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every parent's security blanket



**ANGER MANAGEMENT
FOR CHILDREN
PART 1: YOUR CHILD'S ANGRY
FEELINGS & ANGRY BEHAVIOR**

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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 is Part 1, a 35-page portion of the 66 page [full article](#). Part 1 provides an overview on anger, including its origins and triggers, and focuses on anticipatory strategies and rehearsals for dealing with your child's angry feelings and behavior before hot moments. (In [Part 2](#), a detailed 21-step plan for working with children's physical aggression at home and in the classroom is outlined. An agenda for a parent-childcare staff meeting for dealing with physical aggression is presented.

"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 [FAQ](#) 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 subtle or over bullying that is happening. 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 [Part 2](#)).

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. Each level indicates more maturity and even the smallest 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 [FAQ](#) 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.

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 PREVIEW

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.

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