

Helping children to cool down and stay calm

The following examples are for parents and carers to use at home. The methods described can also be adapted by teaching staff to help children manage anger at school.

When children get caught up with angry feelings it can be quite difficult for them to calm down.

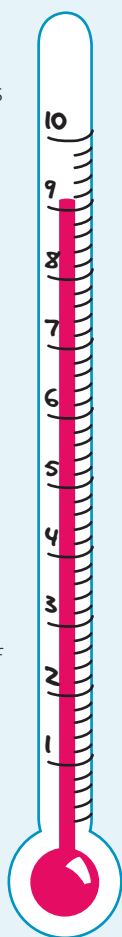
This is because the body gets ready to fight when we are angry and can take some time to return to normal. Teaching children steps to cool down their anger can help. Try the following:

1. Rate your anger

Using a rating scale to notice how angry they are, helps children become more aware of their angry feelings so that they know when to use calming strategies.

Draw a thermometer to show the scale points of 0-10. Add some words that describe low levels (e.g., 0 = calm; 2 = a bit irritated), medium levels (e.g., 5 = quite cross), and high levels (e.g., 9 = extremely angry, "losing it").

Ask children to rate their anger and watch it to see if it changes. This encourages them to look for the signs of angry feelings and to see if they can lower their anger levels. It is much harder to change anger when it is high, so when the rating goes above 6 it is usually best to teach children to move away from the situation. They can move to a special quiet space or ask an adult for help.



2. Relax

There are lots of ways to relax. Some useful ways to teach children to use relaxation strategies to calm their angry feelings are:

- *Deep breathing.* Slow deep breathing has a very helpful calming effect. Getting children to practise breathing in deeply and breathing out very slowly, can help to calm down angry feelings.
- *Visualisation.* Have children visualise a very relaxing scene in their minds. For example, they might imagine themselves floating on an air bed in a swimming pool. You can combine deep breathing with visualisation. For example, ask children to imagine a candle in front of them. As they exhale, ask them to imagine making the candle flicker but not go out.
- *Robot/rag doll technique.* The robot/rag doll technique is a useful for helping young children release muscle tension. Ask children to tense up all muscles in the body and visualise themselves as robots. Have them hold this tense state for approximately 15 seconds. Then ask them to release all the tension and visualise themselves as rag dolls, with all muscles very loose, and stay relaxed like this for 15 seconds.

3. Use coping self-talk

Using coping self-talk involves saying things to yourself to calm down. Children can be encouraged to say things to themselves like:

"Take it easy."

"Take some deep breaths."

"Stay cool."

"It's OK if I'm not good at this."

"Chill out."

"Don't let him bug me."

"Time to relax!"

"Try not to give up."

To teach children to use coping self-talk it is helpful to model it yourself. For example, you could make a point of saying out loud, "I need to relax," "I'm going to cool down," "I won't let this get to me." You can also use coping statements to coach children through stressful moments. Asking older children what they could say to themselves when they need to cool down their anger helps them learn to use coping self-talk for themselves. This is best practised *before* children get angry.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

