

Kids driving you crazy? Try these science-backed anger management tips for parents

January 4 2023, by Alina Morawska



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You're running late for work, your eight-year-old can't find the homework they were supposed to have put in their school bag last night, your four-year-old objects to the blue t-shirt you'd prepared and wants the other shade of blue, and then you step on a Lego piece that didn't get packed away when you asked.

Even if you haven't encountered this exact situation, just thinking about

it might raise your hackles. Parenting comes with many emotions. Anger and frustration are not uncommon and may have been [exacerbated](#) by the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's OK for [children](#) to see parents experience and manage different emotions. But when getting angry, yelling and shouting are a default response, this can have [negative consequences](#) for children (and parents).

Here's what you can do instead.

When is anger a problem and what's at stake?

Anger is a problem when it is too frequent, too intense or when it disrupts your relationships.

Parental hostility has been associated with:

- [children's executive functioning](#) (their ability to think and reason)
- [relational aggression](#) (aggression toward others)
- [internalising problems](#); and
- [anxiety](#).

One study found children who received harsh verbal discipline were likely to experience [more symptoms of depression and behavioural problems as adolescents](#).

A parent's propensity to [react emotionally](#) can increase the likelihood parents will react more harshly, punish their child excessively, or smack their child.

Extensive research has shown smacking is harmful for children's development.

Reducing the risk of conflict

Parenting isn't easy and doesn't come with a manual. Many everyday situations can contribute to parents experiencing irritation and anger.

The best way to manage anger is to try to reduce the likelihood these situations will arise.

Parenting programs that focus on positive parenting practices, can improve the lives of [children, parents and families](#), decrease [parent anger](#) and [reduce the risk of maltreatment](#). Many evidence-based parenting programs are available.

Important strategies to reduce the likelihood of problems arising in the first place include:

- focusing on the positive
- building strong relationships with children
- communicating effectively
- praising children
- teaching children independence skills
- putting in place effective family routines
- having clear rules and boundaries and backing them up with appropriate consequences.

Looking after yourself

It is much harder to be calm, patient and persistent when parents' own needs are not met and when parents are stressed or under pressure.

An important aspect of managing emotional reactivity is to look after your own wellbeing.

Take time out for yourself, balance your work and [family responsibilities](#), and talk to your partner or other carers and support people about how you can get some time to yourself.

Strategies based on [cognitive behavioural approaches](#)—such as relaxation and breathing exercises—can also be helpful ways to reduce anger.

OK but I still need help managing my anger in the moment. What now?

So you've done the parenting program, you're looking after yourself and still you find yourself struggling to tame your anger. That Lego piece really hurt and how many times do you have to ask for things to be packed up anyway?

Sometimes even the best preparation and prevention strategies may not avoid a particular problem, so having a plan for what you can do in that moment is important.

When fury rages inside you, start by taking a few deep breaths. Focusing on relaxing muscles or counting to ten—anything to slow down your emotional reaction—can be helpful.

Remind yourself your child hasn't done this on purpose and that while it's frustrating, you *can* stay calm.

What we say to ourselves about a situation and why it happened can also increase our feelings of [anger](#).

Research shows the attributions we make—meaning the explanations or reasons we have for situations or for our child's behaviour—can play an [important role](#) in the way we react emotionally.

For example, if you think your child is deliberately trying to make your life miserable with their t-shirt choices, you are more likely to feel angry.

If, on the other hand, you say to yourself, "This is important to them and they're only four," you are much more likely to stay calm.

Try to catch the negative thoughts that come into your head in those situations that make you feel angry. Replace them with more helpful ones.

For examples, rather than saying "This is just not fair" you could say "This is upsetting, but I can deal with it." It might feel awkward at first, but give it a try.

Anger is a human emotion. It can motivate us to persist in the face of difficulties, can be a way of reducing tension and can act as a signal to deal with a stressor we're facing.

It can also cause harm to ourselves, our children and our relationships if it is not managed well.

Finding effective ways to positively manage those feelings of annoyance

and irritation is important to ensuring positive family relationships.

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