

Talking through angry feelings

The following examples are for families to use at home. They are most suitable for older primary aged children. The methods described can also be adapted by school staff to help children cope with managing angry feelings at school.

Children who have trouble managing anger

Children lack strategies for thinking through the situations that are troubling them. They may find it difficult to know what is making them angry or to talk about their feelings. Talking with children in supportive ways about angry feelings helps to teach them effective ways of managing anger and builds positive relationships.

It is best to wait until the child is calm and relaxed to talk about angry feelings. When angry feelings are running high it is very hard for children to listen and think coolly. Parents, carers and school staff can help by encouraging children to explain their points of view and listening sympathetically. Being able to talk about angry feelings allows children to feel understood and supported. It helps them to think more calmly and find better solutions.



How to talk through children's angry feelings

The following example shows some possible ways a parent or carer might talk with Dylan, who has come home from school grouchy. He is rough with his younger brother and gets angry when he discovers that a toy is missing. Then he gets angry when his mother asks him to help. Here his mother persists, gently but firmly, with getting Dylan to say what he is really angry about. She talks to him about ways he could manage his feelings and deal with the problem.

- Acknowledge anger and encourage the child to explain what it's about:
"Are you sure you're not angry about something?
You seemed really angry when you got into the car."
- Empathise with the feeling – but don't excuse aggressive behaviour:
"So, you were upset because your friend blamed you for losing his football."
"You must have been really mad to treat your brother like that."
- Ask about the effects of angry behaviour – on others and on himself:
"How do you think your brother felt when you yelled at him?"
"How did you feel after you behaved like that?"
- Teach or reinforce ways of managing angry feelings:
"What could you do to cool down your angry feelings so you can think it all through?"
- Discuss ways of solving the problem that has led to angry feelings:
"How can you sort it out with your friend?"
"What could you say that would help him understand how you feel?"
- Support your child's efforts to solve the problem:
"How did it go?"
"Would you like me to help with...?"
- Notice and praise efforts to manage anger:
"I like the way you kept your cool with your little brother when he took your stuff."

It is best to wait until the child is calm and relaxed to talk about angry feelings.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



Principals Australia Institute
Learning. Leading.