

FOCUS

on
Early Childhood
Mental Health



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Everybody Gets “Ma-a-ad”

“The Mad Goat Song” and many other segments on *Sesame Street* recognize that it is normal for young children to get angry and they need the adults in their lives to help them learn how to handle their anger. For example, in the “Mad Goat Song,” the goat gets angry (“ma-a-ad”) in a variety of situations, while in another segment, Whoopie Goldberg shows Baby Bear what she does to express her anger without hurting anyone.

How children typically express their anger:

Crying or sulking

Aggressive retaliation or revenge (hitting, biting)

Non-aggressive physical or verbal defense

Tantrums

Why children get angry

- Conflict over possessions (another child grabs a favorite toy)
- Being physically or emotionally hurt by someone else
- Feeling rejected or ignored
- Being asked to do something the child doesn't want to do
- Frustration, lack of control

Ideas for handling children's anger

- Don't ignore a child's anger or tell him or her not to be angry
- Try to understand why the child is angry so you can empathize
- Encourage children to label their feelings, teaching them the meaning of words for different levels of anger like “annoyed,” “irritated,” “frustrated,” “mad,” “enraged”
- Model staying calm when you are provoked and give examples of how you do that
- Make it clear that while being angry is okay, it is not okay to hurt someone else
- Suggest alternatives to anger (get or give a hug) or provide acceptable ways to work off anger (go for a walk, punch a pillow, stomp feet)
- Seek professional help when a child's anger is frequent, extreme, dangerous or deliberately malicious

Resources

- Sesame Street: <http://bit.ly/ht71Pz> (short videos about anger)
- “Helping Young Children Control Anger and Handle Disappointment,” Technical Assistance Center for Social-Emotional Interventions: <http://bit.ly/gkqflb> (includes information about the Turtle technique for diffusing anger)
- “Helping Young Children Deal with Anger,” by Marian Marion, Ph.D.: <http://bit.ly/bXFPGH>
- **Related “FOCUS on ECMH” factsheets:** self-regulation, understanding aggressive behavior, problem-solving, the meaning of behavior (available at www.parecovery.org (Statewide Initiatives/Early Childhood Mental Health))