Everyone gets mad

"Hi Dylan. How was school today?" "All right," says Dylan, but the way he throws his bag into the car says something different. Dylan gets into the car, roughly pulls off his jacket and manages to elbow his younger brother. "Can't you be more careful Dylan?" his mother says.

No answer.

Later at home Dylan gets really angry when he finds a favourite toy missing from his shelf. Then when he is asked to turn off the television and help get things ready for dinner, he ignores his mother's request. When she asks again, he storms off angrily into his bedroom and slams the door.

Over dinner Dylan's mum asks him, "What's up?" Dylan just shrugs, "Nothing."

It's easy to see that Dylan is pretty angry about something, but it's hard to tell what it's about. Did something happen at school? Is he worried about the soccer game coming up on the weekend?

Helping children learn to manage anger

Children's angry behaviour is often difficult to deal with because it stirs up feelings of anger and annoyance in others. It can also frustrate parents and carers when anger is used to push them away. If you were Dylan's mum how would you feel? Annoyed? Frustrated? Tense? Angry?

Everyone feels angry at times. Parents and carers can help children learn how to cope with anger in positive ways by teaching them to be aware of feelings, to find appropriate, safe ways to express them, and to identify and solve the problems or frustrations that lead to angry feelings.

[Learning skills for understanding and dealing with anger will make it easier for children to solve problems, get help when needed and be more relaxed around others.]

How parents and carers can help

Be aware of feelings

Children need to learn that having angry feelings is normal and okay, but that reacting aggressively towards others when they're angry is not. Adults can help children become aware of feeling annoyed, frustrated, angry or furious by naming feelings. Learning to say, "I'm feeling angry," or "I'm really frustrated," gives children a way to separate feeling angry from how they react.

Time to talk

Talking to Dylan about what has put him in an angry mood will help him see that feelings have causes and that solutions can be found. Once you find out what he was angry about you can help him think up better ways to handle the problem.

This kind of conversation doesn't work while he is really angry. Sometimes it must wait until later. Children often find it easier to talk in informal situations where they feel less pressure. Find a relaxed time to talk to children about feelings. Asking, "What makes you angry?" can be a good way of starting a conversation about anger.

Find alternatives

Getting children to think through a difficult situation helps them develop problem-solving skills. Asking, "Is that what you wanted to happen?" or "What else could you have tried?" encourages children's helpful thinking. Thinking of alternative solutions helps children plan different ways of reacting next time. Be sure to praise their efforts.
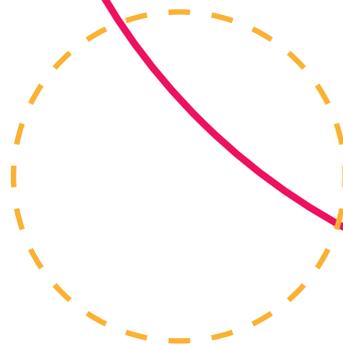
Have ways to calm down

When emotions are strong, it is easy to act without thinking. Encourage your child to take control and allow time for the emotions to subside. Walking away, using a quiet spot to think, or doing something else like riding a bike or listening to music are all activities that can assist in reducing strong emotions.

'Cool-down' steps to teach children

1 Recognise that you are angry
   - Notice the body signals that mean you're angry (eg getting hot, racing heart, tense muscles)
   - Give a number from one to 10 to show how angry you are

2 Cool down your body
   - Breathe slowly
   - Take time-out in a quiet place
   - Go for a walk, do something physical
   - Draw how you feel

3 Use coping self-talk
   - "It's okay. I can handle this."

4 Try to solve the problem
   - Talk to someone who is a good listener
   - Plan what to do next time

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at **www.kidsmatter.edu.au**

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