

Helping Your Teen Manage Anger

Objective

To identify ways to help your teen manage anger.

What to Know

Does it seem like you're always in a power struggle with your teen, or the frequent angry outbursts have you on edge? Perhaps strategies that worked when your child was younger are no longer effective.

Many teens get into trouble and have rocky relationships with family members because they are unable to appropriately manage their anger. Inappropriate expressions of anger can have serious consequences, but most teens have the capacity to learn better ways of coping. You can help them by supporting them in learning anger management skills.

Here are fifteen tips on how to help you and your teen constructively deal with their anger.

1. Be a role model by setting a good example. Modeling appropriate ways of dealing with anger is essential. Anger is a healthy emotion and it's OK to be angry. But if you are triggered and exhibit anger irresponsibly, you're showing your child how to react to anger in ways that might not be helpful. Ask yourself the following questions. Do you:

- talk through your issues?
- find solutions to your problems?
- apologize if you lash out when you're upset?
- react with patience and understanding when your teen is upset?

2. Set boundaries and establish clear rules. Teens thrive with clear boundaries and rules. It's your job to set appropriate boundaries to keep your child safe while helping them gain independence.

3. Be willing to compromise. Working with your teen and being flexible allows them to learn critical thinking, time management, and even assertiveness skills. In addition, your child will feel heard and understood.

4. Validate feelings. Validate your teens' feelings with love, respect, and understanding. Saying, "I understand why you feel that way," in a genuine and caring manner can sometimes lead to a less reactive response.

5. Expand the supportive circle. Ask other trusted adults for help when your teen is unable to talk to you. Your teen may wish to talk to an aunt, uncle, grandparent, teachers or coach.

6. Share decision-making. Teens often get angry when they are told what to do because they think they're old enough to know what to do, think you're micromanaging them, or believe you don't have confidence in them. You can ask them how they would like to be reminded to do tasks. You could text them or put a post-it note on the bathroom mirror as a reminder.

7. Reward them when they successfully manage their anger. Research tells us that positive reinforcement is much more effective than punishment.

8. Teach problem-solving strategies. Anger is often a sign that there is a problem that requires a solution, and problem-solving is one of the most important skills teens can learn. Here are five simple problem-solving steps:

- identify the problem
- brainstorm potential solutions
- evaluate the pros and cons for each solution
- choose the best option
- act on it!

9. Teach deep breathing exercises. Breathing exercises help deactivate the physiological arousal of anger. Here are some ways to practice this skill:

- blow bubbles or a pinwheel
- place pieces of cotton on a flat surface and blow on them so they move
- blow out a candle
- breathe in and breathe out with a closed mouth while humming
- breathe in for a count of five, breathe out for a count of seven

10. Encourage physical fitness. Exercise is a great way use built-up angry energy and release endorphins to calm down.

11. Take a break. Sometimes the best thing to do is take a break by doing one of the following activities:

- relax by reading a book, going for a walk, or listening to music
- create a calming corner or “calm down space” in your home
- give them a puzzle or fidget toy
- squeeze a stuffed animal or hit a pillow

12. Turn around unhelpful thoughts. Help your teen identify unhelpful, triggering thoughts and turn them around into more helpful or positive thoughts.

13. Creatively express angry feelings. Both writing and drawing can be used effectively to express and understand anger.

14. Identify triggers. Help your teen make connections between what leads to angry outbursts so they can have more control and manage their emotions in a healthy way. When you're angry, share what triggers you. Ask your teen what they believe triggers their anger.

15. Seek professional help. Sometimes it's helpful to seek professional advice from a counselor, parenting coach, or other professional – particularly if your teen has an anxiety disorder, exhibits uncontrolled anger or aggressive behavior, or if you are struggling with how to help your teen.

Remember, your teen’s brain isn’t fully developed, and they don’t always use their “thinking brain” to make rational decisions. They require your help to deal with anger. Using the above fifteen tips, you can help them identify the best ways to cope when they are upset.

What to Do

Refer to the above list and answer the following questions.

What are some ways you can model appropriate ways to manage anger? Be specific.

Is there a trusted adult (other than a parent or guardian) who can step in when your teen needs another perspective? Write down 2-3 names.

What are some ways you can share decision-making with your teen? Explain.

How can you reward your teen when they successfully manage their anger?

Do you think you need professional help to deal with your teen’s anger? Why or why not?

Do you think your teen is going through something in their life that you don’t know about? Explain.

Did something happen recently that might be contributing to their anger?

How are your teen's relationships with others?

Is your teen angry at school and at home? Are there specific situations that you see triggers your teen?

Do you believe your child's anger is a sign of a more serious problem (e.g., bullying, substance abuse, depression)?

For the next two weeks, use the following chart to track your teen's angry outbursts. Write down the date, what happened, and how you supported your teen during the episode. Finally, note how your teen responded and how they felt.

Date	What happened?	How did you support your teen?	Response and feelings after the outburst

What one technique helped your teen manage their anger the best?

Did this activity help you understand and support your teen? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
