

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH ANGER

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INTRODUCTION

Are any of these scenarios familiar? Do you encounter children who need help with dealing with anger appropriately? If so, then this book will help both them and you.

Chloe stared at the math problems she had been asked to complete. "What's the point of this junk? I hate math," she snapped. "Every day it's math and more math. Well, I'm not doing it, and you can't make me! I can't stand school, and I can't stand you!" She kicked back her chair and stalked past the teacher, out of the room.

On the way to school, Tariq's brother had wound him up by taunting him, leaving Tariq feeling angry, frustrated, and upset. Then his teacher was sharp with him for not settling down to work sooner. "Leave me alone!" Tariq shouted, and swept his work off his desk. That felt good, so he pulled all of the books out of the nearby bookcase, threw them on the floor, and kicked over several unoccupied chairs. The other children watched in frightened silence.

In the playground, a small group of boys was teasing Jack. The boys knew exactly the right ways to annoy him. After several minutes of their jeers and name-calling, Jack's composure cracked. He rushed at the group with his arms and legs flailing.

These three scenarios show the devastating effects that uncontrolled anger can have on both the child expressing his anger inappropriately and the people around him. Violent outbursts can cause physical hurt to others and be deeply upsetting to all who witness them.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be a very practical resource. It contains a wealth of activities that can be incorporated into your Circle Time sessions. The materials also include useful stories, poems, and scripts for small dramas and scenes.

Each activity in the program is designed to build on the one before it. This should help children develop their understanding and skills systematically. However, if you do not want to run an in-depth program or if you have a specific need, you can select the activities and sections that you feel are of particular relevance.

Who Is This Book For?

This book is for teachers, teaching assistants, school administrators – in fact, anyone who leads groups and wants to help children learn the skills of anger management. The sessions are designed to give children a comprehensive understanding of how anger functions and how everyone has different triggers and responses to the feelings that anger stirs up. The inclusion of art, drama, poetry, and many active games ensures that the concepts grab children's attention and are memorable as well as educational.

Why Children Need This Book

Children often have very little understanding of the subtleties of cause and effect when it comes to anger. It is seen as an involuntary response that is beyond their control – “It’s not me, it’s my temper!” This can be particularly true of children with quick tempers who may feel demoralized by the negative consequences of their frequent eruptions. Anger may involve the loss of self-control, and many children are appalled at the things they have said and done after the event. Sometimes, it is too late to make adequate recompense and the child discovers that her anger has cost her friendships, privileges, and, most important, trust.

Having established this, it is important to note that anger is a healthy emotion and can be a natural response to circumstances that we find ourselves in. Everyone feels anger. Sometimes, it is this emotion that gives us the energy to defend ourselves and those we love when we feel violated or experience injustice. Indeed, anger has provided the motivation for people to tackle such issues as civil rights abuses, apartheid, famine, and poverty.

Children need to learn when to express anger, how to express it responsibly and safely, and how to control its expression. This book explores the concept of triggers – those things that are likely to provoke irresponsible anger in us. Included are activities that will help children to recognize their triggers and the physical changes that occur when anger begins to rise. There are opportunities to investigate strategies to defuse anger, leading children to an understanding that they are responsible for their behavior and they can exercise control over how they act. This will help

them to be more aware of the destructive force of inappropriate anger and the way in which it can increase tension.

While anger is an acceptable emotion, the behavior that accompanies it may not be acceptable. However, if children do not learn suitable ways to express anger, it will creep out in unsavory ways. Changing unsuitable angry behavior is not easy. Some of your children may enjoy the short-term rewards of power and status that their angry outbursts bring. However, with a persistent focus on the beneficial effects of change, by using the activities in this program they can learn effective long-term strategies for successful relationships and friendships, and begin to see their positive impact on their future.

By the end of this program, children should be able to make the following statements:

- I can recognize when I’m becoming angry.
- I understand the triggers for my anger.
- I use calming strategies.
- I know what to do to cope with others’ anger.
- I can speak assertively.
- I can appreciate other people’s points of view.
- I can get along with others.

Before beginning the program, you may want to ask the children to fill in the table on page 6. You can repeat this exercise at various points during and after the program to monitor the progress being made. The table on page 7 will be useful to review your own progress as you work through the program.

Coping with My Anger Checklist

Read each of the sentences in the table. For each statement decide whether you do what it says *always*, *sometimes*, or *never*. Be honest about your choices. Check the appropriate box.

Name:	Always	Sometimes	Never
I can recognize when I'm becoming angry.			
I keep myself calm in difficult situations.			
I recognize the triggers that make me angry.			
I speak assertively.			
I get along with others.			
I appreciate others' points of view.			
I know how to cope with others' anger.			

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Keeping Your Help Effective

Look through the following questions to find out where you need to explore your views on anger and to reflect on your conduct. As you progress through the program, you will find that your expertise in areas in which you are weaker will improve.

	Yes	No
Do you accept that people have different anger thresholds?		
Do you understand that children need help and encouragement in learning how to deal with their anger in appropriate ways?		
Have you devised individual action plans for children who need specific help?		
Have you given adequate praise and rewards to children for trying to deal with their anger in positive ways?		
Have you taught your children effective calming techniques?		
Have you taught your children new things to say and ways to act in challenging situations, and given them the opportunity to practice these?		
Do you have appropriate negotiated rewards and sanctions in place?		
Have you encouraged your children to take responsibility for their behavior?		
Are you leading by example in managing your own anger in a positive way?		

Conducting Circle Time

To conduct the Circle Time sessions in this book, it is good to have a grasp of the stages of a Circle Time as part of the Quality Circle Time model.

Meeting Up – Playing a Game

Always try to start a Circle Time with an engaging warm-up activity.

This helps everyone to relax in one another's company. It helps if the game involves the children changing places so that the group is well mixed up. This opens up the opportunity for new friendships and stronger group dynamics.

Warming Up – Breaking the Silence

In a Circle Time, everyone has the right to speak and the responsibility to listen.

This stage should be a round in which a short sentence stem is used, such as “My favorite dinner is . . .” The leader introduces this stem, which continues around the circle until it gets back to them. They complete the stem for the final time.

A small speaking object, such as a painted wooden egg or a soft toy, is used to show who is speaking. The person holding it has the right to speak without interruption. The object is passed to the next person once the current holder has finished. Any child who does not wish to speak may say “Pass” and hand the object on.

Some children may say “Pass” because they are not sure what to say or because they are being uncooperative. Try to tell your group what the round is going to be about the day before so



that they have a chance to prepare. They can write their sentence on a card if necessary.

If you work with very young children who may be shy, it may help to hold a number of smaller circles beforehand. You can use a puppet to talk about the forthcoming Circle Time. A child can tell the puppet his sentence, and, if needed, the puppet can speak for the child in the main circle.

Opening Up – Exploring Issues

This is the most challenging stage of a Circle Time, when important issues are explored in an open forum.

It may include discussion, role play, creative activities, and puppets to help explore an issue more deeply. This is the phase in which new skills can be learned, new insights reached, and intentions shared.

Cheering Up – Celebrating the Positive

This stage is used to affirm the group's work in the open forum and in their time together generally.

It should be a positive and happy time that can be used as a way to highlight the effective use of the strategies learned.

Calming Down – Bringing Children Forward

Using a ritual to bring a Circle Time to a close helps to make the transition to the next part of the day calm and peaceful.

You could do this by playing a very quiet game, listening to relaxing music, or using a guided visualization.

This gives the children space and time for the learning of the open forum to sink in.

These five stages are the foundation of the Quality Circle Time model.

For the Circle Times in this book, we have focused on the opening-up stage to show how this can be used to explore anger in an accepting environment. We have included a game to draw each session to a close.