

ANGER AND AGGRESSION IN YOUNG CHILDREN CAUSES

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Anger is a primary emotion in reaction to such things as fear, hurt feelings, frustration, disappointment, and jealousy.

It can be associated with low self-esteem, fear of failure, or feelings of isolation. It can be related to situations in which a child feels anxiety because they have no control over the situation (divorce, a move, family problems).

In a young child, what an adult experiences as sadness a child may express as anger (loss of a loved one, separations, etc.) Children who are hungry or tired or crowded may display anger or aggressive acts. Aggression is the way some young children cope with stress.

A major concern for caregivers are children who display their anger and coping in aggressive ways. Aggression is any action that can cause injury or anxiety to others (hitting, kicking, yelling at someone) or attempts to destroy property.

PREVENTING PROBLEMS

- Give children positive attention for behaviors you want to reinforce. "I like the way you three are sharing the trainset". Give them your attention before they act out.
- Recognize that anger is a common emotion and it can be healthy when appropriately expressed. Use stories to normalize angry feelings and appropriate ways to deal with them. (see book list)
- Be a good role model by handling your own anger. Remain calm when children display their anger or aggression or their behavior upsets you.
- Provide many physical activities such as movement, exercise or outside play. In general, any large muscle activity that does not have to be tightly controlled is valuable for releasing emotions.
- Eliminate toys that encourage aggressive behavior (guns, bats, sticks, etc.).
- Reduce frustrating circumstances; have several of a favorite toy, do not make children wait for very long, keep rules to a minimum, provide choices.
- Stop some activities that may escalate and get out of hand before they start such as "angry monsters" or "gun play". Redirect these children to appropriate activities.
- Treat children with the respect you would give another adult.

DEALING WITH ANGER AND AGGRESSION

- First step, is to observe the situations that cause a child to strike out, tired? bored? wants something?
- Remain calm, use a quiet but firm voice, communicate to the child at eye level.
- Give children words to express their feelings toward children with whom they have a conflict.

State Emotion: "Not getting a turn can make you mad".

State Limit: "But, I can't let you hurt the other children".

Model: "Tell him how you feel (mad, angry), you want a turn". For preverbal children, help them label the emotion. For older children (3 and up) get them to express their feelings.

Problem Solve: With younger children (under 3) help them problem solve. With older children let them generate ideas and help them carry out the solutions (each ride the trike for 5 minutes).

- If a child strikes out for others reasons (tired, wants attention) briefly tell the child you cannot allow them to behave in such a way (be specific: hitting, yelling) then attend to the victim. You do not want the child getting too much of your attention for acting out.
- If a child does not calm down, you may need to remove the child from the situation (sitting on a chair, or going to another room - but only for a short time: minutes = child's age).
- Do not be afraid to physically hold a child if he is endangering himself or others. Hold him until he calms down. "You seem to be having a hard time today. I want to hold you for a while. Then you may play again".

- Sometimes puppets or dolls will help a child express their feelings - "tell Mr. _____ how you feel".
- Limit aggressive role models (TV, a parent or relative who plays very roughly with the child).
- Give children acceptable alternatives to expressing their anger. Activities may include:
 - * punching a pillow or punching bag * throwing bean bags * punching playdough * painting
 - * running * drawing their anger * screaming or yelling outside (not at someone)
 - * creating noise with a drum, piano, tambourines or bells * water play * sensory experiences
 - * cooking activities * nerf balls * put on rock music for dancing * classical music for calming down

Remember, ignoring aggression increases aggression by reinforcing that a child can get what they want by acting aggressively.

Children need to know that you will not allow them to hurt others and you will not allow others to hurt them.

BOOKS ABOUT ANGER AND OTHER STRONG EMOTIONS

EMOTIONS - ANGER

Alexander, Martha G. And my mean old mother will be sorry
 Aliko. We are best friends (about moving)
 Austin, Martot. Growl Bear
 Boegehold, Betty. Daddy doesn't live here anymore (divorce)
 Hazen, Barbara. Two homes to live in (divorce)
 Craft, Ruth. The day of the rainbow
 Du Bois, William Pene. Bear party
 Erickson, Karen. I was so mad
 Hapgood, Miranda. Martha's mad day
 Henkes, Chester's Way
 Hautzig, Deborah. Why are you so mean to me?
 Llonni, Leo. It's mine!
 Sharmat, Marjorie. Attila the angry.
 Simon, Norma. I know what I like
 Simon, Norma. I was so mad!
 Viorst, Judith. Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day
 Watson, Jane Werner. Sometimes I get angry
 Zolotow, Charlotte. The quarreling book

EMOTIONS - HATE

Brunhoff, Laurent de. The one pig with horns
 Udry, Janice May. Let's be enemies
 Zolotow, Charlotte. The hating book

EMOTIONS - ENVY, JEALOUSY

Alexander, Martha G. Nobody asked me if I wanted a baby sister
 Cole, Janna The new baby at our house
 Kellogg, Steven Best Friends
 Zolotow, Charlotte. It's not fair

Resources: Carolyn Lima & John Lima. A to Zoo subject access to children's picture books

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