



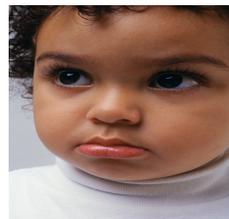
PLAY THERAPY NEWS

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Children and Anger

Parents oftentimes will say that their child is caring and sensitive, except when the child is in a "meltdown." It is likely that the child struggles with a low-frustration tolerance and inflexibility that may reflect a developmental deficit. These children have not yet developed the ability to regulate overwhelming feelings and may appear to go from zero to 100 within a matter of minutes. Working with children to help develop anger-management skills that include problem-solving, compromise, cooperating

to find a middle ground and empathy is part of what play therapists can do. Also, aiding parents in carrying these skills out at home is so important. Once the child and family learn the knack of anger control, putting it into practice with everyday situations is invaluable to the learning process. For example, in the midst of anger, parents can help the child use their own words, such as "irritated" or "furious," to express anger verbally rather than physically acting it out.



Play acts as an integrating mechanism which enables children to draw on past experiences, represents them in different ways, makes connections, explores possibilities and creates a sense of meaning. It integrates cognitive processes and skills, which assist in learning.
Bennett et al. (1996).



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Suggestions for Parents

- ☺ Be a safe person to which a child can go when they are upset.
- ☺ Use supportive reminders that help a child get themselves back in control. For example, have the child tell himself to "Stop!" Use deep breathing or counting.
- ☺ Teach cooling off. Sit down during calm moments and have child list eight things they could do to feel better when upset. Examples: walk, draw, write, listen to music, talk to friends, ride your bike.
- ☺ Help your child develop a list of calming statements like, "I can handle this."
- ☺ Allow child to debrief from angry episodes during neutral times. Role play unsuccessful conflicts incorporating, "Stop, Breathe, & Chill" into a past scene and how to use it next time.

Helping Children Manage Anger

Methods Play Therapists Use to Help Children with Anger Issues:

* Because 'feelings states' are difficult for children to comprehend, teaching feelings identification is an essential first piece of anger work. I use a "feelings faces" chart allowing kids to make-up stories about why the pretend child 'feels' a certain way. Later, I have children choose a face describing how they may feel that day or during a previous incident. Some faces depict "annoyed" and other "rage," educating that anger doesn't have to be expressed as white-hot fury with little in-between.

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Summertime is just around the corner!

- Artistic or symbolic work can help children to express their anger/rage in an appropriate and/or non-verbal way. For instance, many children struggling with anger issues will draw pictures or use my sandtray to represent a volcano with fire coming out of the top. The older children then can verbalize what makes them feel like a raging volcano. Many use monsters or fierce dinosaurs to vent angry feelings out in a safe, supportive environment.
- Children can learn about anger to increase their understanding and decrease their fears about their big, seemingly uncontrollable reactions. Normalizing anger diminishes some of the shame/guilt and helps kids be more open to exploring their problems, rather than shutting down when talking about past incidents. When kids learn there are ways to help themselves to control getting into a "meltdown" situation, they are usually eager to realize those skills.
- First, learning that anger manifests in the body, as a reaction to something the child is telling themselves, is vital. If a child can recognize a 'red flag,' such as increased heart-rate or breathing, hot face, frustrated tears, etc., they can learn those signals to alert them that they are losing control. I have kids draw themselves and color in **red** their body areas that react to angry thoughts to serve as a reminder they are upsetting themselves. At this point, they can 'catch' themselves and use their coping skills: slow & deep breathing, counting, walking fast, self-calming thoughts like, "it's not worth it," "just calm down." They can learn to consider the consequences of their angry actions and just walk away. Anger skills take much practice at home, school and in session before the child has good success.