

# VIP Value In Parenting

Volume 6, Number 2

Spring 2004

## Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours

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Six year old Pamela says... "I get angry when Joey doesn't play fair... when I get blamed for something I didn't even do... when Amy always gets her way... when I have to turn the TV off in the middle of my program... when I have to clean my room."

Dad says... "I get angry when my daughter doesn't listen." "I lose it when the kids leave their toys all over the house." "I've had it with the children bickering all the time!"

Feeling angry is normal. Anger is an emotion, not a behavior. It is experienced by everyone -- young, old and in between. Anger serves as a protection and a signal. It helps us to recognize a threat to our safety and well being and the well being of those we care about.

While it is a fact of life that we get angry, the way we express anger is a learned response. From the time we are born we experience feelings and learn how to respond to them from watching parents, family, friends, community members and the media. Children may witness anger at home, at school, and at the grocery store. They will see characters use violence as a response to anger on cartoons, reality shows, video games and in the movies.

### Dealing With Anger: What Kids Can Do

**"First, I need to figure out what my body does when I am angry."  
(my face gets red, fists clenched,  
stomach tight, crying, etc.)**

#### Next, take these steps:

- 1. Tell myself, "I'm feeling angry!"**
- 2. Take a deep breath.**
- 3. Decide what to do:**
  - ◆ **Tell someone about how I feel.**
  - ◆ **Find a word to describe my feelings.**
  - ◆ **Walk away for now.**
  - ◆ **Think of something different and special.**
  - ◆ **Squeeze a ball.**
  - ◆ **Write down my feelings or draw a picture.**
  - ◆ **Take 10 slow, deep breaths.**

Because it is so pervasive, helping children make sense of anger, and learn how to express it appropriately, is an important role for all adults who live or work with youth.

### Learning to Manage Anger

Warm family relationships can help protect children from acting out their anger in ways that hurt themselves or others. But family members, even in the most loving families, get angry with one another from time to time. When families communicate well and work cooperatively, anger can be resolved without serious problems. Handled poorly, however, anger gets in the way of good communication between parent and child. Anger without control can sometimes become dangerous and may even lead to violence. Regardless of why or when we experience anger, all of us must find ways to express strong feelings in constructive rather than destructive ways.

Dear Parents,  
You could help me practice these steps. Also, if I get angry at home, please remind me what to do. If I have trouble remembering, you could put up a chart with words or pictures to show me the steps. I may need your help to be safe and in control when I am angry. Thank you!

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Many adults are not good at managing anger or expressing emotions in healthy ways. Some adults see anger as an expression that should be suppressed because it leads to trouble and strife. Some grew up in families where anger led to explosive behavior. Others were taught that it's "not nice" to get mad. It is important that we as parents and caregivers learn to recognize and accept feelings of anger both in ourselves and in our children. It is equally important that we learn how to express anger in healthy ways, and teach these same skills to our children.

### Why People Get Angry

There are many reasons why people get angry. Some of the most common reasons include:

1. It keeps us from addressing other painful emotions such as disappointment, hurt and embarrassment. Children and adults will often lash out when they feel disrespected.
2. It helps us release pain, such as when we get hurt or get too tired.
3. It is one way to respond to too much stress.
4. It is a result of not being able to express or get what you really need.
5. It is a way to get attention (even if it is negative attention).
6. It is a way to test others' love and commitment.
7. It can result from alcohol or drug abuse.

### To Explode or Not To Explode

Anger is not bad. The way anger is expressed renders it appropriate or inappropriate. Everyone can identify explosive anger: red face, yelling, screaming, hitting, arm waving, seething and breathing hard. Many children suppress their anger because they have been told that anger is bad, were punished when they became angry or were ignored when they had legitimate reasons to be angry. Both reactions can be harmful. Expressing anger violently causes physical and emotional pain. Research shows that experiencing and even witnessing violence can leave "scars" on the brain that never go away. "Stuffing" feelings can lead to physical and emotional damage: head aches and stomach aches, heart disease, depression and mental illness. Handling anger in healthy ways is not just a good idea, it is critical to good health and relationships.

### What is Anger Management and Why Do We Need It?

Anger management is a set of skills that can be learned. Like any other skill it takes a lot practice to master. The goal of anger management is to help people control the emotional and psychological arousal that causes anger. The triggers that stimulate anger differ for each person. What "pushes your buttons" may not bother someone else at all. Learning to recognize your personal triggers and helping your child recognize theirs is an important first step in getting control.

#### There are many warning signs for anger. You may experience anger if you think you have been:

humiliated	controlled
insulted	intimidated
criticized	abused
treated unfairly	betrayed
degraded	ridiculed
endangered	excluded
made to feel helpless	made to feel incompetent
frustrated	putdown
ignored	accused
taken advantage of	threatened
punished	rejected
manipulated	attacked

#### There are also physical symptoms that may indicate anger. These include:

frowning	clenched teeth
muscle tension	knot in stomach
headache	nausea
face is flushed	heart beats faster
nervous energy	face is pinched
shoulders hunch	sweating
difficulty breathing or hyperventilation	

#### How you act also provides clues that you are angry. You are probably experiencing anger when you:

stamp your feet	throw things
yell and scream	curse
call people names	hit something
start fighting	raise your voice



## Five Tips On Cooling Yourself Down

- 1. Recognize your body signals.** Am I clenching my fists, does my face feel hot?
- 2. Acknowledge your feelings.** "I am really angry."
- 3. Stop.** Take time to cool off. Take some slow deep breaths, count to 10, go for a walk, run, clean the house, go for a ride.
- 4. Think.** What are my choices?
- 5. Get your anger out.** Talk to someone whom you trust, write down your thoughts, join a group of parents to find solutions, and/or take a parenting class.

## Five Tips on Cooling Kids Down

- 1. Acknowledge their anger.** "You sound (look) very angry." Try not to minimize or deny feelings by saying, "No reason to get mad about that." Remember, you can accept feelings without accepting bad behavior.
- 2. Stay calm.** Model the kind of behavior you would like to see. Hitting does not teach self-control.
- 3. Communicate.** Let your child tell you what is upsetting them. Use active listening by giving your full attention and restating what your child is saying. "You feel left out because Justin didn't give you a turn."
- 4. Help your child gain control.** Very young children need help to calm down. They may need to be held or distracted. Give children the words they need to express their feelings. Older children may need physical space to calm down. Suggest slow breaths, counting to 10, physical activity, writing or drawing.
- 5. Think:** whose problem is it? Can you do something to help? Is your child angry because they need more control, more independence, or respect from you? Is this something they need to work out themselves? For example, if they have an argument with a best friend ask them, "Do you want to talk about this, or would you rather work it out by yourself?"

## Create A Win-Win Home Environment

Adults often think that it is important to "let the children know who is boss." While it is critical that parents and caregivers act as adults, and provide for children's safety and security, it is also important that children feel that they have some "power" as an important member of the family. Here are some prevention tips to change a win-lose or lose-lose interaction into a win-win home environment. Following these steps should help everyone reduce their potential for anger.



When you're mad,  
about to fight,  
control your anger  
with all your might.

Take deep breaths,  
count to ten,  
before you try  
to talk again.

If you can't use  
a cool calm voice,  
to walk away,  
is a better choice.

- ◆ **Focus on prevention rather than reaction.** Think, what can I do to encourage desirable behavior INSTEAD OF how do I correct misbehavior?
- ◆ **Set limits in advance.** It is easiest for children to behave if they know the limits ahead of time.
- ◆ **Give choices you can accept.** Only offer choices that are acceptable to you. Remember that asking, "Do you want to help me?" or "It's time for bed now, okay?" is offering a choice. Decide in advance what is negotiable and what is not.
- ◆ **Describe the problem and give information; be specific about what you would like to see happen.** For example, say "when toys are left all over the floor, someone can trip and get hurt. Please pick them up and put them away on the toy shelf."
- ◆ **Speak respectfully.** Speak the way you would want to be spoken to. Avoid accusations, threats, sarcasm, put-downs and blaming.
- ◆ **Think about how you can make more time to spend with your children.** Much of misbehavior and angry outbursts are really cries for attention.

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## How to Handle Anger Between Children

### LEVEL 1: NORMAL BICKERING

1. Ignore it. Think about your next vacation.
2. Tell yourself the children are learning how to resolve conflicts.

### LEVEL 2: TENSION BUILDING

1. Acknowledge feelings. "You two sound upset with each other."
2. Reflect each child's point of view but don't take sides. "Sara, you want to keep holding the puppy. Steven, you want a turn."
3. Describe the problem with respect. "That's a tough one. Two kids, one puppy."
4. Express confidence that they can work it out. "I feel sure you two can work out a solution that's fair to you both and fair to the puppy."
5. Leave the room!

### LEVEL 3: SITUATION POSSIBLY DANGEROUS

1. Ask: "Is this a play fight or a real fight?" (Play fights may be alright. Real fights are not.)
2. Let the children know that play fights are by mutual consent. "If it's not fun for both of you then it has got to stop."

### LEVEL 4: SITUATION DEFINITELY DANGEROUS.

1. Describe what you see. "I see two angry children who are about to hurt each other."
2. Separate the children. "It's not safe for you two to be together. It's time to cool off."

Source: *Siblings Without Rivalry* by Elaine Mazlish and Adele Faber.

## What If Anger Doesn't Stop?

There is NEVER a good enough reason to take out one's angry feelings on another person in a violent way. Young children, in particular, are very fragile. **Never, ever, shake an infant or young child in anger. This could cause brain damage, or even death.**

It is also not acceptable for children to hurt themselves, a pet, or destroy possessions when they are angry. People who exhibit this type of behavior need special help to learn how to channel their emotions. When anger becomes a chronic problem for anyone in the family, it may be time to seek help from a mental health professional. Sometimes it requires that the whole family needs help to function and solve problems together.

**There are many community resources available to help. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance.**

### Community Resources for Parents and Children:

Cornell Cooperative Extension 845-344-1234  
Dispute Resolution Center 845-294-8082  
Orange County Dept. of Mental Health 845-2912600  
Mental Health Association 845-294-7411  
Orange County Safe Homes Project 1-888-503-HOPE  
Orange County Youth Bureau 845-291-2399  
Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome  
845-427-5442 x272  
Pius XII Youth and Family Services 845-294-5888  
Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Council 845-294-9000  
Parent Helpline (Prevent Child Abuse NY)  
1-800-342-7472  
Mental Health Action Team of Healthy Orange –  
Provide info on Anger Replacement Training (ART)  
845-568-5204

### Books for children:

*When Sophie Gets Angry-Really Really Angry* by Mollie Bang  
*Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods That Make My Day* by Jamie Lee Curtis  
*Alexander and the Horrible Terrible No Good Day* by Judith Viorst  
*How Are Your Peeling* by Saxton Freymann  
*Martha's Mad Day* by Miranda Hapgood  
*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Hanks  
*Feelings* by Alike  
*Sometimes I'm Bombaloo* by Rachel Vail

### For more information check out these websites:

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)  
[www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)  
[www.actagainstviolence.com](http://www.actagainstviolence.com)  
[www.angrykids.com](http://www.angrykids.com)  
[www.learningpeace.com](http://www.learningpeace.com)  
[www.parentingtoolbox.com](http://www.parentingtoolbox.com)  
[www.myparentime.com](http://www.myparentime.com)

## VIP Value In Parenting

For more information on parenting education and/or the Orange County Parenting Coalition Action Team, contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 845 - 344 - 1234.

[www.cce.cornell.edu/orange](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/orange)

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**Editorial Staff:** Denyse Variano: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orange County; Stephanie Sosnowski, Maternal Infant Services Network.

**Graphics:** Nancy Karp, Cornell Cooperative Extension, O.C.

**Funding / Distribution:** Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, National Accounts Division, Middletown, NY; Orange County Partners for Children, a component of Healthy Orange, Inc.