

The Child Who Seems Angry
Helping Children Manage Anger and Frustration
By Polly Greenberg

Dear Polly, It frustrates me that a child in my class seems angry so much of the time. He pouts, pesters others, screams, and gets enraged over real and imagined injustices. Of course he hits—and he throws things and scratches his classmates. Most of the children have happy days, but what can I do about him?

I think it's hard for many people to accept anger as part of a young child's range of feelings. We work so hard to make children happy, and we feel frustrated, even resentful, when they don't respond with 100 percent happiness all the time. We know in our minds that anger is a normal emotion and that we, too, sometimes feel angry. However, we also worry that maybe we aren't providing enough to give children happy lives.

Do a Self-Check

To see how well you are providing for this child, first check your classroom climate and schedule. Are you warm, friendly, and calm with him? It's natural to be less inclined to be warm with an angry boy than with smiley, bubbly children. However, he probably needs you to reach out to him more than do those children who are content. Provide acceptance and affection along with discipline.

Extend Play

With regard to your schedule, these days' teachers are so concerned about meeting a variety of standards that we may neglect children's need for extended periods of play. It's during play that we offer props and projects that enrich the experience and help children work through social problems (such as anger or acting out).

Remain Calm

The most effective way to help young children learn to manage anger is to remain calm, so as not to cause further upset. Then, we need to patiently assist them in dealing with altercations and other incidents in a nonviolent way, without hurling insults at their classmates. It's important to talk to the child's most mature self and show confidence in his ability to learn to control his anger, rather than emphasize his wrongdoings. At the same time, we need to (nonaccusingly) point out the child's role in starting or escalating problems.

Useful Anger-Management Tools

- (1) Read and discuss stories that focus on an angry child. Avoid lecturing. Rather, try to get each child to talk about a time when he was angry, and comment approvingly when a child mentions something he did to successfully resolve the issue.
- (2) Have this conversation again at group time on a day when there has been an angry flare-up. Ask children for ideas about the best things to do if they feel very angry.
- (3) Use a supplementary curriculum package that focuses on feelings on a regular basis.

(4) Get to know the parents of children who are particularly prone to anger. Get a sense of the child's home life. Ask if the child is often angry at home, and how parents handle it. If appropriate, include the school counselor or director in connecting the family with needed social services.

(5) As important as it is to work through an angry outburst with children, it's equally important to teach them: "It's over; we're finished talking about it." Being able to self-calm after resolving an issue is an important and valuable ability. ECT

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