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Anger Management

Story thanks to
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taming the dragon

Children often feel confused, anxious, hurt, disappointed, frustrated and angry in their efforts to deal with the world around them. Their age, temperament and emotional maturity will largely dictate how they handle these intense emotions but other influences include how anger has been role modelled in the home.

Children's anger becomes a problem when it is too intense, too frequent or too disruptive. When children know they can regulate their emotion they gain a sense of self-control, self-esteem, and mastery.

Here are some tips on how to teach your child to manage their emotions:

[1] Triggers

Tantrums in pre-schoolers may be caused by frustration that they can't do it or have it "now", an inability to coordinate a new skill, difficulty in expressing their needs, pain, hurt, disappointment or because they are just too tired or little to do what they want.

In older children triggers are harder to identify, but communicating with your child and writing down or drawing all the things that upset them is a great start.

[2] Emotional responses

Start using a rating system for your child's anger with 1 being 'perfect calm' and 10 being an 'explosion'. This usually engages children as they love an easy to use rating system. Drawings and messages combining actions with thoughts, words and feelings make it more fun and helpful.

[3] Soothing techniques

Older children need to develop ways to cope with their emotions on their own. Help them

identify a list of things they can do in different settings to reduce frustration. This may include both physical and non-physical activities. When your child uses one of these techniques, use praise to motivate them to use them again. Parents can also help by role modelling their own relaxation strategies.

[4] Language

Giving pre-schoolers appropriate words to use helps regulate emotions. Older children can often write or draw out their frustration to ensure that they are heard.

[5] Problem solving strategies

Once emotions are back in control, look at what's causing your child's anger. A family problem-solving worksheet or white board is useful, or a regular family meeting will ensure that your child gains the valuable skills of flexibility, compromise and conflict resolution.

[6] Underlying causes

Anger in children can often be a symptom of a deeper issue. This will need to be identified and remedied for a child to achieve more balanced emotional reactions. For example:

- **ANXIETY:** When the child has underlying anxiety, often the inappropriate anger responses are limited to the home and family environment. Consequently their teachers and friends see a

perfectionist 'in control' young person whereas the family sees the dragon.

- **DEPRESSION:** An irritable, agitated, cranky and fatigued mood on more days than not, can be the basis of an underlying sadness and viewing the world negatively. Angry outbursts are often followed by guilt and remorse.

- **LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES:** A child with explosive violent rages can have a language processing difficulty coupled with inflexible thinking patterns. Often this child also has organisation and planning problems as well as social difficulties caused by their 'it's my way or the highway' approach to their friends.

- **LEARNING:** Children who are experiencing learning difficulties at school will often react in anger in many situations as their self-esteem is battered for six hours a day in the classroom.

- **SOCIAL:** Being bullied or having poor peer relations can result in angry explosions due to an underlying frustration in their social life.

- **FAMILY:** Instability in the family causes children to feel a loss of control and insecurity and often leads to anger. Separated families, particularly those in conflict, may cause children to be angry and defiant.

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