



ANGER

No One Gets Angry for No Reason

Anger is a normal part of all our lives—and of course, that includes the life of your preschooler. It can be hard to watch, especially when the outbursts are loud, messy, and (most embarrassingly) public. It falls to you to help your child learn to handle their anger in a way that doesn't involve throwing toys or screaming so loudly that the neighbors can hear.

There Is Always a Reason:

Your child's brain isn't yet fully developed, which means their impulse control is still a work in progress too. When frustration and disappointment hit, they don't have the ability to manage it the way adults do. They're not deliberately trying to push anyone's buttons—they're overwhelmed and don't know what else to do.

The part of their brain that helps manage big feelings—think of it as their “emotional control center”—is still growing and won't be fully developed until they're adults. In preschoolers, this area is still very much under construction. So when your 4-year-old melts down because you gave them the blue cup instead of the red one, their brain is genuinely overwhelmed. What seems trivial to you feels catastrophic to them because they lack the neural pathways to put situations into perspective.

Like us, when children feel threatened or frustrated, their brain's alarm system floods their body with stress hormones. Their “fight, flight, or freeze” response can't tell the difference between real danger and a denied cookie request. When they're upset, the smart-thinking part of their brain basically takes a break—which is why trying to reason with them feels impossible (because it is!). Understanding this brain development helps us respond more patiently to their big emotions.

Common triggers often hide behind the anger: hunger, tiredness, overstimulation, lack of control, or unmet emotional needs. Sometimes anger is really sadness, fear, or disappointment in disguise. A child who angrily pushes you away might actually be saying, “I missed you today and I don't know how to tell you.” Their anger is communication—it gets your attention and lets you know something is wrong, even if they can't tell you what.

Here's What I've Found Works:

- **Stay calm yourself:**

Your child looks to you to see how you handle your emotions. If you can keep your cool, they'll eventually learn to do the same. Here's my own mantra: “They're not giving me a hard time; they're having a hard time.” This

conscious shift in perspective makes a big difference when faced with your child's anger (it did for me).

- **Let them be angry:**

It may feel counterintuitive, but sometimes the best response is to let the emotions run their course. Nobody likes being told to “calm down” when they're upset.

- **Now's not the time:**

While they're angry isn't the time for big life lessons, or to be told to “calm down”. When emotions are running high, reasoning with your preschooler is about as effective as explaining bitcoin to a goldfish! A simple nod or just being nearby is the best support.

- **Keep everyone safe:**

Anger is one thing, but hitting, throwing, or physically lashing out is obviously another. You don't need to be told to gently intervene to keep your child (and others) safe. Just be careful not to shame them for their emotions.

- **Talk about it later (much later):**

When your child is completely calm (a few hours later, or even the next day), briefly revisit the incident. “Remember when you got mad earlier? What could we do differently next time?” Focus on solutions, not blame.

- **Model healthy anger management:**

When you're upset, try talking about your own process. “I'm feeling frustrated right now, so I'm going to take five deep breaths before we talk about this.”

Common Challenges:

- **You want to “fix” it instantly:**

It’s natural to want to snuff out the anger quickly, but trying to do so will likely escalate things. Give them space to express their feelings first.

- **Ongoing angry outbursts:**

If anger keeps happening, step back and look for patterns. Are they overtired, hungry, or overwhelmed? Addressing root causes works wonders. In my professional life, I’d keep records of what led up to children showing anger regularly—that way I could begin to identify their triggers.

- **Public settings feel mortifying (for you!):**

Handling intense anger is tough anywhere, but it feels a lot harder in the supermarket aisle with strangers watching (or seeming to watch). The pressure to control your child quickly can derail your best intentions. If it’s all too much, find somewhere quiet for both of you to reset.

- **Your own triggers show up:**

Your child’s intense emotions can understandably trigger your own frustration or anger, making it hard to respond calmly. Try self-calming techniques (deep breaths, counting, repeating the mantra above). If possible and safe, take a brief moment for yourself (even just turning away for a few seconds) before responding.

- **Inconsistency between caregivers:**

Different parents, grandparents, or caregivers might have different approaches to handling anger, confusing

your child. Talk with other regular caregivers about your strategies to get a generally consistent approach.

Look on the Bright Side

Anger is one of those emotions we all wish our children could just... skip. Few things test your patience like a preschooler's full-volume outburst in the middle of the mall. But anger is something your child is still learning to navigate.

Their angry outbursts aren't intentional misbehavior; they're raw expressions of feelings that are too big for their current skill set. They're struggling with overwhelming feelings that they lack the vocabulary and experience to process. When they lose control with you, it's a sign that they feel safe enough to show their real emotions.

With your calm support and steady presence, your child will gradually learn how to recognize, express, and manage their anger in healthier ways. Emotional regulation doesn't happen all at once—it's something they grow into as they consistently feel understood and supported.

You won't always handle it perfectly, and you don't need to. Just remember, anger always has a trigger, even when it's not immediately obvious.

No one gets angry for no reason!

Look for that trigger.

