

Anger Management: Strategies for Parents and Grandparents



Parenting and grandparenting can be an emotional roller coaster. You're filled with love for your kids and grandkids. Yet caring for them can also be scary, frustrating, and sometimes maddening. But no matter how upset you get, it's important to control your anger around children.

The importance of managing anger

It never feels good to rage at someone you love, especially a child. Anger is a completely natural and healthy emotion. But research shows that frequent, uncontrolled anger is linked to heart disease, digestive disorders, trouble sleeping, and other health problems. It's also linked to family violence and aggression.

Anger management can help you deal with your child or grandchild in a kind, healthy, and constructive way. It also sets a good example to children and grandchildren of how to handle challenging situations and work out conflicts.

Anger management strategies

When you feel like you're about to lose your temper with a child, use anger management strategies. They can help keep your anger from boiling over.

First, try to calm yourself with relaxation methods, such as:

- Slow, deep breathing
- Picturing a relaxing scene (visual imagery)
- Repeating a relaxing word or phrase in your mind

Next, try action steps. These can help you manage the heated situation:

- **Talk calmly and listen.** Speak clearly. Check to see if the child understands you. Remember to listen carefully to what they are trying to say to you.
- **Be logical.** Children, particularly young children, likely aren't trying to make you angry. Realize that the child is not out to get you.
- **Don't make generalizations.** Don't say things like "you never clean your room" or "you always leave a mess." Praise the things that your child does well or correctly as they happen.
- **Know the signs of an impending storm.** Your heart may start pounding. You may tense up and clench your teeth just before you're about to lash out in anger. If so, use the time-tested method of counting to 10 before talking. Figure out what's getting you upset. Then try to respond thoughtfully. If you're still about to explode, leave the room until you calm down.
- **Try to use the word "I" instead of "you."** This will help make things less hostile. For instance, say "I feel frustrated when you do X because ..." instead of "You are making me crazy."
- **Don't get defensive.** Your child may criticize you. Don't start a fight or criticize in return. Try to understand what's really bothering them. Ask questions calmly to try to resolve the issue.
- **Use some humor.** Laugh, get silly with your child, or do some mock wrestling. But don't take part in hostile teasing. And don't make jokes at your child's expense.
- **Give yourself a break.** Don't confront your child or deal with a problem when you're already stressed or tired from a long day at work. Take a break first. Give yourself 10 to 15 minutes to relax, calm down, and do something you enjoy. Depending on your child's age, the immediacy of the issue, and your level of exhaustion, it may even be better to discuss the situation the next day. With rest and distance, it is sometimes easier to tackle a hard problem.

Taking the long view

Anger management strategies aren't just for use in the heat of the moment. Doing meditation or yoga on a regular basis may put you in a calmer, more accepting frame of mind in general. Getting in more exercise routinely can help you relieve some of your everyday stresses. This can help you be more relaxed when you're with your children. Consider developing a support network of friends or family who can be a sounding board or give you a break if you need it.

Role modeling self-discipline is a way to teach your child. Think about your own behavior. Abuse is not just physical. Words can cause deep wounds and lasting damage. Use your behavior to show children that conflict can be resolved without hitting, yelling, or name-calling.

Think about getting professional help for anger management if you can't control your anger. Or if you have relationship problems with your children or grandchildren. Healthcare providers and mental health professionals can help you learn the skills you need to better communicate with children. They can also help you change any negative thought patterns.

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