



Advice and information for parents

Anger

About anger, aggression and violence

Everyone has angry feelings, and they are a normal reaction when things go wrong, life feels unfair, we get overwhelmed, or people upset and hurt us. Anger can sometimes act as a positive force for change or it can be negative and destructive.

Anger as communication

How children and young people channel their feelings and communicate anger can vary greatly. They can show their anger by shouting, refusing to do what they are told, saying horrible things and trying to upset others. They can break or smash things, and hit or hurt their parents and other family and friends.

Anger at different ages and stages

Toddlers and young children typically have tantrums when they don't get their own way or feel frustrated. If they can't tell us in words, they use their behaviour. Starting school can be hard, tiring and overwhelming for a small child. Trying to learn and stay good all day means that parents are understandably the first 'safe place' where their child can let it all out, and so they often bear the brunt of pent-up feelings and exhaustion after school.

The transition from primary to secondary school can make children feel anxious and unsettled, but express these feelings as anger.

Teenagers can be very defiant and refuse to keep to their parents' rules as they try and push the boundaries to increase their independence. Changes in the brain and hormones mean that many teenagers have trouble controlling their behaviour, seeing other people's point of view and doing things if they can't see the point. Being out of control can feel quite frightening for teenagers as well as for parents.

When a person of any age is consumed by anger, and it is having a persistently negative impact on their life and the lives of those around them, it is a problem.

Possible causes of anger

When looking at how to manage anger, aggression and violence think about what might be underlying it all and how the child or young person can channel their anger in a safe way.

Some common underlying causes of anger in young people are:

- Problems at school – bullying, friendship problems, peer group pressures, academic pressure, struggling with reading, writing or schoolwork, exam stress
- Problems at home – anger and arguments in the family, parents splitting up, bereavement, feeling rejected, being jealous of a brother or sister, money worries, poverty, housing problems, having to care for a parent or relative, friendship/boyfriend/girlfriend problems, cyberbullying
- Developmental problems – young people with developmental issues may struggle to manage angry feelings. Speech and language problems can lead to frustration with communicating emotions. Charities such as the National Autistic Society and Contact can provide clear advice on specific strategies
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health issues – being very anxious or stressed about something, depression, low self-esteem

Draw on positive signs

If anger arises in one setting but not another, it is likely that the cause is connected to one setting. The young person is clearly capable of managing their anger elsewhere and can therefore learn more coping strategies for trigger situations.

Dealing with anger

While having some angry feelings is normal, some children and young people struggle more than others to control their rage and to sort problems out. Angry outbursts can be very hard to deal with and can have a big effect on family life. Parents, carers and siblings can feel they are 'walking on eggshells' to try and avoid verbal aggression. How you respond is important for defusing, rather than escalating the anger. Here are five things to try:

1. Separate your child's feelings from their negative behaviours; feelings are valid, bad behaviour is not. It is important to try and make your child understand that you are not rejecting them and their feelings, but that you do not accept the behaviour. Keep explanations simple to avoid misunderstandings.
2. Don't mirror the anger. Keep a calm manner, neutral voice and open body language (no folded arms!).
3. Acknowledge they are feeling angry. Say you would like to talk through how they are feeling and what they are communicating once they've calmed down. Limit the questioning.
4. Hold boundaries and be consistent in consequences. They might not like it, but this helps a child feel contained; it helps in their development and their understanding of what is and isn't acceptable behaviour.
5. Plan ahead. Work out what to do if your child's anger outbursts increase.

Dealing with aggression and violence

When a child or young person is very angry, they can get physically aggressive and even violent. It can be hard to defuse a violent situation, but having a clear plan of action can help:

- If safe to do so for you and the child, remove yourself from the room.
- If not safe to do so and you feel that you or anyone else are at immediate risk of harm, warn the child that if the aggression does not stop you will contact the police. Follow through if they do not stop.

Calling the police to intervene in a situation with your child is an incredibly difficult thing for any parent to have to do. However, this may be the only course of action if your safety, or the safety of other family members, is in question. The police can be incredibly supportive in responding to mental health issues, and can section someone under the [Mental Health Act](#), (*Rethink, 2018*) if appropriate.

- At its most serious, a child's violence against adults in the home can be considered Domestic Violence. It has a huge impact on the whole family. Contact Domestic Violence Support organisations for help.

Violent communities and gangs

Some children and young people get involved with violence outside the home, through their friends, criminal activity or gangs. Local community groups are important in supporting parents in these situations and there is an increasing amount of advice available online (see signposting pages).

Conduct Disorder/ Oppositional Defiant Disorder

When rage is uncontrollable and your child has lost their capacity for reasoning and rationality, the consequences can be serious. It may be that they are also deceitful, manipulative or lie and steal. Relationships become strained, there are problems at school, with antisocial behaviour and getting in trouble with the law. Long term it can lead to other mental health problems. These factors might lead the GP to suspect Conduct /Oppositional Defiant Disorder and offer advice or referral to CAMHS. Support and treatment should be available across all settings – home, school, community – and focus on building positive behaviours.

Parenting Order

In cases of a child's serious antisocial behaviour, families might be issued with a Parenting Order by the Courts to support parents in preventing their child from continuing with antisocial behaviour at school and in the community. It is initiated following contact with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) or the Local Education Authority (LEA). The Parenting Order means attending a parenting course and sometimes other requirements, such as ensuring school attendance and imposing curfews.

What can help? What to do.

These are some things that may really make a difference:

Helping a young person to manage their anger

1. Talk together about what might be causing the angry feelings.
2. Say you have noticed they don't seem happy and ask if anything is worrying them or stressing them out.
3. Try the five-step technique for defusing anger (see p2)
4. Help them to recognise their triggers and patterns for when and how they get angry.
5. Help them to work out ways of channelling their anger differently, for example with:
 - Simple controlled and calming breathing techniques
 - Increased physical activity
 - Pick 'n' mix time-out options, e.g. walking the dog, having a kick-around, YouTube
 - Communicating their thoughts in a different way, e.g. text/draw/music
 - Drinking more water and limiting sugary, processed foods
6. Let them know you are there to listen whenever they are ready to talk. Sometimes children just need parents to notice and acknowledge that things are hard.
7. When teens are angry they can also be frightened at how out of control they feel. This is the time they really need family stability, so retain parental authority and don't change your usual rules.
8. Give yourself and the child some time to allow things to resolve.
9. Encourage them to build on their own coping strategies for dealing with the world.

Getting more help

10. Being a very angry person doesn't necessarily mean they need professional help. Go and see the GP if you answer 'yes' to these questions:
 - Is their anger having a severe impact on your child's day-to-day life and wellbeing?
 - Is the anger disproportionate and persistent?
 - Has the anger escalated into violence?

Your GP may know of local support services. Write down details of times when your child has been angry, what has happened and the effect on the family. In severe circumstances,

they might be able to refer to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for assessment and therapy for under-18s.

11. If your child is over 18 they will need to ask for the help themselves. If they are not willing to do this, you can still ask your GP for support for yourself, to help you cope. Write down details of times when your child has been angry, what has happened and the effect on the family.
12. Talk to school staff about their view on your child and the support they could provide.
13. Youth counselling services can help. Young people can refer themselves to these without needing to see a doctor first.
14. If your child is violent or criminal towards you or other people, you may need to call the police or emergency services for your own protection. Decide and stick to your personal red line – if your child goes over that line you will call the police. This can be a very difficult and upsetting thing to do but it may be the only way of stopping the behaviour and making sure your child gets some help.
15. Look after yourself and keep yourself strong. Talk to friends/family and try to find a bit of time out for yourself.

Finding support

All signposts listed on this sheet are for information only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, YoungMinds cannot accept responsibility for changes to details made by other organisations. Please let us know about any anomalies you find.

Support for your child

The Mix

www.themix.org.uk

If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service.

Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994

Email: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us

Webchat open daily 4-11pm:
www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team

Counselling service: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.

24/7 helpline: 0800 1111

Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor:
www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat

To email: Sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at
www.childline.org.uk/registration

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

www.thecalmzone.net

Provides support to anyone who is feeling down and needs to talk or find information.

Open daily 5pm-midnight.

National helpline: 0800 58 58 58

London helpline: 0808 802 58 58

Webchat:
www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Text YM to 85258

Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

Youth Access

www.youthaccess.org.uk

Information about local advice and counselling services for young people aged 12-25.

Finding a private counsellor or therapist

If this is an affordable option for you, you can find accredited private child and adolescent counsellors and therapists living locally to you by searching the following directories.

Counselling directory: www.counselling-directory.org.uk

BACP: www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists

UKCP: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist

Support for you

YoungMinds

Parents Lounge

www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-lounge

Our Parents Helpline experts answer questions about anger.

#Take20

www.youngminds.org.uk/take20

Ideas and suggestions to help parents find 20 minutes to do something together with their child to support confidence, self-esteem and resilience.

Top Tips

www.youngminds.org.uk/take20/top-tips-for-you-and-your-child

Advice about supporting your child through a time of difficulty or change.

Family Line

www.family-action.org.uk

Provides support with family issues via phone, text and email. You can also access longer-term support through Befrienders and Counsellors.

Open Monday to Friday, 9am-3pm and 6-9pm.

Phone: 0808 802 6666

Text: 07537 404 282

Email: familyline@family-action.org.uk

Relate

www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers/behaviour

Information and advice about supporting your child with anger and aggressive behaviour.

Family Lives

www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/behaviour

Information and advice on anger, violence, teens, challenging behaviour and setting boundaries.

Ditch the Label

70 suggestions for different ways of expressing anger

www.ditchthelabel.org/what-to-do-when-youre-af

10 tips for parents to use when talking to teenagers

www.ditchthelabel.org/10-tips-parents-speak-teenage-son/

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/controlling-anger.aspx

General information about anger and advice for parents or other adults dealing with their own anger.

NSPCC

If you're worried about your child's involvement in a gang or violent community, you can contact the NSPCC for information and advice.

Open Monday to Friday 8am-10pm, and 9am-6pm at weekends.

Phone: 0808 800 5000

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Online information:

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/staying-safe-away-from-home/gangs-young-people

MindEd

www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk

MindEd for families is a website where you can hear about other parents' experiences and find clear, helpful guidance on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.