



Top Tips on Managing Frustration and Anger

All children (and adults) have difficulty managing frustration and anger sometimes.

Anger is not a 'bad' emotion - feeling angry is a normal part of being human! At times feeling angry about something is actually helpful – anger is an emotion that can encourage us to take action and try to set right something that is unfair or unkind. But when our children are frustrated and angry a lot, this can make them unhappy. Fortunately, there are lots of ways to understand and respond to anger that may help. If you'd like to find out more, check out 'What to Do When Your Temper Flares' - a workbook by Dawn Huebner.

Why do children (and adults) get angry?

It can be helpful to think of anger like an iceberg, as most of an iceberg is hidden under water. When we feel angry, there are often other emotions hiding underneath!

The emotion we feel first might be sadness, fear or embarrassment – but those emotions can feel so uncomfortable that we start to get angry instead.

It can be easy to see a child's anger, but more difficult to see what is hiding underneath. Next time you notice that your child is angry, ask yourself - *what is my child feeling underneath?*



The Anger Volcano



Sometimes it might seem like anger erupts out of nowhere – it might be really surprising and it can seem hard to do anything about it. But actually, even if the eruption happens suddenly, pressure has probably been building up for a long time!

Ask yourself, *what might have led to this build up?*

Some common examples include friendship difficulties, lack of sleep, hunger, school-related stress, feeling overwhelmed and big life changes, such as, moving house or starting secondary school.

Try helping your child to keep track of **what builds the pressure** – what kinds of things move their volcano closer to eruption?

Try talking with your child about **warning signs** – what do they feel in their body right before an eruption? What kind of thoughts do they get? What changes do they see (or you see!) in their behaviour?

It's not possible to avoid all the things that might build up pressure – but by helping your child **monitor their anger volcano** you can help them find new ways to respond.

Top tip: encourage your child to draw or make an anger volcano; this can be a really helpful way to start conversations about this tricky feeling!

Managing Angry Feelings - It is important that children understand that it is OK to feel angry; however, that they must learn safe ways to manage and express it.

One good way to cope with anger is to **take a break**. When we walk away from whatever's making us frustrated and do something else for a little while, it gives us a chance to calm down and think more clearly. When anger is building in your child, what could they do to take a break? Helpful examples might include going for a walking or having quiet time in their room,

However... anger is physical – not just emotional! When we feel angry our whole body might start to react. Our hearts race, tummies churn, breathing gets fast, muscles clench, and we might start to feel hot and flushed! Even if your child takes a break they might have so much anger built up inside their body that it's hard for them not to let it out!

Anger in the body can be managed by slowing down or speeding up...

Speeding Up

This needs physical activity – the faster the better! Think of things that your child could do to go fast...

Could they run in the garden or on the spot as fast as possible?

Could they do star jumps or as many jumps with a skipping rope as possible in two minutes?

Could you all put on music and dance the anger out?

Talking about anger

Talking about anger can be difficult - after an 'eruption', you might want to avoid 'rocking the boat' by mentioning it again. However, this can be a missed opportunity to teach your child helpful ways to cope with angry feelings.

When your child is calm again (this bit is really important!), reassure them that we all feel angry sometimes. Try to make the experience of talking about how to manage differently next time as comfortable as possible.

For example, by playing, drawing or going for a walk.

Give praise afterwards and share how proud you are of your child for talking about it!

Slowing Down

Slowing down breathing helps an angry body to slow down, too. You can try these ideas along with your child to help them practise!

Breathe in slowly through your nose while you count **1... 2... 3...**
Breathe out slowly through your nose or mouth while you count **1... 2... 3... 4...**

If your child finds it hard to just sit and breathe, they might find it useful to breathe while they **stretch** or **squeeze**.

Stretch: stretch your arms up over your head while you take a deep breath in (**1...2... 3...**) and slowly let it out (**1... 2... 3... 4...**); bend forward at the waist and stretch towards your toes while you take a breath in and out; put your arms out to the side and twist at the waist until you're looking over one shoulder, then twist the other way, taking a breath in and out each time.

Squeeze: get a big pillow and wrap your arms around it. As you breathe in (**1... 2... 3...**) squeeze it tight! As you breathe out (**1... 2... 3... 4...**) stop squeezing and let your whole body relax. Try this for five breaths in and out.

Remember – we learn new skills best when we are calm and relaxed, so try to practise these slow down techniques a few times a week. This will ensure that they are ready to be used when needed!

Problem solving

Problem solving – thinking of new ideas that might help, weighing them up to decide which one to do, and putting it into action – is a really important skill for young people to practise. You can help your children to learn this by not just solving the problem yourself, but **encouraging them to think of different ideas on how to manage anger and frustration**, and **talking about which one might be best to try next time**.

BUT... remember to strike when the iron is cold!

When anger is at its hottest, it's really hard to think and problem solve! If you try to talk to your children about problem solving right away they might just get fed up all over again. Give them time to cool down first!