Angry Behavior

A key point is to differentiate between angry feelings and angry behavior. All feelings can be acknowledged and accepted, but not all behavior is acceptable. Angry feelings are acceptable; inappropriate angry actions need limits. *“Ezra, I can understand that you’re angry at your little brother, but chairs are not for kicking. We need to find another way for you to express your angry feelings,”* is a statement accepting of your child’s feelings, but limiting your child’s inappropriate behavior. Words and a model for setting limits and redirecting angry behavior are included in [PART 2: ANGER IN-THE-MOMENT](#).

In partnering with your child around their angry feelings, it is important to reinforce the concept that your child is a great child, but your child may have made choices that were not good choices in expressing their angry feelings. You are addressing your child’s actions, not who your child is. It is important to preserve your child’s self-esteem, while partnering and guiding your child in how to appropriately express their anger.

ANTICIPATORY STRATEGIES: FEELINGS

Developing a Third Ear

In understanding your child's feelings, it helps to develop a third ear, that is, to try to listen to the feelings behind the words rather than the words themselves. What is your child trying to say to you? What is your child feeling? The words themselves may be inflammatory, but they are words and not physical aggression, so the question is: how can you get beyond the words and address your child's feelings? As mentioned previously, sometimes your child's angry feelings are a protective coating for more vulnerable feelings, such as feeling sad or hurt or inadequate.

Learn to develop a third ear. Listen for your child's other feelings that may be hidden behind their angry words. REALLY LISTEN. Put yourself in your child's sneakers. Here are some examples of some underlying feelings that may be behind your child's words.

YOUR CHILD SAYS	YOU RESPOND TO THE FEELINGS BEHIND THE WORDS
"I hate you!"	"You seem frustrated...sad...disappointed...hurt."
"Brother's a poophead!"	"You seem jealous...sad...like you are feeling neglected."
"I never want to go to Grandma's again!"	"Did Grandma do something to upset you? Did you miss me? Did Grandma say something to hurt your feelings?"
"Jimmy is stupid!"	"Did Jimmy hurt your feelings? Did Jimmy make you angry?"
"I hate school!"	"It sounds like school upset you. Did something happen on the playground? Was there a problem sharing during free play? Did your teacher say something that upset you?"
"I hate Halloween!"	"Is there something scaring you about Halloween?"
A child hits a child	"Did you want to play? Were you trying to get your friend's attention? Was it sad when your friend didn't want to sit next to you at snack?"

Your Family's Feeling Vocabulary

It is helpful to distinguish between your child's feelings and your child's behavior. You will be working with your child's feelings on the inside—their thoughts, wishes, feelings, hopes, ideas, and dreams—and also with your child's behavior on the outside—how they relate to you and to the other important people and things in their life. It is important to distinguish between what your child expresses from the inside and what your child actually does. It is crucial to encourage your child to put feelings into words, rather than acting out those feelings with inappropriate behavior.

You can try to understand and accept any feeling that your child might have, but you may need to set a limit on a particular behavior. For example, if your child says, *"I hate you!"* you can accept, validate, and possibly re-frame that statement and respond, *"You seem very, very angry and frustrated with me. Let's talk further about that."* Or perhaps you might ask, *"Did I do or say something to hurt your feelings?"* As long as your child puts their feelings into words, a very difficult task at times, you can try to accept, acknowledge, validate and understand those feelings.

On the other hand, your child's behaviors or actions may not be acceptable and you may need to set a limit. *"Bodies are not for hitting; bodies are for hugging. You need to put your angry feelings into words such as, 'I'm mad!'"*

Actions that hurt a person's body or hurt a person's feelings or damage furniture or other objects is not acceptable. Setting limits and re-channeling anger into appropriate outlets are discussed in detail in the sections below.

Focusing on two or three feelings that can be associated with anger will simplify things for your child. The feeling vocabulary in your family should focus on the feelings and words: anger, frustration, disappointment. The more your child hears these words within your family, the more natural it will become for your child to put their feelings, even these complicated feelings, into words. Your child needs help in having you identify these feelings, acknowledge these feelings, and accept these feelings.

- "Sarah, you seem disappointed that we can't have your friend over for a playdate right now."*
- "Xavier, I can understand that you would be angry that you have to stop playing now and go to bed."*
- "Taking that tight top off of that paint jar looks frustrating."*

It can be very helpful for you to work on putting your own anger, frustration and disappointment into words so that your child has your words as a powerful model. Your family's rich feeling vocabulary fosters your child's verbal expressions of all feelings, including the complicated and intense feelings. You can model:

- ☑ *"I feel frustrated waiting for a long time in this grocery check-out line."*
- ☑ *"OUCH! It makes me angry when I accidentally hit my finger with the hammer."*
- ☑ *"This is disappointing. I was hoping that Auntie Raylene would be coming for dinner tonight and she can't come until next week."*

One-on-One Time

The most important things you can give your child are your attention and your time. When your child is feeling angry, aggressive, frustrated, or disappointed for a stretch of time, some of these intense feelings can be eased by one-on-one time with you. This one-on-one time doesn't have to be doing a special activity or buying a toy—the best one-on-one time is playing together with the games and toys that your child wants to play with.

One-on-one time with your child at least two to three times per week for 30-45 minutes each time is a powerful connection for both you and your child. This special time can help your child feel less angry, less frustrated, more grounded and connected. Think of this as a date with your child. You might give it a special name, such as Together Time, Dad and Daughter Time, Mom and Madeline Time, or, as one four-year-old named it, Sparkle Time. Talk about it before—*"I can't wait to see what you want to do during our Rashid and Mom Time"*—and talk about it after—*"Clara, I smile every time I think of our Special Time together yesterday."*

All children want attention. If a child can't get your attention in a positive way, sometimes your child would rather get your negative attention than get no attention at all. Sometimes when children are tantruming and angry, it is not clear if this is to get your attention negatively—which works! In order to ensure that this angry behavior is not negative attention-getting, being proactive about positive attention through one-on-one time can be very effective!

If there are siblings, this one-on-one time may be difficult to arrange, but if there are siblings, this one-on-one time is even more important.

During this one-on-one time be sure to engage in the play that your child chooses and be sure to listen and follow your child's lead. Allow your child to be directing the play. This is a time to hang out together and for you to understand your child on a deeper level.

At every workshop I always talk about the importance of One-on-One Time. It is awesomely powerful. I have seen positive changes in a child's challenging behavior after two to three weeks of One-on-One Time, several times a week, with Mom and/or Dad.

Books

Books can be helpful and cathartic in working with your child concerning their angry feelings. Here is a partial list of books that your child may enjoy. In choosing books dealing with anger, be certain that the resolution of the angry feelings in the book is positive.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Blumenthal, Deborah, *The Chocolate-Covered-Cookie Tantrum.*
- Cain, Barbara S., *Double-Dip Feelings, Stories to Help Children Understand Emotions.*
- Duncan, Riana, *When Emily Woke Up Angry.*
- Everitt, Betsy, *Mean Soup.* *
- Mitchell, Edna Preston, *The Temper Tantrum Book.***
- Simon, Norma, *I Was So Mad!*
- Steig, William, *Spinky Sulks.*

OLDER CHILDREN

- Blume, Judy, *The Pain and the Great One.* Deals with sibling competition
- Conlin, Susan and Susan LeVine Friedman, *All My Feelings at Preschool: Nathan's Day.*
- Conlin, Susan and Susan LeVine Friedman, *All My Feelings At Home: Ellie's Day.*
- Crary, Elizabeth, *Dealing with Feelings: I'm Mad; Dealing with Feelings: I'm Frustrated.*
- Viorst, Judith, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.*
- Wilhelm, Hans, *Let's Be Friends Again.*
- Zolotow, Charlotte, *The Hating Book.*

**Mean Soup* is particularly helpful for very young children, as Horace expresses lots of angry feelings nonverbally and with control. Children may find it helpful and fun to act out Horace's actions as you read.

***The Temper Tantrum Book* is excellent. So few books depict temper tantrums. After reading this book, you might want to staple some blank pages into a book and start a child's temper tantrum book: "*Terran's Temper Tantrum Book*". The child can dictate to you what makes them angry or frustrated and can draw or put stickers on the opposite page. This temper tantrum book can then be used in angry situations: "Terran, is it time to add a page to your *Temper Tantrum Book*?"

Feeling Notes

Feeling notes can be extremely powerful in helping your child work through anger. Feeling notes are similar to adult journaling, where putting the feelings into words and putting the words to paper can be extremely cathartic and empowering. To be deeply heard and understood by an adult can help your child work through their frustration, anger, or disappointment.

It is helpful to write feeling notes in-the-moment of an angry conflict, but writing that note will be easier if you and your child have had some practice beforehand in writing notes in less intense, lower adrenaline, cooler moments. Choose a situation where there is some mild disappointment or frustration or sadness to begin the practice of feeling notes.

Suppose your child is disappointed because they didn't get to see their dad as expected. You can talk about their feelings and suggest that you write their father a note.

Dear Dad,

I wanted to see you now. I am disappointed, very, very disappointed. (Aside: "How many 'very's should I use—one or two or three?"). I wanted to play with you for ____ minutes (Aside: "How many minutes?"). I miss you so, so, so much. (Aside: "How many 'so's' should I use?") I am feeling same/better/worse now (Ask in an aside which it is.)

Love, (Aside: "How should we sign it?")

Often the first feeling note or two can be the most challenging to write. After feeling notes become a part of your child's repertoire, these notes can be very helpful in the heat of angry confrontations.

ANTICIPATORY STRATEGIES: BEHAVIOR

The Three Big Rules

Every family and every classroom needs rules. These are THE THREE BIG RULES.

- RULE # 1. EVERYBODY IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE'S BODIES. This is a positive way of saying: no kicking, biting, scratching, pinching, choking, hair-pulling, punching, arm-twisting, tripping, etc.
- RULE #2. EVERYBODY IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE'S FEELINGS. This is a positive way of saying that we try not to hurt people's feelings with statements such as": "You're ugly" or "You can't play" or "You can't come to my birthday party" or "I hate you" or "You're not my friend."
- RULE #3. EVERYBODY IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE'S THINGS. This is a positive way of saying that everybody should respect other people's creations—not ripping up their painting or knocking down their block castle—and should respect other people's possessions—not grabbing their fire engine or breaking their toy airplane.

These three rules are so basic and so fundamental that they could be posted at The United Nations!

The first two rules are of primary importance because they address rules for social relationships; the third rule, regarding things, is of less importance for your young child to learn at an early age.

These rules can be posted pictorially for your child who cannot read. For Rule #1, you can have the number 1 followed by a photo or magazine picture of two children hugging or holding hands, i.e., being gentle with bodies. For Rule #2, you can have 2 followed by a picture of two children talking together in a friendly way. For Rule #3, you can have 3 followed by a picture of two children playing together cooperatively. Then you can refer to the rules as your child is exhibiting positive behaviors associated with the rules.

- "Great job, Garrett. You are using gentle hands with your friend as you are playing. Good job with Rule #1."*
- "Your soft voice is so easy to listen to Carina. You are remembering Rule #2."*

"Use Your Words"

If the ultimate goal for your child is to put their angry feelings into words, then it is important to be very proactive in recognizing your child's use of words in many, many situations, even in cool moments. Once again, the positive reinforcement for using words in various scenarios will eventually translate into using words in conflicts. You cannot give your child too much encouragement for using words.

- ☑ *"Pippa, the way you are asking for water with your words is wonderful. Your words make it so easy to understand what you want."*
- ☑ *"I hear your words, Diego. You are doing a great job of using your words."*
- ☑ *"I like your words."*
- ☑ *"Dane, your words make it so easy to understand what you want."*
- ☑ *"Your gentle words to your brother are great!"*
- ☑ *"Mouths are for chewing, Gabriella. I like the way you are using your mouth."(when working with biting)*

The same way that there is a repetitive reminder in this article for your child to "use your words," that repetitive encouragement can become a part of your ongoing dialogue with your child.

Rehearsals

Often, temper tantrums and angry encounters with your child are so intense and disturbing that you may try to move on quickly to recover from the conflict.

However, at a later, cooler time, you need to revisit these conflicts and deal with inappropriate angry actions by helping your child practice more socially appropriate behavior.

It is important that you practice rehearsals with your child to provide them with alternative skills and techniques for dealing with their angry feelings when they arise. So often we tell children what not to do, but we do not tell them what to do. The time spent practicing new ways of expressing your child's angry feelings is very important. These practice rehearsals solidify your child's new behavioral responses and neurological pathways and provide alternative behaviors when a similar conflict situation arises.

A rehearsal is a 30-second (yes, 30 seconds!) practice session in which you and your child role play and practice a specific socially appropriate outlet for anger. Suppose you want your child to say "No!" rather than hitting when angry (or your child can choose an alternative phrase such as "I'm mad!") During a rehearsal you can say, *"I'm concerned about what happens when you get angry. Let's practice saying 'No!' when I take this toy away from you....Let's hear a loud 'No!'...that's great...a little louder 'No!'...terrific...that's a great way to let someone know what you want....what a great 'No!' I like the way you are putting your feelings into words."*

Practicing in this manner several times a day, over an extended period of time, helps to establish a new way for your child to express anger and frustration. These rehearsals are

establishing alternative behavior patterns, even helping to form new neurological pathways, toward learning more socially appropriate behavior.

A younger or less verbal child may need to rehearse nonverbal outlets for angry feelings. During this rehearsal, a child might practice stomping like an angry dinosaur or curling up like an angry hedgehog as in the book *When Emily Woke Up Angry* by Riana Duncan, or stirring up a bowl of *Mean Soup* as in the book by Betsy Everitt. These rehearsals provide important practice opportunities for your child to establish new responses for hot moments.

Angry situations can be difficult and frustrating for both you and your child. By accepting angry feelings, limiting inappropriate angry behavior, and using rehearsals to practice socially acceptable outlets for anger, you can help your young child deal more positively and more appropriately with their angry feelings.

Impulse Control: Slow-Medium-Fast Game

At the cornerstone of all the behavior changes in your child is self-control, self-regulation, self-modulation. You want to help your child have control over what they say and what they do. Dealing with your child's anger management issues is an exercise in promoting your child's self-control.

Your child learns best through play. To promote self-regulation, you can use the Slow-Medium-Fast Game to encourage your child to practice self-control. In this game you are working with your child on the concept that they can control their impulses, that is, there are many behavioral gears between 0 and 60 mph and that your child can learn to control these gears. Children usually love the Slow-Medium-Fast Game, because most children are working, albeit on an unconscious level, on self-control (aren't we all!) and this game is all about self-control.

The Slow-Medium-Fast Game has two parts: the activity itself and your verbal positive reinforcement for your child's self-control. The Slow-Medium-Fast Game consists of encouraging your child to perform many activities at different speeds or different levels. The second part of the game is your comment on the self-control, self-regulation, self-modulation used by your child. The basic idea is to interweave this game throughout the day into your child's normal activities and schedule.

This game is especially applicable when there is physical activity, talking or singing. Also, transitioning from one activity to another can often be problematic for some children, so you can try the Slow-Medium-Fast Game to ease these transition times and mobilize your child to move on to the next activity, at the same time that they are working on self-regulation.

- ☑ *"Let's try the Slow-Medium-Fast Game, Damien. I wonder if you can take 3 slow snail steps to the car? Now, can you take 3 medium speed steps to the car? Now, show me 3 running steps to the car. Now, can you stop? Great control of your steps to the car. Can you now take 3 snail steps backward? Great control!"*
- ☑ *"I wonder if you can eat that cereal slowly? Now, Naveah, I wonder if you can eat that cereal at medium speed? Now I wonder if you can eat that cereal fast? Now can you stop eating cereal? Now can you eat that cereal again slowly. Great control. You can really change the speed of your eating."*
- ☑ *"I like that song you're singing. I would like to hear a whisper version of that song. Now, can you sing in a medium voice? Can you shout that song? And now, can you sing it so loud that the neighbors can hear it? Great voice control. You are so good at controlling the level of your singing."*
- ☑ *"Can you ride your bike slowly? Jeremiah, good slow riding. Can you ride your bike at medium speed? Good speed control. Can you now ride your bike as fast as a cheetah can run? Can you now stop suddenly? You really controlled the speed of your bike. Great listening and great control. You are really gearing your bike up and down."*

Most children like the sense of mastery they feel during this game. What a fun challenge! There is no wrong way to do the Slow-Medium-Fast Game. Enjoy!

In addition, the classic children's games Red Light, Green Light, Mother, May I? and Simon Says can be modified to emphasize self-regulation. Instructions for these classic games can be found on the internet.

Catch Your Child Being Good

Every parent needs to catch their child being good. If there is a behavior that you are wanting your child to change, you need to tweak your consciousness to first recognize and then to acknowledge when that behavior is being exhibited by your child. It is up to you to encourage and reinforce your child's positive behavior: putting their feelings into words, using impulse control, being kind to a sibling, being gentle with your body. Everyone thrives on recognition and encouragement; your approval for your child's behavior is their ultimate reward.

Anger Box

When I first started teaching three-year-olds, one of the moms, Karen, came to me and said, "My son Jeremy has such a hard time when he gets angry. He tantrums and tries to kick me. And he has a hard time letting go of his angry feelings. He stays angry for such a long time—he

just won't give up his angry feelings. I struggle when he gets angry—I don't want to deal with him. Is there an easier way for Jeremy to deal with his angry feelings without my dealing with him? I just want to opt out."

Of course this felt difficult, but I came up with the Anger Box concept. Karen and I took a box and put things in it that Jeremy could use as an outlet for expressing his angry feelings—there was some playdough and a clay hammer for pounding the playdough, there were some books about anger to look at, there was a pillow to punch, and there were some markers and paper to draw an angry picture.

Karen practiced with Jeremy in cool quiet moments. She asked, *"Jeremy, what could you do the next time you are angry?"* and then they rehearsed using the activities in the Anger Box. Then later, when Jeremy was frustrated or angry, Karen encouraged him to go to the Anger Box and find an appropriate outlet to release his frustration and anger. Mom was minimally involved and her son learned to release his angry feelings through the Anger Box activities rather than hold on to his anger in a grudging manner.

In particular, Jeremy found pounding playdough was especially cathartic for releasing his frustrated feelings. When he became angry he would go to the Anger Box himself, lift the lid, and take the playdough and clay hammer to pound at the kitchen table to release his frustrations. Ten minutes later he would leave the table with a smile, having pounded away his angry feelings.

The Anger Box helps you be PARTNERED with your child around their anger. Or if your child has a hard time talking about their anger, you may want to use the Anger Box to help them release those angry feelings so that you can then have a discussion about their frustration.

It is important to practice partnering with your child with Anger Box activities in cool moments so that these rehearsals can then reinforce using these same Anger Box activities in later hot moments. Your child then has a practiced activity within their repertoire to return to in high-adrenaline moments.

It seems true that most children return to the same activity in the Anger Box to find that release and to become calmer. Initially there may be many things in your child's Anger Box. Eventually, your child will probably focus on one, maybe two. Here are some suggestions on what you can put in your child's Anger Box to help release frustration and anger.

- PILLOW to punch
- MARKERS OR PAINTS AND PAPER for drawing angry pictures
- _____'s [TEMPER TANTRUM BOOK](#)—add a page
- PLAYDOUGH and clay hammer for angry pounding—supervised!
- PAPER for recording—how many angry runs around the tree outside?

- PUPPETS for expressing angry feeling
- HAMMER & NAILS for angry hammering—supervised!
- ANGER BOOKS
- SAUCEPAN for making Mean Soup—[see Books above](#)
- [FEELING NOTE](#) to _____(grandma, pet, etc.)
- BUBBLES for blowing angry bubbles
- BREAD RECIPE for kneading angry bread
- MUSIC—instruments or CD for an angry song or angry march or angry dancing
- DINOSAUR—to remind to roar like dino or stamp feet like angry T-Rex
- MATCHBOX CARS for angry car crashing
- FOAM SWORDS for play fighting—with clear rules
- JUMP ROPE for angry jumping
- [STRESS REDUCTION EXERCISES](#)

Notice that there are some things in the Anger Box that you can store away in your mental Anger Box in case you are not at home: you could partner with your child in stomping like an angry T-Rex or doing an angry dance or singing an angry song when you are not near the Anger Box.

Once again, in partnering with your child around their angry feelings, it is important to reinforce the concept that your child is a wonderful child, but your child may have made some choices that were not good choices in expressing their angry feelings. The Anger Box helps your child make appropriate choices in releasing their frustrated, angry feelings. You are addressing your child's actions, not who your child is. It is important to preserve your child's self-esteem, while partnering and guiding your child in how to appropriately express their anger.

Stress Reduction Exercises

Every child needs exercise every day for fun, for muscle and motor development and as a stress reliever. When your child cannot exercise outside or needs some additional relief or stress reduction, the following exercises can be helpful. If your child is experiencing a particularly challenging and frustrating time, you might want to do these stress reduction exercises every hour. You could even do these with your child in a modified way in your car.

IMAGINARY BALLOON

You tell your child that you want them to blow up an imaginary balloon. Hold your thumb and first finger together near their mouth as if you are holding a balloon and ask them to use belly breaths—very deep breaths from their diaphragm—to blow up their imaginary balloon.

Then ask them to keep blowing and keep blowing. After about five or six big blows, ask your child if the balloon is all blown up and ask your child what color it is. When the imaginary balloon is all blown up, ask your child what to do with it. Your child may say, “*Let it go*” or “*I want to keep it*” or “*Bop yourself on the nose with it.*” The deep breathing can be very cathartic and tension-releasing for your child, almost like Lamaze breathing for relaxation during childbirth.

This imaginary balloon blowing is a helpful technique because, once it is practiced in quiet moments, later at an angry moment you can ask your child if they want to blow up an imaginary angry balloon. Blowing up an imaginary angry balloon can be cathartic and can be utilized as a technique in your mental [Anger Box](#) for partnering with your child in their angry feelings.

HONEY JAR

You and your child imaginatively jump into a huge, huge jar of honey. You can then move slowly, at honey-slow speed, doing lots of fun activities: open your mouths slowly and lick the honey, wave hello slowly, do a honey dance slowly, jump slowly, jog at a honey-slow pace, clap your hands slowly, breathe slowly, do a marching band slowly, do karate kicks slowly, use lightsabers against Star Wars enemies slowly, drive a racecar slowly, ice skate slowly. Using these slow and controlled actions can be calming and a stress release for both you and your child.

RAG DOLL

You and your child reach up to the sky as high as you can, reaching for the stars or flying airplanes or the clouds or apples on a tree or flying pizzas or alien spaceships; you stretch and stretch. Then you pretend that you are a rag doll like Raggedy Ann or Raggedy Andy, or another stuffed animal your child may know that is soft, and you suddenly bend at the waist and become totally limp with your arms dangling down and your hands almost touching the ground. You bob as a limp rag doll in front and then bob limply with your arms to each side and then toward the back. After this limp rag doll, you then reach up high again to the sky, stretching toward stars, planes, or pizza, UFOs, etc., and after much stretching, then become limp rag dolls again. This stretch and release exercise can be very relaxing.

PART 1 SUMMARY

Anger Management for Children: PART 1 explores how parents, teachers, and early childhood professionals can help children deal with their angry feelings. PART 1 of this two-part article focuses on your child's angry feelings and angry behavior. A broad [overview](#) of anger is provided. Guidelines are provided for helping you [partner](#) with your child in exploring socially appropriate ways to express their angry and frustrated feelings. The [Six Levels of Angry Expressions](#) are explored. Rehearsals are explained and encouraged to help your child learn to express their angry feelings in words. Many specific, detailed anticipatory strategies for working with your child's [angry feelings](#) and [angry behavior](#) are presented.

FAQ

Q. My daughter has allergies and her medication causes her to have more temper tantrums than when she is not on the medication. What should I do?

Be sure to discuss your daughter's behavioral response to her medication with your child's pediatrician or pediatric allergist to see if the medication or dosage can be adjusted. Also, be sure to inform any teachers or caretakers of your child's medication; it is sometimes easier to deal with a child's behaviors knowing that you are not dealing with your child so much as working with your child's medication.

Q. Sometimes my three-year-old daughter puts her angry feelings into words and sometimes she hits her sister. She seems to go up and down the [Six Levels of Angry Expression](#). What is happening? What can I do?

Most young children are inconsistent in the development of their impulse control. "Young children do not always understand and remember the rules." Certainly for a three-year-old, life is challenging and it sounds like your daughter sometimes has more resources than at other times.

See if you can identify triggers for her physical aggression—time of day, hunger, lack of sleep, allergy season—so that you can avoid some of these. Also, provide as much one-on-one time with her as you can; aim for several times a week to help ensure that her hitting is not negative-attention-getting. Give her lots of encouragement when she uses her words.

Try to track your daughter's progress over two-to-three week time periods, rather than day-by-day. Has she been using her words more now than she did two or three weeks ago? Has she been hitting less now than two or three weeks ago?

Given real life, it is common for there to be two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back in terms of the challenging task of channeling physical aggression into verbal expression.

Q. This whole "partnership" thing is not comfortable with me. I don't want to be my child's friend, I want to be my child's parent.

In partnering with your child around their angry feelings and angry behavior, it is important to be the parent in charge. You are offering understanding for your child and offering encouragement for their feelings and their behavior, but you are also setting limits on inappropriate behavior and re-directing and re-channeling the angry feelings and behavior into appropriate outlets.

The partnership is one of a teacher-to-student rather than buddy-to-buddy. The parent is definitely the partner-in-charge. The point is to have a partnership with your child in helping them work with their angry feelings and not to have an adversarial connection in working with your child's angry feelings.

Q. I have a hard time with one-on-one time with my child. I don't know what to do and it makes me feel uncomfortable. I know it is important. What should I do?

Often parents have a challenging time one-on-one with their child if their own parents did not play with them as children. If there are not those models, it is hard to know how to be. Also, sometimes parents feel some hurt or pain that belongs to their own childhood yearning when they do one-on-one time; sometimes parents feel healed when they can interact and connect with their own child in a way that they could not interact with their own parents. Giving your own child an important emotional connection that was missing from your childhood can be very gratifying.

During this one-on-one time, your child should be the director of the play, choosing what toys and activities to play with and how to play with them. You can participate, witness, or comment on the play as your child directs. Try to stay very focused during this 20-30 minute one-on-one. Try to fully participate and understand your child's play during this time—no making to-do lists in your head for after your one-on-one time.

Try to comment in non-judgmental, non-critical ways. Be descriptive about the action or the feelings in the play; be accepting of whatever arises (within acceptable behavior).

- "Tristan, I see that you are putting the red Lego on top of the yellow Lego. That Lego tower is getting taller and taller."*
- "You are feeding the baby doll her bottle. She's hungry. You are taking care of your baby doll, Gabriella."*
- "You like building a train track that gets longer and longer. Then it's fun for you, Brayden, to smash it up and build it again. You feel like building and smashing and building and smashing. Do you want me to help build it or smash it? What would you like me to do?"*

You might also think about some special play activities that you enjoyed as a child and suggest these to your child. Make the final choice of activities your child's choice.

This ongoing one-on-one time is so important in continuing a strong connection with your child.

Q. My son hits and kicks me, his mom, but never hurts anyone else. This makes me so angry. Why is he picking on me?

First of all, children often act most aggressively toward the person that they feel safest with—they know that you are there for them and that you won't leave. This is often the mom. Also, you may be the person that your child is around the most—you are in the line of fire and catch most of the heat coming from your child.

Be sure that you are spending enough one-on-one time with your child. Upping your one-on-one time with your child to two to three times a week can improve your child's behavior in just a few short weeks.

If this behavior continues for a period of time, you should consult an early childhood professional to seek help for your child and yourself with this issue.

Q. My two-year-old son bit a child at preschool and broke the skin. Now they want to kick him out of school. What can I tell them to help the situation?

Age matters. Two-year-olds bite.

Bites, especially bites that break the skin, can cause a lot of anxiety and stress on parent's parts. Biting is such a primitive response that we adults often have an almost physical reaction to it.

It is important that the school review the context of the bite and the frequency of the biting. It is important that the school has a plan to re-shape this oral expression of feelings. Having a strong plan in place—a plan for home that is consistent with a plan for school—should help with the behavior and should help calm the families involved. See Part 2 for a detailed [21-step plan](#) for dealing with physical aggression at home and in the classroom; an agenda for a parent-staff meeting to implement this plan is also presented.

Q. My three-year-old is hitting at daycare and they want to send him home each time he hits. Nothing seems to be helping. What should they do? What should I do?

You and the staff need a plan. See Part 2 for a detailed [21-step plan](#) for dealing with physical aggression at home and in the classroom; an agenda for a parent-staff meeting to implement this plan is also presented.

PART 2

ANGER IN-THE-MOMENT: WORDS, STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES

Part 2 focuses on the [A-B-C-C Anger Model](#) to provide a basic framework for words and techniques you can use when your child is angry. Many examples are provided for working in-the-moment with your child when they are at various levels of angry expressions. A detailed, nitty-gritty [21-step plan](#) is provided for waging peace when your child is physically aggressive at home or in the classroom. [An agenda](#) for a parent-childcare staff meeting for dealing with physical aggression is presented.

PART 1 REVIEW: YOUR CHILD'S ANGRY FEELINGS & ANGRY BEHAVIOR

Part 1 of this article, [Your Child's Angry Feelings And Angry Behavior](#), provides invaluable background for Part 2, *Anger In-The-Moment*. Here is a short review of goals and guidelines from Part 1.

- ☑ [Overview](#): Anger occurs within a context. It is important to identify the causes or triggers for the angry situations. Triggers may include allergies, medication, stress, delayed development, and sensory issues.
- ☑ [Overview](#): It is important that you examine your own history and feelings about anger in working with your child's anger. Explore your family of origin's attitude about angry feelings as well as your own current attitudes about anger.
- ☑ [Overview](#): Communication with your child needs to be within their age-appropriate sensory sphere.
- ☑ [Child's Goal](#): Your child puts their angry feelings into words.

- ☑ [Your Goal](#): You are emotionally partnered with your child around their angry feelings. You help your child verbalize their anger, frustration, and disappointment.
- ☑ [Your Goal](#): You are partnered with your child in guiding their angry behavior. The ultimate goal is to have your child put their angry feelings into words. For a child who is being physical, the goal is for the physical aggression to be changed to verbal expression. Your role is to set clear, firm limits around angry behavior, limits which will eventually be internalized by your child and help them with their impulse control issues.
- ☑ [Guideline](#): You distinguish between angry feelings and angry behavior. You acknowledge and accept your child's angry feelings, while setting limits on their physical aggression or inappropriate angry behavior
- ☑ [Guideline](#): There are Six Levels of Angry Expression. Knowing where your child's behavior is on this hierarchy is important in responding appropriately to your child's anger.
- ☑ You are partnered with your child in finding appropriate outlets to express any lingering angry feelings. You help your child pass through these angry feelings to reach a calmer place.
- ☑ You use [anticipatory strategies](#) to work with your child's feelings before the angry situations arise. These strategies include: listening more carefully to your child's feelings, expanding your family's feeling vocabulary, increasing one-on-one time, reading relevant books, and practicing feeling notes.
- ☑ You use [anticipatory strategies](#) to work with your child's behavior before the angry situations arise. These strategies include: encouragement for your child's using words to express feelings, rehearsals to practice appropriate responses to angry feelings, using the [Slow-Medium-Fast Game](#) to increase impulse control, creating an [Anger Box](#), and using [stress reduction exercises](#) daily.
- ☑ You encourage your child in non-angry moments when they use appropriate words and appropriate behavior in expressing their feelings, especially their angry feelings. In non-angry moments, you support their use of their words to express their feelings.

IN-THE-MOMENT WORDS, STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES

As a parent, you need to be emotionally distanced, and not actively engaged in a power struggle, to be effective in helping your child with those difficult situations involving intensely angry feelings. This is not always easy. Having a structure or model for a reference in hot moments can be very helpful. The A-B-C-C Anger Model helps you help your child learn to put their angry feelings into verbal expressions and helps you be partnered with your child around their angry feelings and angry behavior.

A-B-C-C Anger Model

- A=Acknowledge and Accept Angry Feelings
- B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement
- C=Channel Anger into Appropriate Outlets: Notes, Imagination, Choices, Exercise
- C=Consequences: Relevant, Brief, Immediate

Given real life, it is common for there to be two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward in terms of the challenging task of channeling physical aggression into verbal expression.

The A-B-C-C Anger Model can be that model for guiding in-the-moment words, strategies and techniques. It is suggested that you mentally rehearse this A-B-C-C Anger Model several times a day in cool moments by yourself so that it becomes part of your repertoire to use in conflict situations. Rehearsing this A-B-C-C Anger Model is very helpful in hot moments. The good news in all of this is: if you feel that you did not use this model perfectly the first time, the odds are, you know that you will have another opportunity to use this model again within a short time. Guaranteed, you will have plenty of real-life angry opportunities and real-life chances to practice and use this model with your young child!

GUIDELINE	CONCEPT	WORDS/ACTION
A=Acknowledge Anger	Feelings first	"I see you are mad, frustrated"
B=Behavior – Set Limits	No physical expression	"People are not for kicking"
C=Channel Anger into Outlets	work/play anger through one of the following	
	Notes: Feelings into words	Feeling notes
	Imagination: Feelings into play	"Do you want to stomp like a T-Rex?"
	Choices: empowerment	"Do you want to__or__?"
	Exercise: feelings out of body	"Do you want to do an angry dance?"
C=Consequences	Learning, not punishment	
	Relevant: repair what broke	"Let's talk or rebuild__?"
	Brief: child's time concept	"Let's do this and move on."
	Immediate: child's cause and effect	"Let's do this now or within 5 minutes."

A=ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT ANGRY FEELINGS

It is important to acknowledge and accept your child's angry feelings. Focusing on the words angry, frustrated and disappointed in these moments can be helpful. By verbalizing these feelings, you are modeling putting feelings into words. It is helpful to use as calm a voice as possible so that you are lowering the intensity of the moment and so that you are modeling using calm words.

Your child may not know what they are feeling. They may not have words for their feelings, especially in high-adrenaline moments. By putting words to their feelings, you are helping your child parse out their feelings, label their feelings, and feel accepting of their feelings. Angry feelings are often uncomfortable feelings; your child needs reassurance that it's okay to be mad. Often young children feel angry and then feel bad about themselves that they feel angry— a double whammy. Accepting your child's angry feelings makes it easier to work with your child's angry feelings.

Always try to do *feelings* first. It is important that you listen to your child's feelings (see [Developing a Third Ear](#) from Part 1) and address the feelings first, before you set a limit. Children are like adults in that we all want to be heard and understood. Often understanding and verbalizing your child's feelings is a crucial part of your exchange; once your child feels heard and understood, it is often easier for your young child to move from their angry stance and to calm somewhat.

It is important to realize that accepting the feelings is NOT accepting the behavior. Once again, you are distinguishing between your child's angry feelings and their angry behavior.

Since the ultimate goal is your child's putting their angry feelings into words, this acknowledgement of feelings can also include appreciation for your child's words, if they used words.

- "You seem angry, Faith. I can understand that you want my attention when I am on my cell phone and you don't want to wait."*
- "Of course that makes you mad when your little brother takes your fire truck. I might be very, very angry, too, Hector, if that happened to me."*
- "It seems very important to you that you have candy before breakfast. I hear how frustrated you are when I say I won't give you candy for breakfast. Liam, I like that you put your angry feelings into words and screamed, 'Give me candy.' Your words are great. They help me know what you want. Also, it helps me hear you when you use your softer voice."*
- "Hailey, I can understand that you might be disappointed that I am feeding the baby when you want to play."*

B=BEHAVIOR—SET LIMITS OR OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT

It is important to set clear, firm behavioral limits. Know where your child is on the [Six Levels of Angry Expression](#) so that you can recognize and speak to current progress while also encouraging more progress. For example, if your child has been hitting you and then chooses to hit the couch pillows instead, that is progress. Certainly this is not perfect behavior, but their behavior of hitting the pillows shows tremendous control.

There is a hierarchy of behaviors in terms of expressing angry feelings. It is important that you realize where your child has been on this hierarchy and where on this hierarchy their current angry behavior resides. Is your child's angry behavior, though not totally appropriate, exhibiting progress? Is your child using a more mature level of expressing their angry feelings? Think progress, not perfection. Changing angry behavior takes time and patience on both your parts.

It is relevant here to review the Six Levels of Angry Expressions from [Part 1](#). There is a hierarchy of how children express their angry feelings, starting with the most primitive expressions and moving toward the more mature, more socially-appropriate expressions. As a child moves through each level, more and more impulse control is needed. It is important to recognize this hierarchy since each level indicates more maturity and your child's progress within the hierarchy needs to be noticed and acknowledged. Parents often expect a young child to transition from hitting to using words. This is unrealistic; impulse control and mastering angry feelings takes time, often many months or even years, and it is important to recognize the interim progress of your child until your child only uses appropriate words to express anger.

The biggest developmental leap is when a child moves from physical expression of angry feelings to non-physical expression of angry feelings. This is HUGE progress and may take a good deal of time to solidify for your young child. Once your child makes this leap to verbal expression, you can slowly refine the appropriateness of the verbal expression over time. (See [Physical Aggression at Home and in the Classroom](#) later in Part 2.)

Six Levels Of Angry Expression

- Level 1. Physical Expression—Aggression upon a Person: A child expresses their anger by using physical aggression upon another person's body, such as biting, hitting, kicking, pinching, choking, scratching, pulling hair, squeezing, or hitting with an object.
- Level 2. Physical Expression—Aggression upon a Person's Possessions/Creations: A child expresses their anger by physically destroys another person's creation or possession, such as ripping up a painting, destroying a castle, or breaking a fire truck.
- Level 3. Physical Expression—No Physical Contact: A child expresses their anger in a physical manner, but without any physical contact or aggression directly upon another person or their creation or possession. Examples are: temper tantrums, crying, threatening with a fist, pointing with a finger gun, jumping up and down, sulking, purposefully vomiting, or holding one's breath as a threat.
- Level 4. Oral Expression—Nonverbal: A child expresses their anger using oral, but not verbal, means, such as spitting, sticking out their tongue, growling, shrieking, screaming, or giving someone the raspberry.
- Level 5. Oral Expression—Verbal, Inappropriate: A child expresses their anger using words that are inappropriate, such as: cursing, screaming words, screaming hurtful words, using hurtful words.
- Level 6. Oral Expression—Verbal, Appropriate: A child expresses their anger using words are are a socially appropriate expression of angry feelings.

It is very important to recognize that your child may need to experience each level and that moving to another less primitive, more appropriate, level is progress—not perfection, but definite progress. If your child has been hitting and then your child begins screaming instead of hitting, it is important to recognize and speak to that progress. If you tell your child not to scream, then you have cut off that more mature outlet—which is actual progress from hitting—and, since that level of expression has not been accepted, your child may revert to less mature, more physical expressions of angry feelings.

Your response to your child's anger depends on where their angry behavior or angry words are on the six levels of expression of anger. Once again, It is very important to know that the biggest developmental leap is from Level 1 to any higher level. At Level 2 and above, your child is showing a great deal of impulse control by not acting out hurtfully on someone's body. It is important in setting any necessary limits that any angry behaviors at Level 2 or above also be accompanied by positive encouragement as to your child's "*Great control in being gentle with people's bodies!*"

C=CHANNEL ANGER INTO OUTLETS: NOTES, IMAGINATION, CHOICES, EXERCISE

Certainly there may need to be consequences or repairs made for any damage that occurs in angry situations. The reparations can be actual tending to a hurt person or rebuilding a castle, or the repairs can take the form of healing a social relationship. Those issues will be discussed in the [Consequences](#) section.

In terms of angry feelings, your child may become angry and have a hard time letting go of their angry feelings, so that even discussing consequences or attempting rehearsals may not be productive until these angry feelings are released. Channeling your child's angry feelings into socially appropriate outlets can be very important to help your child pass through their angry feelings. Often once you and your child have settled upon a technique for releasing their angry feelings, that technique will work in most angry situations. If you have found a technique that helps your child release their angry feelings, go with that proven technique.

The [Anger Box](#) section from Part 1 discusses possible techniques to practice and use in hot moments to help your child release their angry feelings. Since it is sometimes challenging for us to remember these techniques in hot moments, an easy memory key for recalling some of these possibilities is N-I-C-E: Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise.

N-I-C-E: NOTES-IMAGINATION-CHOICES-EXERCISE

Notes

- Write a [Feeling Note](#) with your child.

Imagination

- Use your imagination to find a cathartic outlet for your child. The phrase “I wonder...” can be a productive way to engage a child’s imagination. “I wonder...” is less confrontational as it does not require an answer, but it can spur a child to action.
- “I hear that you are sad that your friend can’t come over. Tristan, it is great that you put your sad feelings into words. I wonder if you want to paint a sad picture.”*
- “Tara, you seem mad that you have to get your hair shampooed now. I know how you hate getting your head wet. Great words. I wonder if we should add another page to Tara’s Temper Tantrum Book. I could write and you could draw a picture.”*
- “You are mad that there is no school today and that you can’t play with your friends. I see your angry face. Great control with your body, Atticus—you are being so gentle with my body and your sister’s body. I am wondering how an angry T-Rex might stomp and growl?”*

Choices

- Sometimes giving your child choices may help them with their angry feelings. Giving a child choices can empower them and help them feel more in control.
- “I know that you are angry that you can’t have candy before dinner. Moms are not for hitting. Moms are for hugging. We need to find something else to do with your angry feelings. What do you want to do with your angry feelings? Should we look in the Angry Box? Sophie, you choose.”*
- “You are still mad that you had to turn off the DVD player. I can understand that. Great control with using gentle hands with me. I see your angry pout. Do you want a few minutes to yourself to work this out or should we talk now? Where should we talk?”*

Exercise

- Your child’s moving their body can help release some of the angry feelings.
- “You are still sooo angry that Mom has to work late and you won’t see her tonight. Carla, it’s great that you used your words and told her that you were angry over the phone. You still seem angry. Do you want to punch your pillow?”*
- “Jose, You are angry at Jarrod for not wanting to sit next to you at snacktime. It seems that you got your feelings hurt. We talked to Jarrod and you still seem hurt and angry. Do you want to stay here at snack or do you want to take a break and go outside and run around that big tree 20 times?”*

CONSEQUENCES: RELEVANT, BRIEF, IMMEDIATE

Consequences for any given situation with your young child should be relevant, brief, and immediate.

Often parents feel that consequences are equated with punishments—that a mistake needs to result in a situation of removing privileges or pleasures or treats. This is counter to research that has shown that, time and again, children respond more to encouragement and positive reinforcement than to punishment and deprivation.

Everybody makes mistakes. People, both young and old, grow and learn from mistakes. It is important to approach all situations with your child, especially hot moments, as opportunities for growing and learning. What is to be learned in this situation? How can your child grow from this experience? How can you grow from this experience as a parent? It is important that you come with partnership and compassion to these conflict situations.

Big question: How can we make this situation right? If someone's body has been hurt, how can we help them heal? If someone's feelings have been hurt, how can we help soothe them? If there has been a breakdown in your social relationship with your child, how can that social break be mended? What is needed to repair you and your child's relationship?

Also, it is important to remember, to quote a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) brochure: *"Young children do not always understand and remember the rules."* And we adults don't always understand and remember that young children do not always understand and remember the rules. Growing up is hard. Helping your child grow up is hard.

I always like to believe that, in any given situation, everyone is doing the best that they can. At any given moment, I like to believe that your child is doing the best they can. At any given moment, I like to believe that you are doing the best parenting that you can. And, at any given moment, I like to believe that I am doing the best that I can as I write this. We are all doing our best at this moment. We are all working hard. We are in this together. We are partnered around helping your young child with their angry feelings. This helps in bringing compassion to the moment.

A discussion of consequences is complicated because there are so many possible angry situations and levels of angry expression that may be occurring, often within the same conflict. Some general guidelines and some examples are provided to cover various situations involving consequences.

It is important to note that not all angry conflict situations need consequences. If your child has not been physically aggressive or verbally aggressive and has a more self-contained, more mature level of response, such as crying or sulking, then there is no need for consequences, but rather for instruction and further rehearsals so that your child can have

an appropriate voice, both the appropriate words and level of vocalization, to verbalize their feelings.

- ☑ *"I see that you are very disappointed, Derek. Great control in using gentle hands and gentle feet. Can you put your disappointment into words? Can you say, 'I am disappointed.' It's not easy, but we will practice. Your feelings are important and so are your words telling me about your feelings."*
- ☑ *"Yes, Shoshana, I see that you are going to your room and that you don't want to talk about how angry you are. Great control. I will check on you in a few minutes to see if you want to talk about your feelings and put your anger into words."*

Consequences are needed if there has been some harm involving your child and a peer or sibling or you. This harm can be physical to someone's body or the destruction of someone's creation or social damage to your child's relationship with another person. If there are things that are hurt—bodies or possessions or relationships—then there needs to be repair. Consequences should repair damage, not inflict punishment. Consequences should be relevant, brief, and immediate.

If your child is still so full of feeling that they cannot talk about the situation, then it is important that you employ the techniques involved in the [Anger Box](#) or [C=Channel: N-I-C-E](#) so that your child can gain some catharsis from their feelings and eventually you can revisit the angry situation. This may be a minute later, ten minutes later or several hours later.

One important goal in conflict resolution is about communication, not simply the resolution of a specific problem. Other goals in conflicts are to set behavioral limits, to be sure that each person has had an opportunity to speak, and that each person has had an opportunity to be heard. Each person needs a voice.

Relevant

Consequences should be relevant to the mistaken choice in behavior. If your child's anger was not expressed in a socially appropriate manner, then any harm that your child caused, be it physical or emotional or social, needs to be repaired.

It is important to realize what was breached or broken or eroded in the situation and what needs to be repaired. If there was physical damage inflicted, then the damage needs to be repaired. For instance, if your child injures you or another person or someone's creation, your child needs to verbally address and tend to the injured child's body or destroyed creation and try to help repair that; in this case, there will often be a rift in the social relationship and that also needs to be tended to in terms of feelings communicated between the two people involved.

If your child has not been physically aggressive but has been verbally aggressive, then the reparation needs to be with your child's social relationship with a peer or with you. In this case, feelings need to be addressed to repair the breach in the relationship.

More appropriate angry responses need to be suggested and rehearsed.

Brief

Sometimes parents can forget how time moves much differently, much more slowly, for children than for adults. An interesting guide for understanding time concepts for children is to compare your age and your child's age. Suppose you are 33 and your child is 3—you are 11 times older than your child. What is 24 hours in your child's life is what 11 days would feel like to you as an adult.

Often when parents try to set limits or consequences for a child, the time frame is very incongruent with child development. To ask a child to not use a disputed toy for an entire day is not allowing for your child's time concept. To ask your child to share a doll for an hour is even asking a lot for most young children; by the end of the hour your child may not even remember the conflictual incident.

It is important that consequences be brief so that they are congruent with your child's concept of time and allow for your child's memory capacity.

Immediate

Given the above discussion of your child's concept of time, it is important that any consequence be immediate. Using the consequence that six hours from now they will only have two books read at bedtime instead of the usual three will be long disassociated from the current conflict situation. Children have limited understanding of cause and effect; if consequences are immediate, then the cause and effect connection can be more easily understood.

Let's resolve this issue and move on. Let's agree, you and I, what happened, come up with a plan to repair whatever damage has occurred, discuss how to do things better, and then turn the page. We all make mistakes. This isn't easy, but we'll try to do better next time. And we'll rehearse some better strategies.

A-B-C-C EXAMPLES

Example #1: Hitting another Child (Level 1. Physical Aggression Upon a Person)

SITUATION: Your young child hits another child when that child takes away the book your child is reading.

RESPONSE

- ☑ First tend to the child that has been hit. *"Are you okay? You had your body hit."* By tending to the *presumed victim* first, the possibility of your child being the physical aggressor as a means of seeking negative attention is diminished. Then turn your attention to your child.
- ☑ *"You seem very angry. Hitting hurts people. Your hands are for gentle touches. Use gentle hands. Let's see if your friend needs a cold washcloth or a band-aid. Then let's talk with your friend about your angry feelings."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- ☑ A=Acknowledge and Accept Feelings. There is a labeling and an acknowledgement and acceptance of the angry feelings.
- ☑ B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement. Limits are set. Suggestions are made for more appropriate behavior in future angry situations.
- ☑ C=Channel anger. No possible re-channeling was suggested. If your child is too angry to talk with, [Anger Box](#) techniques or [N-I-C-E](#) (Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise) can be used for catharsis prior to talking.
- ☑ C=Consequences. A child's body was hurt. You are suggesting ways to ease the child's pain. You are suggesting ways to repair the relationship through talking. If hitting is a frequent concern, rehearsals are needed every hour for using words. See [Detailed Plan for Waging Peace](#). If hitting is a frequent concern, it is imperative that many times an hour your child be caught being good and using their hands appropriately.

"I like your gentle hands as you are having snack next to your friend."

"Hands are for holding."

"Hands are for building blocks. Great hands"

"Hands are for painting. Good job."

"Hands are for gentle touches. Your little brother loves those gentle strokes on his cheek. Great control."

Example #2: Hitting a Parent; Channeling using N-I-C-E (Level 1. Physical Aggression Upon a Person)

SITUATION

It is 8:44am on Tuesday morning and your young son Daniel is watching a Barney DVD. You need to leave for preschool at 8:45am. You turn off the Barney DVD. Daniel starts kicking you and hitting you and screaming, "I hate you! I hate you! I want Barney! I want Barney!"

Note: Avoiding this situation would be helpful. Giving a child a few minutes warning before the transition to preschool might help or be more careful to time the DVD so that it doesn't interfere with leaving time.

RESPONSE

- "You seem very, very, very, very angry with me." You very gently hold your child's hands and feet so that you cannot be hurt. "I can't let you hurt me. Parents are for hugging, not for hitting. You need to put your angry feelings into words. You could say, 'I'm angry.'"*
- Note: "Should we write a note to Barney and tell him goodbye until after nursery school?" or*
- Imagination: "I wonder...what would Barney do if he were really angry?" or*
- Choices: "Do you want to rest the Barney DVD on the DVD player or on the counter to finish watching when you get home from school? Or do you want to do some angry running around the tree out front? I wonder if you can run around it 10 times or 25 times without stopping, the way you did when you were angry yesterday? Here's your coat."*
- Exercise: "I feel like running to the car. Should we have a race and see who can get their coat on first and be the car race winner? Here I go--see if you can catch me."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Acknowledge and Accept Feelings. Angry feelings were acknowledged and accepted.
- B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement. A strong limit was set concerning physical aggression. If necessary, use gentle restraint (gently hold their wrists or ankles) to stop your child from hitting or kicking you. (If kicking is a concern, a consequence for kicking is having your child remove their shoes—kicking usually hurts too much without shoes, so that behavior is altered.) When children hit or kick their parents, they feel too powerful in a very uncomfortable way; gently restraining a child is actually helping them feel safer.

I always feel a little uncomfortable restraining a child, even gently, when they are out of control and attacking me, so I usually talk about how I feel. This models putting feelings into words and keeps the communication channels open even in the midst of conflict. I might say, *"I am not comfortable holding your wrists, but I can't let you hurt me. When you have more control, then I can let go and we can talk. It's your choice—when you control yourself, then I will let your wrists free."*

- C=Channel Anger. There were details offered on how to re-channel the angry feelings so that your child can release those feelings and you two can then communicate more easily about your child's anger. You are partnering with your child about how to release their angry feelings.
 - N—Notes: A feeling note was offered.
 - I—Imagination: The Barney connection was encouraged through fantasy.
 - C—Choices: Your child was presented with choices, so that perhaps they could feel more in control in the situation.
 - E—Exercise: Run out those angry feelings!
- C=Consequences. As in Example # 1, if hitting is a frequent concern, rehearsals are needed every hour for using words. See [Detailed Plan for Waging Peace](#). If hitting is a frequent concern, it is imperative that many times an hour your child be caught being good and using their hands appropriately. See [Example #1](#) above for phrases for encouragement.

Example #3: Destroying a Castle (Level 2. Physical Aggression Upon a Person's Possessions/Creations)

SITUATION

Your child was excited about grandma coming for a visit. Then she couldn't come and your child was so disappointed and angry they threw a temper tantrum and destroyed their brother's block castle.

RESPONSE

- For a younger child: *"You seem angry. Your brother's castle is not for knocking over. Use your words, say 'I'm mad!' Now let's help your brother rebuild his castle."*
- For an older child: *"Yes, Grandma did say that she was coming over today and now she can't come. You seem angry that she won't be coming to play Candyland with you. But your brother's castle shouldn't be destroyed. Use your words. 'I am angry at Grandma.' Do you need to take a short break for a while or should we see which block should go at*

the bottom to start rebuilding the castle? We can talk with your brother about your feelings as we build. If you would like, later we can write a note to your grandma."

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Acknowledge and Accept Feelings. There is an acknowledgement and acceptance of your child's anger.
- B=Behavior—Set Limits or Offer Encouragement. Limits are set on behavior and suggestions offered for using words.
- C=Channel Anger. The choice of a short break or dealing with the consequences immediately is offered. If your child is still very angry, you can use the [Anger Box](#) for techniques to dissipate your child's anger so that you can then work with it more easily.
- C=Consequences. The castle was destroyed. The relevant, brief, immediate consequence is to help rebuild the castle. Communication about the feelings is also included. A possible feeling note to brother and/or grandma may be helpful. There should be rehearsals of 30 seconds each several times a day in which the phrase "I'm MAD!" or "I'm angry!" is practiced.

Example #4 : Threatening with a Fist (Level 3. Physical Expression—No Physical Contact)

SITUATION

A child on the playground pushes your child down. Your child approaches that child and raises a fist to that child.

RESPONSE

- "You are soo, sooo angry. Great control. You have raised your fist but you are being gentle with your friend's body. Great control. Use your words. Can you say, 'I'm angry!'"
- A= You have identified and acknowledged and accepted your child's angry feelings.
- B=No behavioral limits are needed. Your child used control.
- C=You provided alternative strategies for expressing anger. You may need to help your child run or slide or swing out their angry feelings on the playground if they are still upset.
- C=No immediate consequences are needed. The feelings involved in the interaction should be discussed. Also, you catch your child using their words in many, many situations and you give them positive feedback for that. You may do a rehearsal several times a day, also.

Example #5: Jumping and Screaming (Level 4. Physical Expression—No Physical Contact and Level 5. Oral Expression-Non-Verbal, Inappropriate)

SITUATION

Your young child wants a candy snack thirty minutes before dinner. Your child starts jumping up and down and jumping up and down and screaming.

RESPONSE

- "You seem very, very, very frustrated that you can't have candy now. I really like how you used your control to be gentle with my body. Can you use your words? Can you say 'I'm MAD!?' Your soft words are easier to hear and I know that you want me to listen.....Dinner is in 30 minutes. You can help me set the table or you can read a book to me while I cook or we can do a dinner dance while we finish fixing dinner. Those are your choices."*
- Your child persists in their screaming and yelling. You say, "You seem very, very frustrated. Let's add a page to your [Temper Tantrum Book](#)—you draw and I'll write for you what is making you mad. Or should we go to the [Anger Box](#) and see what we can do about your angry feelings?"*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Angry feelings were acknowledged and accepted. The intensity was addressed ("very, very angry"). It helps to address the intensity if your child is intense.
- B=Behavioral limits were not needed. Guidance was provided
- C=Channeling the angry energy was suggested: Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise were all offered
- C=Immediate consequences were not necessary as there were no physical expressions or oral expressions that created a rift in your relationship with your child. You catch your child using their words in many, many situations and you give them positive feedback for that. You may do a rehearsal several times a day, also.

Example #6: "Poophead!" (Level 5 . Oral Expression—Verbal, Inappropriate)

SITUATION

Your young child is screaming "Poophead" at their friend.

RESPONSE

- "I hear you screaming 'Poophead' at your friend. You seem disappointed that he doesn't want to play with you. That was great control—you were gentle with his body. Great control. Let's try saying, 'I'M MAD!' Let's talk with your friend about how you are both feeling."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=There was an acknowledgement and acceptance of your child's feelings.
- B=You addressed your child's physical behavior. Since your child exhibited impulse control, it is important to acknowledge that control.
- C=If your child is still feeling very intense in their anger, then you can use one or more of the techniques from the [Anger Box](#).
- C=Your child's choice of words may have caused some ill-will with his friend. The consequence is in how to repair that relationship. Suggesting that your child talk to your friend about what they are both feeling is the first step toward healing that relationship. This consequence is relevant (how to fix the friendship), brief (short talking and listening time between the two friends), and immediate (talking either then or after a few minutes cooling-off period). Rehearsals of 30 second duration several times during the day may help guide your child's language to more socially appropriate words. You can strategize with your child on how they can say, "I'm mad!" or "I'm angry!" for the next angry episode with a friend.

Example # 7: Putting Angry Feelings into Words (Level 6. Oral Expression—Verbal, Appropriate)

SITUATION

Your child and their friend have had a playdate and it is time for the playdate to end. Your child is furious that the play can't continue. Your child says, "I am so mad. I want Raphael to stay and play."

RESPONSE

- "I really like how you put your feelings into words. Great control. Gentle hands. Gentle words. Great control. Let's come up with a plan to have Raphael over again soon."*
- Your child is still upset. You offer a socially appropriate outlet. *"After Raphael leaves, we'll...look in your [Anger Box](#)...write a [note](#) to Raphie...play with your action figures or read [The Temper Tantrum Book](#)...or run around the living room 20 times to run out those angry feelings."*

DISCUSSION OF RESPONSE

- A=Angry feelings are acknowledged and accepted.
- B=No behavioral limit is needed. Encouragement is offered.
- C=Notes-Imagination-Choices-Exercise are suggested to play through the feelings.
- C=No consequences are needed, as your child handled their angry feelings respectfully, using gentle hands and gentle words. Continued encouragement for putting feelings into words is always supportive and helpful for your young child.

NO Time-Outs

For some reason, time-outs were the discipline flavor of the 1990s and that flavor still lingers on. Time-outs are easy to administer, especially in a group situation, and take no thought on an adult's part, but, unfortunately, time-outs provide little learning for your child. Parents often tell me that they use time-outs again and again. My response is: *"Then time-outs don't seem to be working."*

There are several serious concerns and issues with time-outs.

SHAME

In group situations, giving a child a time-out is shaming that child. None of us send our child to homecare, daycare or school to be shamed. All you have to do is look at a child's face who has been timed-out in a group situation and you can see how bad they are feeling about themselves. They might as well have one of those old-fashioned dunce caps on their head. Shaming a child teaches them nothing; in fact, if you were ever shamed as a child you may remember being angry at the adult or angry at yourself. Time-outs often cause more angry feelings and can be counter-productive.

YOU CAN'T LEARN SOCIAL SKILLS IN ISOLATION

If conflict situations are viewed as opportunities for growth and learning, what is being accomplished during a time-out? If you are trying to teach your child social skills, how can your child learn social skills in the isolation of a time-out? Social skills need to be taught and reinforced using direct instruction, not by ostracizing. Two things that are often learned by children who are timed-out: be sneakier in your misdeeds and be angry at the adult who put you in the time-out—the time-out is their fault, not yours.

TIME-OUTS DON'T TEACH

When your child leaves the time-out chair and a similar conflict situation arises, your child has no additional skills to use in that situation. There has been no talk or rehearsal to increase your child's behavioral repertoire for the next time your child feels angry or upset. There has been no practice to provide some additional behavioral and neurological pathways so that your child has new choices when a conflict arises again.

CONFUSION?

Very often children who are sent to time-out are not clear why. If you ask your child, sometimes they will be uncertain or confused about the behavior or words that caused the time-out. If this is the case, how can your child know what to do next time? Young children need specific directions. It is important to remember and understand, once again from an NAEYC brochure: "Young children do not always understand and remember the rules."

PARTNERSHIP

There is no partnering in the time-out chair. Your child is there by themselves to tough out whatever. We have an important role to provide guidance to young children, especially in high-adrenaline moments.

WHO NEEDS THE TIME-OUT: YOU OR YOUR CHILD?

Let's be honest here—often when children are timed-out, it is the adult that needs the time-out! The adult needs space and time to cool down, not the child!

Some people say that they use time-outs effectively with young children. Some people use time-outs as a cooling off period. I think that this can be a valid approach if two guidelines are followed:

- Your child is given a choice of where they want to be and for how long. "Do you want to take a cool down in the kitchen or the living room? Should I check on you in two minutes or five minutes?"
- The cooling-off period is step one of a longer process of working with your child's angry feelings. Taking some time and space apart may help you and your child come back together and talk about the situation, re-strategize for next time, and set up some models for further rehearsals over the next several days. This cooling off period should be step one in the process of working through this angry situation. The cooling off period can be a re-centering so that there can be some important learning and growing around angry situations in which you and your child are partnered in learning social skills and how to best express angry feelings.

NO Spanking

Spanking is a hot topic. Spanking is complicated. Spanking or hitting on the butt or shaking a child's shoulders can mean very different things to very different people. Different families have different guidelines regarding hitting children. Different cultures have different guidelines regarding hitting children. Some cultures encourage spanking children, some cultures use caning for disciplining children, some cultures accept light taps on a child's backside. In some cultures parents are thought of as neglectful and weak if they do not use physical means to discipline children.

It feels important to explore your own personal experiences with spanking or hitting children, as those get carried from our families of origin, our growing-up families, to our own family. This isn't easy, but it is important.

I have feelings about spanking from both a personal and a professional standpoint.

Personally, I remember being spanked as a child. My pride was hurt. I felt humiliated. What I felt was intense anger at my father or my mother. What I learned was to be more secretive and not to trust my parents to understand me or help me. I didn't learn any of the lessons that they tried to teach me by spanking me.

What I can say about spanking or hitting professionally is on another level.

First of all, when your goal for your child is for them to put their angry feelings into words, then it is hard to justify we adults not putting our angry feelings into words, but putting our angry feelings into hits or slaps. If a parent is still working on impulse control, then how can we expect more impulse control from a child? "One parent is worth a thousand teachers" says an ancient Chinese proverb. This speaks to the power of modeling—what we do as parents is far more powerful than what we say. If we want children who don't hit, then we need to be parents who don't hit. If we want children who follow [Rule #1](#): Everyone is Gentle with Everyone's Body, then we need to follow the rule as well.

Secondly, my concern is empirical. When I work with families, if a child has been hit or spanked by a parent, then within the next day or so that child will often hit either a peer, a sibling, a parent, or a teacher. In my experience, without judgment but with much observation, if a child is hit, then that child will hit soon after. (Important note: I am definitely not saying that every child who hits has been hit. I am saying that a child who hits will very likely then hit. There is a definite distinction here.)

So much of the work with your child concerning anger management issues is about impulse control. So much of the work with your child concerning anger management issues is about helping your child learn to put their angry feelings into words. It is extremely important that the adults in your child's life model impulse control and verbalize challenging feelings. Spanking is counter to these goals and counter to this model for anger management for your child.

PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AT HOME & IN THE CLASSROOM: A DETAILED PLAN FOR WAGING PEACE

Guidelines: Biting, Hitting, Kicking, Temper Tantrums & Hurtful Words

It is important that you have read [Part 1: Your Child's Angry Feelings And Angry Behavior](#) and the previous sections of [Part 2: Anger In-The-Moment: Words, Skills, And Techniques](#) to provide a rich and full context for the following suggested plans.

One-year-olds bite and hit and kick. Two-year-olds bite and hit and kick. Less often, three-year-olds bite and hit and kick. Four-year-olds who bite and hit and kick are starting to push the envelope. Your child explores their world through their senses, initially through their mouths and then, as they mature, through their hands. This oral and tactile means of learning comes naturally to your young child and is often your child's first mode of communication in high-adrenaline moments.

One of the most challenging issues in working with your young child is to help them control their impulses, be they oral or tactile. Helping your child put their physical expressions of anger and frustration into words is a huge undertaking requiring a huge developmental step. This takes time and patience and adherence to a specific plan that focuses on changing specific behaviors.

A 21-Step Detailed Plan for a Young Child Who is Hitting at Childcare

1. WAGE PEACE

When I work with children who are physically aggressive at home or in a classroom situation, I think of our work as waging peace. That is the kind of focus and dedication that is needed to guide your child toward more mature, more socially appropriate behavior. It takes a great deal of time, effort, focus and dedication to change a child's behavior. We adults must modify our behavior—and this can be very challenging—in order to modify a child's behavior. This can be accomplished by having specific guidelines and a specific plan.

2. DON'T LABEL YOUR CHILD

Don't call your child "a biter" or "a kicker." Labeling your child makes it too easy to ignore the important details and not look closely at each situation. Your child is going through a phase where your child sometimes bites and sometimes kicks—that is a phase that you will help move them beyond.

3. NOTICE DETAILS, DETAILS, AND MORE DETAILS

Re-shaping challenging behavior is in the details. You and the childcare staff need to have written goals for desired behavior and a specific plan—what everyone will do and what everyone will say—in given situations.

Behavior charts in the classroom aren't helpful for changing a child's behavior, although some parents find them helpful in understanding their child's behavior. Usually they are too general, without specifics of behavior, to be of use. To say that a child had a good day or a bad day is not helpful—often your child doesn't even know what behavior is expected of them or what they did wrong and what does good and bad mean? The really helpful information is in the small details...what occurred, what precipitated it, who was involved, what was the time of day and what was happening in the classroom, where were the teachers, etc. What was the frequency of the behavior, the intensity of the behavior, the duration of the behavior?

It is important to know all of this information. It will help with many issues, including: is this negative attention-getting? And what can be done to provide positive attention from you or your child's teacher to offset possible negative attention-getting? Is there a pattern here that would be helpful? What helped deal with this behavior? What didn't help with this behavior?

4. IDENTIFY YOUR CHILD'S POSSIBLE TRIGGERS

Try to identify possible [triggers](#), as outlined in Part 1 of this article so that you may be able to identify a pattern in the behavior. This allows you to anticipate a situation or restructure a situation so that the triggers will not be present. For instance, if your child refuses to eat breakfast on some mornings, but then hits in daycare when they may be hungry and out of resources, you can bring a Ziploc bag of car snacks or daycare snacks for your child to munch on throughout the morning to avoid a blood sugar drop that may lead to aggression.

5. EXAMINE YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AT HOME & AT SCHOOL

Young children are very responsive to their physical and visual and sensory environment. At home or in the classroom, are the lights too bright and overstimulating? In the block corner in the classroom, is it too much out of view so that supervision is difficult and a teacher cannot stay on top of a situation? Are there enough tactile experiences—a sand table indoors, playdough—that a child's tactile needs are being met? Is a nearby classroom too noisy and contributing to the frustration in your child's classroom? Are there age-appropriate toys that interest your child? Is there a way to structure a physical or social situation or environment to avoid conflict situations?

6. EVALUATE YOUR CHILD'S ACTIVITIES AT HOME & IN THE CLASSROOM

Is your child's school program developmentally-appropriate? (see NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practices brochures and books at www.naeyc.org). At childcare, is your child encouraged to participate in group activities, but allowed to choose not to participate? In addition, sometimes an adult's physical presence can calm a situation—are you or your child's teacher physically present in anticipation of certain situations that may cause problems? Is your child's schedule at home and at school alternating between quiet and busy activities? Is your child overscheduled? Does your child get enough sleep? Is the transition from home to childcare in the morning unhurried or is it stressful?

7. KEEP YOUR CHILD'S MOUTH OR HANDS OR FEET BUSY.

If your child tends to bite, keep their mouth busy, either with a pacifier attached to their shirt with an elastic band or with a bagel or with a gel gum soother or, at an appropriate age, chewing gum. If your child tends to bite, they may be seeking oral deep pressure and may need to eat crunchy foods to satisfy some oral cravings; if this seems to be the case, you should have your child evaluated by an occupational therapist (see your pediatrician for a referral).

If your child tends to hit, keep their hands busy. Have playdough to push and pound or encourage them to carry a soft object. Keep them building with LEGOS and painting and crafting and throwing a ball.

If your child tends to kick, have them remove their shoes—your child won't kick if it hurts them as much as it hurts the other person.

8. PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY 5 MINUTES!

Catch your child being good. Provide positive reinforcement. Appreciate the appropriate behavior. Constantly. Every 5 minutes. Again and again and again. When we change our behavior and response to respond in positive moments, powerful changes occur. This isn't easy, but it is necessary!

9. PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY 5 MINUTES!

Take charge of the power we have in changing our child's behavior. This guarantees that the temper tantrums aren't negative attention-getting.

10. PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY 5 MINUTES!

Again and again and again. "Gentle hands." "I like your gentle words." This requires a great deal of proactive engagement on the part of adults!

11. DEVELOP A MENTAL ANGER BOX FOR YOUR CHILD

When I taught preschool, I incorporated the [Anger Box](#) concept into my classroom, where I had a mental Anger Box in my head (a physical Anger Box would have been a sharing nightmare!). Since young children are often frustrated or angry or out-of-control, my goal was that, within the first six weeks of school start-up, I would have one technique in my mental Anger Box for each child, one proven technique that helped that particular child deal with their frustrations and provide a socially appropriate outlet so that they could pass through their angry feelings.

I soon developed a large number of items in my mental Anger Box, usually fifteen if there were fifteen children in the classroom, as each child had their own particular way of working through their anger. Once I found a specific technique that worked for a specific child, it usually became the tried-and-true strategy that was the go-to technique.

12. PRACTICE ANTICIPATORY STRATEGIES AT HOME & AT SCHOOL

Incorporate the [Slow-Medium-Fast Game](#) for impulse control throughout your child's day at home and have the staff use this game at childcare. At childcare, the Slow-Medium-Fast Game can be used during transition times, at snack time, and especially while singing and dancing at Circle Time.

13. DO 30-SECOND REHEARSALS EVERY HOUR

Once again, partner with your child in practicing putting angry feelings into words. Rehearsals in childcare settings can include several classroom children at the same time so that it becomes a group rehearsal.

14. SUPERVISION

To wage peace in this situation, supervision is needed. Teachers can tag-team in 30-minute intervals. One teacher can focus on your child for 30 minutes, providing a great deal of verbal encouragement for positive behavior ("*I like your gentle hands*" "*I like the way you are using your mouth for talking*"), being a physical presence within one or two feet of your child to calm a situation or intervene before issues escalate, and providing friendly supervision if your child does not want to participate in group activities.

If tag-teaming is difficult for the staff, you may want to hire a shadow, a person who establishes a relationship with your child and can be their partner in the classroom, incorporating and implementing the words, strategies and techniques that will help change your child's behavior. Shadows can be roving staff aides or shadows can be college students or mothers of children at the school that are hired by parents; it is important that any shadow be instructed as to the detailed plan to help your child.

15. SHORTEN THE CHILDCARE DAY

For several weeks, try programming your child for success by having them be in school or daycare for a shorter day, say only one or one-and-a-half hours if it is a half-day program or only two or three hours if it is a full-day program. All the suggested interventions are more tenable for staff for a shorter period of time and the shorter day may be less stressful for your child.

It is often far easier for your child to use impulse control and deal with frustrations for a much shorter day than for a longer day. You and the staff can evaluate after two to three weeks if the shorter, less demanding childcare time is helpful and then, if warranted, you can gradually progress to a longer time in childcare.

It should also be noted that your child may have fewer resources later in the week, so your child may be able to phase into a longer day on Monday, Tuesday, and/or Wednesday, but may be more successful if Thursday and Friday remain shorter days.

16. EXERCISE IN THE MORNING BEFORE CHILDCARE.

Have your child ride their big wheel or run or climb for 30-60 minutes before going to childcare. Exercise at home or at a park on the way to school or at the school playground before going into the classroom. Allow for a few minutes of quiet transition before entering the classroom. Releasing any pent-up energy can be so helpful and lead to a quieter, less aggressive day in childcare.

17. USE ENCOURAGERS IN MODERATION, IF THEY ARE HELPFUL.

I am not a fan of using stickers, but for some children stickers are effective encouragers. It is important that, if stickers are used, the encourager is clearly defined. It is also important that your child's process as well as your child's progress/behavior be rewarded, so that your child's attempts to change their behavior are recognized. Your child should receive a sticker for trying to be gentle with their hands for 10 minutes and then another sticker for actually being gentle with their hands for 10 minutes. This should be stated clearly to your child. All encouragers should be used in moderation.

18. EVALUATE WHETHER YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO BE PICKED UP BY A PARENT

Sometimes, after trying numerous strategies, the intensity of the consequences needs to be increased. A decision can be made and shared with the child that *"The next time you choose to hurt your friend, you are choosing to go home"* and have the child picked up from school by a parent. This should be very carefully considered, as for some children having their parent pick them up early from childcare and spend time with them is positive reinforcement and not a consequence that is effective in deterring their behavior.

19. RE-STRATEGIZE AFTER 2-3 WEEKS OF WAGING PEACE

Careful attention should be paid in terms of the question: Has there been progress? If there has been no change in the frequency, intensity, or duration of the physical aggression, there needs to be re-strategizing of the plan. Also, some serious concerns need to be addressed: perhaps your child is not well-matched to the childcare program and/or perhaps a professional needs to be consulted to work with the child in the classroom and/or outside the classroom.

20. EXPECT PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Measure progress in terms of changes in frequency, intensity, and duration.

21. TRANSGRESSIONS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING & GROWTH

Rehearse appropriate behavior after a cooling off period. Bring compassion to the situation. Remember that "Young children do not always understand and remember the rules."

AGENDA FOR A PARENT-CHILDCARE STAFF MEETING FOR DEALING WITH PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

All of the previously discussed guidelines, words, strategies, and techniques from Part 1 and Part 2 are used to wage peace with a child who is hitting. The following outline provides an agenda for a parent-childcare staff meeting to establish a detailed plan for dealing with physical aggression in the childcare setting that is consistent with the plan being implemented at home.

1. The Child
 - a. Special Needs/Services/Assessments: Share these with childcare staff
 - b. [Triggers](#): Allergies? Medication? Nutrition? Family Stress?
 - c. [Home strategies](#): rehearsals, more exercise, more one-on-one with parents, [Slow-Medium-Fast Game](#), [books](#) about angry feelings, [feeling notes](#)
2. Childcare Strategies: Review Detailed Plan
 - a. Goal: Put angry feelings into words; physical aggression to verbal expression
 - b. Identify triggers: time of day, particular child, section of classroom, activity?
 - c. Positive encouragement for proper use of hands/mouth/feet—every 5 minutes: *"Gentle hands/mouth/feet."* *"Great control."* *"I like how you are using your hands/mouth/feet for ____."*
 - d. [Exercise](#) or stress reduction exercises offered frequently
 - e. Close supervision at block corner and on playground
 - f. Close supervision at transition times: before, during, and after transitions
 - g. Transgressions are opportunities for learning: frequent rehearsals
 - h. Shorter day?
 - i. Tag team or shadow for close supervision?
 - j. [Note progress](#) in terms of changes in frequency, intensity, duration; progress may be weekly rather than daily given the ups and downs that can occur day-to-day
 - k. Daily communication with parents: phone, notes, email, or voicemail, with many details

PART 2 SUMMARY

Anger happens. The goal for your child is to put their angry feelings into words. A parent's goal is to be emotionally partnered with their young child to help their child acknowledge and accept their angry feelings. A parent's goal is also to be behaviorally partnered with their young child to help them channel their angry behavior into socially appropriate outlets.

The [A-B-C-C Anger Model](#) is an in-the-moment strategy used to help you help your child channel their angry feelings into appropriate verbal expressions and physical outlets. The A-B-C-C Anger Model helps your child progress through the [Six Levels of Angry Expression](#). Time-outs and spanking are not recommended strategies.

A [21-step detailed plan](#) for waging peace with your child's physical aggression, both at home and in the classroom, is important to help your child learn to express their angry feelings with words. [An agenda](#) was presented for a meeting between parents and childcare staff to help in providing classroom strategies to work with physical aggression, strategies that are consistent with strategies being used at home.

It is not easy for your young child to learn to manage their anger, but with your help with in-the-moment words, strategies, and techniques, you can partner with your child to help them put their angry feelings into words.

FAQ

Q. My child is being bullied at daycare. What should they do? What can I do?

Bullying is an adult problem. Adults need to be very present and very aware of bullying situations and they need to intervene with strong limits on what is acceptable behavior between children. Bullying often occurs during free play time or during outside play, so staff need to be very aware and present before situations arise.

If your child is being bullied, it is important that adults intervene and stop the bullying, even if this requires a great deal of supervision. If your child is being bullied, it is also important that you do rehearsals with your child and encourage their strong words so that they can stand up to the bully. "NO!" or "GO AWAY!" or "LEAVE ME ALONE!" are good phrases to rehearse with your child when you reenact a scene. Bullies stop when there is push-back from the child being bullied, so it is important that your child has a strong voice to defend themselves.

Q. My child is a bully at school. What should they do? What can I do?

Once again, bullying is an adult problem. Adults need to be totally tuned into potential problem times and be sure to provide adequate supervision to minimize the possibilities of a bullying situation. Playground time is an especially important time for supervision.

If your child is doing the bullying, it is important that you work with your child on putting their feelings into words. If your child is doing verbal bullying, it is important that you examine your child's situation to see if, somewhere in their environment, they are being bullied and that there is bullying behavior they are modeling. It is not unusual for children who are being bullied by siblings to then bully other children. In this case, it is important that you intervene and not allow bullying at home. If there is no sibling bullying, then explore your child's contacts and try to determine if another relative or friend or neighbor is acting in a bullying manner toward your child.

Some power-tripping behavior can occur naturally in young children, especially around four years of age when children are becoming even more social with their peers and they are into testing their mettle. It is the intensity and the frequency and the style of the bossiness that may turn power-tripping into bullying behavior. Regardless, this issue is still an adult issue and requires strong limits and interventions from adults.

Q. My child is fine at daycare—not at all aggressive—and then he comes home and beats up on his little brother or tries to hit me. What is going on? What should I do?

It is hard for young child to be good for a solid three, four, five or six hours (it's hard for us adults to be good for hours and hours!) Young children have limited resources and these resources may be used up in behaving appropriately at group care. This behavior can sometimes be considered the behavioral cost of childcare.

Be sure that the childcare program is a good match for your child and be sure that there is no bullying in the childcare situation. [See our article](#) on choosing the right school or childcare for your child.

Easing your child's transition to home may be helpful to the situation: try to provide physical exercise for your child after picking them up at childcare—either at the playground at daycare, at a park on the way home, or at playspace or lawnscapes near your home. Have a healthy car snack or drink for the transition home if your child seems hungry or thirsty. Allow your child some veg time in the car or at home; some undemanding down time or screen time of 30 minutes can be helpful in unwinding and becoming more grounded at home. A ritual or ritualized activity can help in this regard.

Q. My two-year-old son bit a child at preschool and broke the skin. Now they want to kick him out of school. What can I tell them to help the situation?

Age matters. Two-year-olds bite.

Bites, especially bites that break the skin, can cause a lot of anxiety and stress on parent's parts. Biting is such a primitive response that we adults often have an almost physical reaction to it.

It is important that the school review the context of the bite and the frequency of the biting. It is important that the school have a plan to re-shape this oral expression of feelings. Having a strong plan in place—and a plan for home that is consistent with a plan for school—should help with the behavior and should help calm the families involved. Following the [21-step plan](#) outlined above should help with the biting issue.

Q. My child keeps saying that she hates me and that I am stupid. It makes me so angry! What should I do?

First use the [A-B-C-C Model](#) of addressing the situation. Be sure to re-frame the hatred and accusations of stupidity as anger, which is true.

"I can hear that you are angry at me. I really like your words. Good control. I am wondering what I did or didn't do to make you angry. Let's talk."

From your description, your daughter sounds at least 3-1/2, so you can sit down with her in a cooler moment and have a brief discussion.

"I know that when you are angry you really want me to hear you. When you use the words 'hate' and 'stupid' I have a hard time listening. What words could you use that make it easier for me to listen?" Then you can be partnered with your daughter in coming up with a phrase such as *"I'm MAD!"* or *"I'm frustrated!"* and you can rehearse this with her several times a day, 30 seconds a rehearsal.

It might also be helpful to consider that your daughter may be hurt or disappointed and that she is manifesting these other feelings as anger.

In terms of why your daughter may be addressing her angry feelings at you, please see the answer to the next FAQ.

Q. My son hits and kicks me, his mom, but never hurts anyone else. Why is he picking on me? What should I do?

First of all, children often act most aggressively toward the person that they feel safest with—they know that you are there for them and that you won't leave. This is often the mom. Also, you may be the person that your child is around the most—you are in the line of fire and catch most of the heat coming from your child.

Be sure that you are spending enough one-on-one time with your child. Upping your one-on-one time with your child to two to three times a week can improve your child's behavior in just a few short weeks.

Use the [A-B-C-C Model](#) for addressing your child's anger in-the-moment. Also use the [anticipatory strategies](#) concerning your son's feelings and behavior. It's not easy, but developing these skills can help your son learn to control his anger and to put his angry feelings into words.

It is important to have age-appropriate expectations for your child. The younger a child, the less impulse control and fewer verbal skills; the older a child, the more quickly their behavior can be shaped. Being a partner with your child in helping them with their angry feelings and angry behavior provides a foundation for partnering with your child throughout your relationship.

SUMMARY: PART 1 & PART 2

Anger happens. [The goal for your child](#) is to put their angry feelings into words. There are many [anticipatory strategies](#) and rehearsals for working with your child's anger beforehand, as well as words and techniques for dealing with your child's anger in-the-moment.

[A parent's goal](#) is to be emotionally partnered with their young child to help their child acknowledge and accept their angry feelings. [Anticipatory strategies](#) such as rehearsals, one-on-one time, family vocabulary, positive reinforcement for using their words, feeling notes, and books can be helpful in working with your child concerning their angry feelings.

A parent's goal is also to be behaviorally partnered with their young child to help them channel their angry behavior into socially appropriate outlets. Anticipatory strategies for working with your child's behavior include [impulse control games](#), [Anger Box](#) strategies, and [stress reduction exercises](#).

The [A-B-C-C Anger Model](#) is an in-the-moment strategy used to help you help your child channel their angry feelings into appropriate verbal expressions and physical outlets. The A-B-C-C Anger Model helps young children progress through the [Six Levels of Angry Expression](#). Time-outs and spanking are not recommended strategies.

A [21-step detailed plan](#) for waging peace with your child's physical aggression, both at home and in the classroom, is important to help your child learn to express their angry feelings with words. An [agenda](#) was presented for a meeting between parents and childcare staff to help in providing strategies to work with physical aggression, strategies that are consistent with strategies at home.

It is not easy for your young child to learn to manage their anger, but with your help with anticipatory strategies and in-the-moment techniques, you can partner with your child to help them put their angry feelings into words.

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