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I'm Not Bad, I'm Mad: Please Understand my Anger & Help Me

Teachers are experiencing an explosion in the number of angry and aggressive children they are encountering. Time out and reward charts don't work. In fact, they may make things worse.

There are real reasons why a child behaves this way. Anger doesn't appear from nowhere, and a behavioral approach to change aggression will almost never work. This workshop will give you a new understanding about what is causing a child to behave this way and will provide interventions to help this child become calm and self controlled. Based on neuro-scientific findings and incorporating an understanding of a child's attachment needs, this workshop will give you fresh insights, ideas and techniques to manage anger.

Introduction

Helping children learn to handle their angry feelings can be a frustrating problem for most caregivers and teachers. Young children have not yet learned how to express anger in acceptable ways. When they get angry, they are likely to take it out on another person, to blame someone else, scream, hit others, or display some other inappropriate behavior.

Some children grow up ashamed of their feelings because they have been taught that it is "bad" to feel or show anger. It is much more emotionally healthy for children to learn that everyone has angry feelings at times and that there are appropriate ways to express anger.

Caregivers and teachers can help children learn to cope with their feelings of anger and to express them appropriately by remembering the following tips when dealing with the angry child.

Always focus on the behavior

It is not children that we want to change. Rather, it is the inappropriate behavior that we want to change. We want to support appropriate behavior. Calling attention to inappropriate behavior lets the child know that the actions are not acceptable, but that the child is still loved. Do not forget to also focus on appropriate behavior. Praise and reinforcement let children know which behaviors are appropriate and acceptable.

Focus on the behavior.

Remember, it is not "bad" to be angry, but it is "bad" to express angry feelings in ways that hurt others.

Teach the child to consider angry feelings as a problem to be solved.

Help children use their minds to solve problems and to think about solutions or alternatives to their angry feelings. Help them see that "getting mad" does not solve the problem.

Help the child express angry feelings in words.

Be a role model for children by using words that tell how the child feels, not what the child thinks about another person. For example, "I am sad when you won't let me play with you;" not "You're mean and I hate you!" Words that hurt others are not acceptable ways of coping with anger.

Use "You-messages" to encourage children to express their feelings in words.

"You-messages" describe the child's feelings and help you and the child focus on the inappropriate behavior. They encourage children to express their troublesome feelings. Many times, when children are allowed to express angry feelings, the feelings tend to disappear. An example of a "you-message" is, "You must be really mad that Sue wouldn't share her new books with you."

Allow children to make acceptable choices

Give children the responsibility for their behavior whenever possible. Allow the child to make acceptable choices by offering only choices you can live with.

Teach by example.

Good role models for children are always the best teachers! If children hear you using words to express your anger, they are likely to do the same. On the other hand, if they hear you scream or see you throw something when you get mad, then they are likely to think those behaviors are acceptable. Likewise, if you hit children when you get mad at them, you are teaching them to use violent behavior to express their angry feelings.

Help a child learn to get rid of angry feelings through vigorous physical activity such as: running, digging, pounding nails in a board, punching a punching bag, tearing newspaper.

Help children forget about angry feelings by interesting them in activities which will take their minds off the feelings.

Young children forget about angry feelings quickly, especially if something else seems more exciting.

Help the child get rid of tense feelings through soothing activities such as:

playing in the sand and making mud pies, taking a warm bath, playing in a sink full of warm, sudsy water, playing with play dough, or finger painting.

Interest the child in an absorbing activity such as making cookies.

It is always easier to talk to children about their feelings once they have calmed down.

Use closeness and touching to calm an angry child.

Angry, impulsive behavior often goes away when an adult soothes and comforts the child.

Express interest in the child's activities.

A child about to use a toy in a destructive way is sometimes easily stopped by an adult who shows interest-"Show me how the toy works."

Catch the child being good.

Be sure to support and reinforce appropriate behavior. Comments such as "You did a good job cleaning your room," "I am glad you remembered to wash your hands," or "I like the way you shared your toys today," help children understand acceptable behavior. Most caregivers tend to comment on undesirable behavior, but forget to verbally reinforce good behavior. If caregivers praise good behavior more often, the child will have fewer reasons to be angry.

When it comes to showing anger, adults do not hesitate to verbally express it but children have much different ways of dealing with anger. Here are some obvious signs that a child may need help and what to do to help them.

Kids are normally forthcoming with regards to sharing feelings and emotions. While a child may be burdened with feelings of pain and guilt, you will never learn it from a conversation without knowing how to steer the conversation with the right questions. However, you can know a child's real feelings because they are usually displayed in their visible behavior.

When a child is sad they may keep to themselves or have little to say. When a child feels guilty they may avoid people and stay in their room. When a child is angry they may break their toys, scream or throw a tantrum. Children are not always verbal about their emotions but their actions often speak louder than words.

When kids show signs of anger, bursting into fits of rage and rolling around the floor in tantrums, this is a sign that there is a problem that cannot be ignored. This should tell you that a child needs help that you, as a caregiver, can give even though you may be the target of the anger. Left untreated, this problem could evolve into a mountain of difficulty in the future.

If you are worried about a child with behavioral trouble regarding anger, professional anger management tools are available and can be effective in dealing with a child's problems with anger. Finding the best program or person to help will require some research and experimenting. Many different resources provide tips about anger management for kids. There are books, movies and plenty of helpful information provided by sites on the Internet.

Kids respond best to activities. Activities involving games are smart tools to use to help the child display the real reasons behind their anger. Activities will teach them positive values and show them acceptable behavior traits through various games. Activities are much more effective than a one-on-one session with an anger management counselor. Providing them with worksheets, coloring pages, puzzles and quizzes makes anger management for kids more interesting and enjoyable. In this way, children actually participate in a program that helps them without actually realizing it.

Thanks for your interest