



**MY FAMILY
COACH**

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Helping Your Angry Child Calm Down



About My Family Coach

We all have times when we need some parent support. That's why I created My Family Coach, a free website giving you all the help you need for every stage of your child's development, from these first years, right through to leaving school, and everything in between.

We'll support you through the tough times, inspire you with new ideas, and share practical tips to make parenting that little bit easier.



About Jonathan Newport

Jonathan is an internationally recognised behaviour specialist with over 30 years of experience. He started his career in a mainstream primary school and it was here that he developed a passion for puzzle solving with children who were struggling to 'fit' in their own classes.

This led him to work across a range of primary and secondary schools, including 17 years leading Barnardo's largest residential special school.

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: Why your child feels angry

- Emotions work on a scale
- Calming down strategies
- Useful resource: The Ask

Chapter 2: Why is my child always angry?

- Triggers for anger
- Useful resource: Podcast

Chapter 3: Supporting your child when they feel angry

- Talking about their behaviour
- Useful resource: My Family Journal

Further help



Introduction

We all get angry from time to time. Anger is a natural emotion, and we can't (and shouldn't) stop it from happening. What we can do is to teach our children better ways to recognise their feelings and show them how they can calm themselves down in a healthy way.

Anger is a powerful emotion that can feel overwhelming, but there are lots of ways you can help your child calm down when they're feeling angry. We can also work on this ourselves to spot when we are feeling angry and do something about it.

Children can grow up feeling guilty, embarrassed, and have low-self-esteem because they can't "control themselves" when they feel angry. Instead of anger being seen as a "bad" emotion, you can help your child see that it's perfectly natural to feel angry at times, and help them learn to self-regulate when they feel this way.

Managing our feelings is called "self-regulation". This means:

- Your child can recognise and explain how they feel.
- They can take action before an emotion becomes overwhelming.
- They feel equipped with healthy strategies to help them calm down.





Chapter 1:

Why your child
feels angry

Many things can make your child feel angry. You might notice they seem more angry at times of increased stress, changes in their life, or if they're feeling worried about something.

Common reasons for feeling angry include:

- Pressure and changes at school – particularly the transition to secondary school
- Friendship problems
- Feeling worried or scared
- Hormonal changes in puberty
- Underlying issues, like bullying



Children can also learn angry responses if they see family members acting this way. Showing them you can self-regulate your emotions gives them a positive example to follow.

Emotions work on a scale

We don't just feel happy or sad, calm or angry. We can think of our emotions as being on sliding scales.

Using a 1-10 emotion tracker can help your child talk about how intensely they're feeling an emotion. A one on the scale would mean they feel completely calm. Scoring ten is the most angry they could ever possibly feel.

You could ask your child:

- What number out of ten do you feel right now? Why is that?
- What could make you feel an 8/10? What about a 2/10?
- How would you know you're feeling this way?

Using an emotion tracker helps them learn how their body feels when they are angry before they lose control. They can identify particular times and situations when they are more likely to feel angry and plan strategies to use when it happens.



Calming down strategies

Rather than reacting when your child is already angry, you can often spot the signs they are starting to feel this way and take action before they feel overwhelmed. Teach your child a few calming down strategies they can use when they start to feel angry. Every child is different, so experiment to see what works best for them. Praise them whenever you see them using a calming down strategy.

Popular strategies for calming down include:

- Slow deep breathing: There are great ideas for these online
- A sport or exercise they can do at home, like football practise
- Get outside for a walk or some fresh air
- Distract themselves with a calming activity or game
- Have a drink or a healthy snack
- Listen to music
- Colouring and drawing

If your child feels the need to do something physical when they're angry, find a safe way for them to release their emotions. Punching a pillow, throwing a ball against a wall, or ripping something up (with permission) are all ways to let out feelings of anger without hurting anyone.



Useful resource

If you struggle with big outbursts from your child when you ask them to do something, check out our free video series, called [The Ask](#) on the My Family Coach website. It's full of helpful ideas to help the whole family talk and listen to each other more effectively.





Chapter 2:

Why is my child
always angry?

Some children are placid, and nothing seems to annoy or upset them. Others have a “hot temper” and often feel angry. Their response can seem out of proportion to us. They might become furious over what seems to be a minor problem or concern.

When younger children feel angry, they can have big outbursts of emotions—we often call them tantrums, but really, it’s because they don’t yet have the language skills to communicate how they feel, and they don’t recognise their own emotions.

As children grow older, they may show they are angry in different ways:

- Slamming doors
- Stamping feet
- Screaming and shouting
- Ripping or breaking things
- Hitting and kicking at objects or people
- Speaking or acting aggressively
- Vandalism



We don’t want children to suppress these powerful feelings, but instead learn healthier ways to cope when they feel angry and recognise the signs of anger before they feel out of control.



Triggers for anger

Children feel angry for a wide range of reasons. Usually it's in response to a specific event and they eventually calm down. But some children often feel angry and it's more difficult to spot the cause.

If your child always seems angry, there can be a lot of reasons behind it:

- **Physical needs:** Being hungry, thirsty or tired can have a huge impact on your child's emotions.
- **A big life change:** Family breakups, going to big school, or moving home are examples of big life changes that can have an impact on their emotions.
- **Anxiety:** The "fight or flight" response means they can respond angrily when worried or feeling trapped.
- **Puberty:** Huge physical and hormonal changes can affect your child's emotions.
- **Low self-esteem:** Some children feel they're worthless or stupid because they're struggling at school or have a learning difficulty that isn't being supported.
- **Trauma:** Traumatic experiences can have a significant impact on emotions.
- **ADHD:** Children who struggle with impulsivity can quickly and frequently feel angry.
- **Communication difficulties:** Children who struggle to communicate their feelings may show physical behaviours when angry or frustrated.
- **Autism:** Some autistic children may find it hard to understand and communicate their feelings. They can be affected when their senses feel overwhelmed or because of sudden changes to their usual routines.



Useful resource

To find out more about anger, listen to our podcast episode [Behaviour & Anger](#) featuring expert guest Rachel Thynne, a teacher for an attachment-awareness setting for pupils with Social and Emotional Mental Health difficulties. She is also author of the book *Behaviour Barriers and Beyond*.





Chapter 3:

Supporting your child
when they feel angry

If you can see your child is starting to feel angry, you can listen, validate and empathise with them to understand how they feel. Sometimes this can help diffuse the situation before they get angry.

1

Listen:

Let them tell you about the problem without leaping in to solve it for them.

2

Validate:

Agree with them that this is a difficult situation. Avoid laughing it off or telling them it doesn't matter.

3

Empathise:

Put yourself in your shoes and imagine how it feels for them.

When your child has become angry, respond in a consistent and calm way. They can pick up on your emotions, so try to use a quiet voice, speak in short sentences and reduce how much you say. Give them some space and remind them you love them and you're there to help them. They won't be able to talk to you about their emotions when they're feeling very angry, so give them lots of time to calm down.

Talking about their behaviour

When your child is calm, talk to them about their feelings and behaviour. Name the emotion for them and help them recognise how their body feels when they are experiencing this emotion. Remind them that everyone feels this way at times and you still love them when they lose their temper.

You can explain how it made you feel when they behaved in a dangerous or unhealthy way. You could say, "When you screamed at me, it made me feel frightened. What would have been a better thing to do?" Help them plan healthier strategies they can use next time.

It takes time to learn healthy ways to release our emotions, so don't expect instant results overnight. Keep practising and praise them when you see them using the strategies you've agreed, even if they don't completely work at first.



Ideas for healthy strategies when they feel angry:

- Kick or throw a ball outside
- Go for a walk or run
- Use breathing exercises
- Counting down or in a pattern
- Get outside into nature
- Have a drink or snack
- Squeeze and squish a ball or play with a fidget toy
- Yoga exercises
- Punch a pillow



All children need exercise, but if your child often feels angry they can really benefit from plenty of opportunities to get moving. It gets their hearts pumping but can also make them feel happier. Encourage them to take part in sports, run off steam in the park, go on walks, and play outside.



Useful resource

Journaling is a useful way to spot patterns in your child's behaviour, particularly if you're not sure why they feel angry. [My Family Journal](#) is a free app that is great for this. You might spot particular triggers behind their behaviour, such as when they feel hungry, tired, or overstimulated by their environment.



Further help

If your child is often angry, hurts themselves or others, is getting in trouble at school because of their anger, or you just feel something is wrong, it's important to get help. If you or your child is in immediate danger, call **999**. Talk to your GP for further support and signposting to services available in your area.

For a range of useful resources, check out our popular [Calming Down Collection](#). It contains a wide range of Quick Reads, podcast episodes and blog posts to enjoy.

Being a parent is the hardest job in the world. But we've found information available online is often confusing, misleading, or just downright wrong. We're here to fix that.

My Family Coach is a free website full of expert support brought to you by Team Teach. We have over 20 years' experience helping schools, families, and health and social care sectors. We've transformed 8,000 schools and care settings, training over 100,000 people each year. We've even won awards for our training courses. Now we're here to support parents and carers, too.

Our website is full of helpful Quick Reads, podcast episodes and Video Talks with more added all the time. Come and see how we can support your family.

Register for free at myfamilycoach.com



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