



Control Issues

Managing Your Anger

No matter how much you love your child, there will come a time when you find yourself feeling frustrated, impatient, and even angry towards her. Although these feelings may seem scary at times, you should remember that anger is a natural emotion and that every parent experiences it. You will not harm your child by showing your feelings; in fact, doing so can even be helpful, since it can teach her about handling her own emotions.



You should not feel ashamed about your negative feelings, but you should try to control how you act on them. Here are some suggestions that can help you express difficult emotions in constructive ways.

Be honest with yourself and your child

- Allow yourself to feel angry. Ignoring your feelings will only cause them to build up and, perhaps, make you overreact in the future.
- Recognize when you are starting to feel frustrated. Become aware of what makes you upset so you can address a situation before your feelings explode into full-blown anger.
- Be clear about which of your child's behaviors are important to control and which you should let go. Controlling your child if she runs into the street is appropriate. Controlling how your child draws a cat, how quickly she walks or eats, or how she plays, is not.
- Choose your battles: decide which rules are absolutely essential and be flexible about the rest. How important is it that your child wear an apron when she paints? Is it worth a battle? Try to find an alternative that would avoid the confrontation, such as bringing a change of clothes to wear once the activity is over.



Use your words

- Tell your child how you feel and why. Be brief and specific in your explanation.
- Talk about your child's behavior, not her character. "I am angry because you poured water on the floor after I told you not to" is more effective than, "You made me angry because you were a bad girl."
- Stay in the present. Don't bring up past transgressions or make dire predictions about what will happen in the future if your child doesn't behave right now.
- Avoid overgeneralizing. Statements such as, "You're always messing up," or "I'll never be able to trust you again" are inaccurate and hurtful. Do not accuse, blame, or call your child names.
- Apologize if you say or do something you later regret. You will not lose your authority and you will be helping your child by teaching her that adults can make mistakes too.

Adopt your child's point of view

- Consider what your child may be thinking and feeling. Does she even know that what's she's doing is upsetting to you? Use your insights to change your perspective.
- Learn about your child's developmental stage so you can have realistic expectations about what she can and cannot do and about what you can and cannot control about her behavior.
- Realize that your child is usually just doing what comes naturally to her. If she runs away with a forbidden object, she may be acting on her desire to explore something that looks interesting, rather than deliberately breaking your rules.



Take a timeout

- Do not react in the heat of the moment. Take a deep breath, count to 10, or leave the room – just give yourself time to calm down and think.
- Do not resort to threats or physical force. Threats are unenforceable and physical punishments only teach children to resort to violence when they are angry. Both are scary for your child and neither is an effective or acceptable form of discipline.
- Seek social or therapeutic support if you have feelings that seem uncontrollable, frightening, or violent.

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