

# How to Raise Kids Who Are Good at Getting Angry

Anger has a bad reputation, but it is a basic human emotion like any other. Here's how to help children cope.

*The following is excerpted from the article, "How to Raise Kids Who Are Good at Getting Angry," by Catherine Pearson of The New York Times, June 28, 2022.*

"Many of us were taught that anger is bad, and that to show we're angry and express our feelings is bad," said Jazmine McCoy, a child and family psychologist and author of "The Ultimate Tantrum Guide."

But anger isn't bad, Dr. McCoy said, nor is expressing it inherently dangerous or disrespectful. Learning to manage anger is a lifelong skill that allows children to function at home, in school and out in the world. And it's a skill that parents can help kids cultivate by encouraging them to develop outlets, and modeling coping skills yourself.



Credit Raz Kurman

## Don't be afraid of tantrums

Reminding yourself that anger is an intrinsic part of being human can help you respond to a rampaging child with compassion, not judgment. Yelling at a child — who is yelling at you and the world — is only likely to escalate the situation.

"Tantrums do serve a developmental purpose," Dr. Sukhodolsky said. "Children are learning how to deal with independence, transitions, learning social rules, and they're learning about situations in which compliance is required."

## Help children develop an emotional vocabulary

"Name it to tame it" — a phrase coined by psychologist Dan Siegel — is an oft-repeated mantra among child development specialists who believe in the importance of teaching children to identify and label their emotions so they can talk about what they feel.

Whatever strategy you ultimately settle on, the goal is to help children develop the language they need to express their feelings. It is a skill that builds with time and practice, and can help them feel heard and understood.

“It is important to validate children’s emotions,” Dr. Sukhodolsky said — whether you’ve got a 2-year-old at home, or a 22-year-old.

## Tell them when you are angry

Parents sometimes feel like they need to shield their children from their own emotions, but opening up during moments of fury or frustration can be educational. Describe to your child what it feels like physically. Is your mind racing? Is your heart beating fast?

You might say something like: “I’m going to take a few deep breaths.’ Or ‘I’m going to take a seat for a moment.’ Or ‘I’m going to get some water,’” Dr. McCoy said. “Whatever it is you need in that moment, speak it out loud and help them understand what is happening.”

## Identify effective ways to cope

Kids also need to find their own ways to self-regulate, and they may be different from yours. Helping your child find an outlet (or outlets) for their anger may take experimentation.

Ideally, you will learn to identify the signs that your child is growing frustrated and steer them toward those outlets before they have reached their boiling point. Experts say [behavior correction is pretty much impossible](#) when children are mid-meltdown.

“What you want to do instead is look for those moments when their frustration is *just* starting to escalate,” he said. Prompt them to try out coping strategies so they get practice managing big emotions before they become too intense.

## Set clear boundaries around unsafe behaviors

Children must learn the distinction that while all emotions — including anger — are OK, not all behavior is OK, Dr. McCoy said. So clear, consistent boundaries around aggressive or unsafe behaviors are important.

## Listen and be open to your children’s feelings

In terms of the bigger picture, it is important to make sure your child has ample opportunities to discuss their feelings — anger, sadness, excitement, all of it — with trusted friends, family or a mental health provider.

“I like to say the best form of anger management is feeling understood,” Dr. McCoy said. “Often when we’re angry, underneath we feel scared, we feel misunderstood and we feel disconnected.”