



Child Care Resources Inc.

CCRI tip sheet

Ideas and information about child development and early education for parents, professionals and the community-at-large.

#566

Helping the Angry Child

“When Sophie gets angry she kicks and screams. She wants to smash the world to smithereens. She roars a red, red roar and when Sophie gets angry, really, really angry, she runs! Then, for a little while, she cries. Now she sees the rock, the trees and ferns. She hears a bird. She climbs the old beech tree. She feels the breeze blow her hair. She watches the water and the waves. The wide world comforts her. She feels better now. She heads for home.”

These words were taken from the popular children’s book *When Sophie gets Angry - Really, Really Angry...* by Molly Bang. This book depicts the same, strong emotional charge felt by some preschoolers when they become angry.

Tim Murphy, author of *The Angry Child*, defines anger as a powerful response that is triggered by another negative emotion. A broad range of negative emotions trigger anger such as pain, frustration, loneliness, fear, rejection, boredom, jealousy, disappointment, powerlessness, embarrassment and humiliation. Sometimes, these emotions, if they can be identified, may help the child learn techniques for responding appropriately to the anger.

Teachers should try to prevent the situations that cause children to become angry. While conflict provides opportunities for children to learn problems solving skills, we should not be setting children up to fail deliberately. Too few toys and/or activities build boredom or frustration. Too little attention invites competition and misbehavior. Too much teacher control invites feelings of powerlessness. Some things are basic:

- Develop good relationships with children. Help them to build positive self-images by providing activities that bring rewards and success.

- Provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviors. Let him/her know that their good intentions are noticed and appreciated. Point out the connection between good choices and good results.
- Offer children choices throughout the day. Let them begin to problem solve and effectively negotiate with other children to accomplish goals or to get their needs met.
- Ignore behaviors that are harmless or unimportant. Prevent outbursts by not magnifying small incidents. Pick your battles carefully.

A wise teacher helps children develop emotionally as well as intellectually by:

- Taking notes on children’s behavior. You may begin to see a pattern that will then suggest prevention and/or guidance strategies.
- Teaching children to recognize their physical signs of anger and how to label it appropriately. Invite children to think about and discuss how they feel when they are angry. Help them recognize that their tears, stomach ache or pounding heart may be related to their anger. Model for them “When I feel my tummy hurt like that, I realize I’m upset and I need to figure out what to do.”
- Acknowledge his/her feelings by assigning labels to emotions. Children need to know that anger is a normal emotion, and that adults can teach them which behaviors are acceptable when they are angry. You can help by saying, “I know you’re angry because your tower was knocked down. I can help you build another tower or you can put the blocks away and choose an activity that will help you to feel better.” Acknowledging and labeling feelings and offering alternative activities are the tools needed to equip children for success.

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Teaching children self-calming techniques is helpful. Some methods include: moving away from the source of frustration and taking a break; taking slow, deep breaths; feeling their heart beat; talking to an adult; hugging a pillow; making a fist and “throwing the anger away”; thinking about positive things; riding a tricycle or running; or drawing a picture.

Other positive steps you can take:

- Add a cozy area in the classroom. This area will provide children with a place to calm down or just to be alone. Add pillows, rugs, and stuffed animals to make the area more inviting.
- Make a scrapbook that displays pictures and labels for emotions. Include emotions like surprised, lonely, frustrated, laughing, worried, and puzzled. Try not to place too much emphasis on anger.
- Encourage sensory experiences. Daily warm soapy water and finger paint can be soothing.
- Offer tempera paint and brushes to motivate children to engage in easel painting. Help them to paint angry feelings as well as happy feelings.
- Include soothing music with games that teach children how to control their bodies. Play stop and go games.