



# Monthly Parenting Tip from the ACFC

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## Helping Children Manage Anger

It is increasingly important these days that we teach children that violence is not an acceptable way to solve problems. Here are some steps to teach them to use anger effectively.

- 1. Model good anger management.** The way you handle your own problems and frustrations will provide a model for your children.
  - Do you fly into a rage, hurling insults and humiliating remarks?
  - Do you strike out at others?
  - Do you sink into a depression?
- 2. Help them find more effective forms of expression.** For example: *"You have the right to feel the way you do, but in our family, we don't scream and blame; we look for solutions."*
- 3. Remove yourself from a power struggle.** When children have tantrums, you can acknowledge their anger, but at the same time "take the wind out of their sails." Don't try to overpower the child—withdraw instead. This action says to the child, "I am not intimidated by your show of temper and will not give in, but I won't punish or humiliate you either." The result is that children who get neither a fight nor their own way after throwing tantrums will usually find more acceptable ways to influence people. If you need a quiet place to withdraw from the power struggle, try the bathroom. It's the one place where a little privacy is usually expected. For spirited children and other kids who have trouble calming themselves, stay with them and help them self-calm. Then work at teaching them self-calming methods later.
- 4. Use the FLAC \*(Feelings, Limits, Alternatives, Consequences) method.** In situations where a child's tantrum interferes with the rights of others (like in a restaurant, or when company is in the home), you can acknowledge the child's feelings, remind him of the limits, offer an alternative and follow through with logical consequences. For example: *"I know you are angry about having to go shopping with me, and I'll admit that it isn't much fun. Still, we do want to eat dinner tonight, so we need to get this done. How about you help me out by putting the food in the cart? That will make it go faster and then you can help me pick out some of your favorite desserts."*

If the child continues to act out his anger, add a logical consequence: *"Dennis, you can either calm down and help me shop or we will have to go sit in the car until you can. Then we definitely won't have time to stop by the park."*

Children must learn that there are consequences for violent and aggressive behavior. The child who acts out his anger by breaking something can help pay for its replacement. The child who hits or bullies can be removed from other kids for a period of time to think about how he can make it up to the other person. As with all logical consequences, stay calm and firm when delivering them. Your goal is not to hurt the child—which may just begin a revenge cycle—but rather to teach him.
- 5. Allow your child to influence your decisions.** When a person feels powerless to influence an authority, frustration gives way to anger and rebellion. If you allow your child to influence your decisions, she will not be as likely to resort to such unconscious tactics as bed wetting, soiling and stomach disorders, to name a few.

The method your child uses to influence your decisions will be influenced by what you allow to work. If you "give in" to tantrums, whining or tears, the child will learn to use these tactics again. If you redirect your child to express his anger respectfully, listen to his arguments and sometimes change your decisions, then your child learns the important skill of negotiation.

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