

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

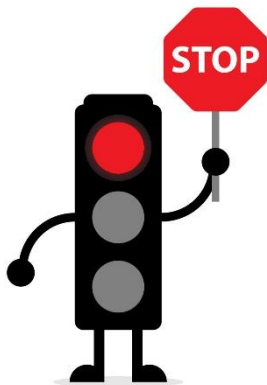
Helping children handle anger – Part 2

In the fourth session of the “Handling Anger in the Family” course, we continued to focus on how we can help our children handle and express their anger appropriately ...

Extreme anger can be a frightening emotion for children. We thought about different ways that we can explain anger to them. We can use the “Anger River” idea that we talked about in session one, to help children to picture what it feels like when we get swept away by the current or go over the edge of the waterfall. Or what about thinking about a bottle of fizzy pop that has been shaken up and down? What will happen if we take the lid off before we let it calm down? Why not demonstrate this at home? The idea is to create a vocabulary that we and our children can use when we’re talking about anger. So we can tell family members if we feel “close to the edge” of the anger river. Or children can learn to tell us that they feel “fizzy” to express the build-up of their emotions.



The home is the best and safest place for children to learn about handling anger. The environment we create can really help our children’s stress levels, which in turn helps them with managing anger. Sometimes children (and adults!) need noise levels to be kept down. We need to be aware that mood can be affected by extremes of heat, hunger, thirst, lack of sleep. Do we need to think about avoiding violent games or TV shows? (They may be age-appropriate but how do our children respond once they’ve been exposed to them?) Have we got good routines so everyone knows what is expected? Do we take time to listen to their worries and anxieties? Are we good role models when it comes to managing our anger?



When we get angry, we often display or become aware of physical symptoms. We can teach our children to spot these in themselves and see them as a red traffic light. My middle daughter noticed that when she got angry she used to clench her fists. She recognised that when this happened she had to take the time to calm down before she did something she might regret. (Like wallop her younger sister!) If we go through a red traffic light there is a high risk of an accident and someone getting hurt. What are our children’s “red lights”? Do they grit their teeth, feel their heart beating faster, does their tummy “feel funny”, do they growl? It’s worth taking the time to find out together.

We need to help our children to express their anger in respectful ways. Ideally, they learn to do this by using their words and telling us why they feel cross or frustrated. This will require time and practice, as well as lots of patience and modelling by parents. Children can also be encouraged to communicate their anger non-verbally by drawing a picture that we can then respond to. Maybe they need a safe place where they can go to calm down? Perhaps they can be encouraged to do some exercise to release the built up anger? Try running round the garden, or go to the park; a change of scenery can be really helpful. Children may want to write a letter to those they are angry with, although it may not always be appropriate for them to send it. Remember, **it’s OK to be angry, it’s what we do with it that matters.**

Anger management is complex and takes more than a weekly article to unpack. If you need help, get in touch, we can chat some more and I can go through the ideas with you in detail. You can contact me at parenting@foundrylanprimary.co.uk