

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Recognizing and Dealing with Your Child’s Anger or Aggression

From the toddler stage onwards, all children feel and express anger occasionally. This is normal and can usually be managed with parental guidance and clear communication of limits. Sometimes, however, a cycle of inappropriate anger develops and begins to be expressed in unhealthy ways that call for intervention.

It is painful for a parent to accept when this line is reached—we all want to think our children are perfect and lean towards the belief that our children will out grow even the most serious of issues. However, we need to recognize that when left unchecked, problems such as excess anger are likely to spiral into increasingly angry, violent or destructive behavior.

Learning to accept that a problem exists is the first step to understanding the causes and finding great solutions.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Take an honest look at your child. If it's clear that a problem is developing, try to stay calm and recognize that you don't have to face the challenges alone. There are many excellent resources to help you. Early intervention will help immensely in coming to a successful outcome. Here are some tips to get you started:

Signs to watch for:

- Loss of temper on a daily basis
- Frequent punching, hitting, kicking
- Physical fighting with siblings and in school
- Bullying, including name-calling
- Belligerence when thwarted
- Overt defiance
- Association with trouble-makers
- Abusive language
- Destruction of property
- Cruelty to animals
- Self-mutilation
- Threats of violence or plans for retaliation
- Alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Threats of retaliation
- Worsening school performance
- Trouble sleeping
- Risk-taking behavior

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Possible causes for this kind of behavior can include:

- Depression and anxiety
- Frustration over school or social performance
- Having been a victim of physical or sexual abuse
- Having been a victim of bullying
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Excessive exposure to violence in the community, at home or in the media
- Genetic tendencies
- Brain damage from head injury or illness

Ways to Help at Home

- Set a good example—stay calm and in control during arguments.
- Calmly express how angry behavior makes you feel upset—avoid levelling accusations at your child.
- Keep communication open—and listen more than you talk. Discuss how your child feels.
- Set clear limits on behavior. Make it clear that uncontrolled expressions of anger are not acceptable.
- Make it clear that name-calling is never an acceptable solution.
- Problem-solve how your child can learn to respond instead of just reacting.
- Show your child unconditional love. Make it clear that although you don't always like your child's behavior, your love and caring will always be there.

Seeking Outside Help

There are many potential avenues for support that you can take. Consider trying to:

- Talk to friends and family members. Do they see the same issues with the child? Do they have any insight as to what might be going on for him or her?
- Discuss the issue with your child's school.
- Talk to your child's doctor about your concerns. Medication is sometimes recommended in combination with therapy.
- Talk to your local Family Services Counselling Center—they may be able to advise on available resources.
- Make an appointment to talk with a counselor. They may have support to offer, and strategies to suggest.

If you feel unsafe at any point, seek urgent outside intervention. Urgent assistance can be received from your local distress centre or crisis line.

While we all feel and express anger sometimes, anger that seems out of control is often a sign of an underlying issues that needs attention. To keep yourself, your family and your child safe, find a constructive and supportive way to address the issue as soon as possible. By addressing inappropriate anger, you pave the way not only for a more tenable relationship, but for a healthier life for your child.