



beat that anger!

Your child may not know how to reign in his feelings of anger. Help him learn to calm down. by **APARNA SAMUEL BALASUNDARAM**

ANGER, like any other emotion, is normal and part of the human experience. In fact, when expressed appropriately, it is a useful emotion. As Mahatma Gandhi aptly said, “Anger controlled can be transmitted into a power that can move the world.” So a child feeling anger is absolutely normal, but what becomes crucial is how he reacts to this feeling.

As a parent, it is essential that you do not judge, label, or shame your children’s intense emotion. Instead, by staying calm and making an effort to help them regain control, you are demonstrating that you are not against them, but their behaviour. They then view you as part of the solution, and not the problem.

Over the last two decades, I have worked with many families

where anger in children seems to be a repetitive theme and an emotion that is getting more prevalent. Here are three steps that will guide you in helping your child manage that anger: The Why helps you understand the causes; the How tells you how anger is manifested; and the What are things parents can do to help their child feel in control and be the boss of his anger!

SHUTTERSTOCK

→ the why of anger

The first step is to understand the reasons why children get angry. Anger is usually a defence against a deeper sense of hurt, frustration, shame, jealousy, or rejection. When these feelings become too intense for a child, she might act out her anger in a way that causes pain to herself and to others. For example, a child could get angry with her parent (who she perceives as unfairly disciplining her), or with a sibling (who does not share), or with a bully (who teases her).

→ the how of anger

Anger is manifested in many different ways. The classical impression is that of a volcano erupting. So screaming, hitting, and throwing things are stereotypical ways in which it is manifested. Equally common, and often not taken as seriously, is when anger is inwardly-directed towards the self—crying, locking oneself up in the room, hitting oneself, clenched teeth, and holding one’s breath.

Depending on your child’s personality and perhaps the situation, a child might respond in either an externally, or internally-directed way. Help your child be aware and identify these ‘warning’ signs as they act as red flags that he is getting close to losing control of his anger.

→ the what of anger management

Here are three key strategies to help your child deal:

● **the stop sign** When your kid identifies the warning signs, tell him to close his eyes, and imagine a ‘STOP’ sign in his mind. This sign acts as a reminder, and is a symbolic visual that he has to ‘stop’ and break the flow of

stop the fireworks

Take a look at these preventive strategies and give them a shot.

* My anger chart

Do a fun family activity where your child can make a chart of constructive ways to handle her anger. Encourage her to draw or write these out as this gives her a sense of ownership. Post this chart at a visible place, like on the refrigerator or near her bed.

* I am a problem solver

Another strategy is to help your child stop, think, and find a plausible solution, sometimes even before the problem arises! So, if she gets angry every time her younger sister grabs her toy, talk about alternate solutions. She could play in another room where her sister will not disturb her, or she could give her another toy to play with. Involve your child in this problem-solving process, so it empowers her with the skills to look for solutions even when you are not around.

negative emotion. Help a younger child label his feelings. You could say something like, “Ayush, you’re getting upset. Mummy (or Daddy) is here to help you. We can make this better. Let us first ‘STOP’ and calm down.”

● **regain control** Now that the ‘STOP’ sign has disrupted the flow of anger, the next step is to start regaining control. Teach your child to use some calming strategies, like taking deep breaths, drinking water, distracting herself with music, art, or throwing a ball. Avoid switching on the TV or giving her screen time to calm down with, as you are inadvertently sending her a wrong message that “When you get angry, you earn screen time!”

● **the empathy hat** Empathy is the capacity to see things through another’s point of view. Children as young as 2 years can show empathy, but they require your example. Help your child realize that just as he wants his view understood, so does the other person. So when 8-year-old Arjun’s toddler brother Rohit grabs

the toy car he was playing with, Arjun may grab the toy back, and also land one whack on Rohit’s head! Use this as an opportunity to talk about the ‘empathy hat’. Tell Arjun that while you understand how he feels, hitting back is not the solution. Instead, ask him to put on the empathy hat and think about how he would feel if he had been hit. Also talk to Rohit about how he would feel if Arjun had taken away his toy. This mutual understanding will lessen sibling fights and teach them a way to deal with feelings of anger. When you see your kids using the ‘empathy hat’ concept, positively reinforce it with encouraging words.

Remember, anger is completely normal and merely telling our children, “Stop getting angry!” doesn’t help. Rather, help them to deal with their anger in a safe and constructive way. And model the same behaviour yourself first! ●

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