

# Anger



Anger is a normal and healthy feeling which we all experience from time to time and the older we get the better we are at dealing with our angry emotions. Children can sometimes be scared by the feeling of anger. They may not always have the words or understanding to manage this emotion. Anger can be a way for them to show their frustration or unhappiness, or they may not even know what is making them feel this way.

## Why is my child angry?

It can be a response to feeling scared or stressed, or things not happening as they hoped. Parents and carers have an important part to play in helping them cope with these strong feelings. Children can learn to recognise and name strong feelings like anger. Children often need support to learn out how to handle the feeling and how to show it safely, as well as how to calm themselves down. Sometimes children and young people get angry about something that has just happened or something they have bottled up for a long time. As they grow up they have many challenges to learn to manage. Changes in school, friendships, exams and family relationships can all lead to feelings of anger.

## Things you can do to help

It can help for your child to learn about anger. You can support them do this.

- ❑ Talk about what's making your child feel angry – don't ignore it. Your child may not want to talk straight away and that is okay, but you can help to get them started by talking about what makes you angry. Choose examples that a child or young person can easily understand like 'leaving the towels on the floor in the bathroom'.
- ❑ It is hard keeping calm and caring for your child through a meltdown. Make sure you have time to let off steam and have someone to talk to too – being with your child when they are feeling angry is exhausting! Get support for yourself;
- ❑ Talk to friends and family.
- ❑ Relax when you can; it could be deep breathing, getting some fresh air or having a bubble bath.
- ❑ Taking care of yourself will help you keep being able to respond to and support your child when they are struggling with their feelings.

## Triggers

You know your child best. You may notice that there are some things that make an angry outburst more likely. Being aware of this can help you and your child avoid a meltdown.

Anger can be triggered by basic needs like hunger or tiredness. Or it may be that stress, new situations or family upsets or worries increase the number of outbursts. Things like teasing or feeling 'bossed about' by a sibling can also create these feelings. Sometimes stepping in to distract and support your child to manage their frustration can head off an outburst.

Knowing how best to respond to your child can be difficult when they are angry. The reasons and how your child shows anger will depend on a number of things like age, personality and understanding.

There is a pattern to anger. It can happen very quickly but if you can spot the stages you may be able to sometimes avoid the meltdown. Use some time after an outburst to think how it might be avoided next time. As your child gets older it is important that they get in the habit of reflecting on this too.

## Stages of an angry outburst:

### The Trigger

Try to intervene or distract your child when you first notice they are becoming irritable or angry. Give positive instructions and give time for your child to act on these.

### Escalation - it's getting bigger!

Try to change activity to diffuse the situation. Encourage your child to use calming strategies such as the "Take 5 breathing", counting to ten or a physical activity like star jumps

### Crisis Stage - meltdown!

Make sure everyone is safe and remain calm. Use a quiet, slow and clear voice so your child has time to understand what you are saying

### Recovery Stage - for you as well as your child.

Allow time for your child to calm down safely. Give them a simple calming activity such as colouring or drawing. Be positive, encouraging and avoid discussing what happened at this point.

### Post-Crisis Stage

Having a meltdown is exhausting - your child will need reassurance and encouragement from you as the chemicals in their body returns to normal. Having a meltdown is a really scary experience for a child - they may need you to reassure and comfort them.

## Who can help?

If you are concerned that you are unable to help your child control their anger, you could speak to their school or early years setting. Many children get angry and sometimes their anger can last a long time. Schools and early years settings will have supported lots of parents to help them understand the same issues.

If anger becomes regular and uncontrollable you may need to seek further help and support. You can contact a member of the 0-19 Healthy Child Programme by calling Just One Number on 0300 300 0123 or texting Parentline on 07520631590. Our opening hours are 8am-6pm Monday-Friday (excluding bank holidays) and 9am-1pm on Saturdays.

You can also contact your GP, who can help you access support.

## Helpful Links

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3514/young-minds-anger-issues.pdf>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anger/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/dealing-with-angry-child/>

<https://www.iustonenorfolk.nhs.uk/emotional-health/children-young-peoples-emotional-health/anger>

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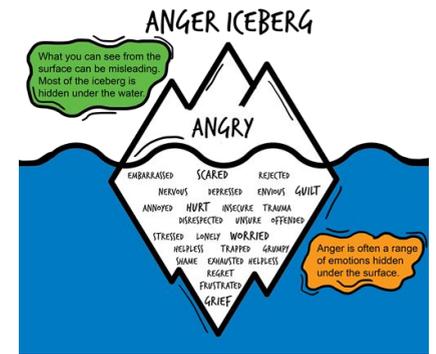


## The Anger Iceberg

It can be good to think of your child's anger like an iceberg. If your child is showing lots of signs they are angry, underneath the surface they could be feeling lots of other emotions.

Anger is sometimes just the quickest and easiest emotion to show. Think about the other things that could be happening for your child at the moment.

Talk with them about what they might be feeling underneath.



## Books on Anger

### Suggestions

- Feeling Angry! by Katie Douglass.
- Mindful Me: Exploring Emotions: A Mindfulness Guide to Dealing With Emotions by Paul Christelis and Elisa Paganell.

## Fight or Flight

Fight, flight or freeze is a normal reaction. It is our body's way of preparing itself to respond to danger. Back in caveman times it would have been the instinct that kept us safer when wild animals were around.

Fight, flight or freeze is an automatic response. It can happen when the danger is real or only in our minds. Our body's automatic reaction is either to;

- Stay and fight.
- Run away.
- Freeze and be unable to move.

It can be helpful to watch out for when your child has a "fight, flight or freeze" response. Be aware of any patterns or triggers. Flight or flight can be a sign of the anger emotion. This response is our bodies letting us know that there is a danger. We can stay and fight the danger or run away.

Being able to spot the signs of anger early can help your child understand what they are feeling. Talk about what your child feels when they start to get angry. For example, they may notice that:

- Their heart beats faster.
- Their muscles tense.
- Their teeth clench.
- They clench their fists.
- Their stomach churns.
- They feel hot.
- They want to hit or kick.
- They shout or swear.

## Let it out!

Helping your child find safe ways to let out anger can be good for all the family. Giving your child a space where they can go if they are feeling angry can also make them feel more secure.

Safe ways for your child to let their anger out:

- Listening to or playing music
- Writing down or drawing how they are feeling
- Hitting or punching a cushion or pillow
- Counting to 10 slowly
- Exercise such as kicking a football or jumping on a trampoline
- Tearing up an old newspaper or magazine
- Scribbling with a marker pen.

