

Penhaligon's Friends

Calming an Angry Child



Many children get angry! Many adults get angry! Anger is a difficult feeling to manage and often the one that can get you into trouble.

Anger is part and parcel of grief and a normal response when someone has died. This anger may be for a short period of time or it may stay with you forever. It might be about the situation as a whole or it could be towards someone or something – it may even be towards the person who died.

Due to anger often being associated with difficult behaviours it can be a feeling many people are frightened of. The child may be frightened of their anger and the adults around them may be frightened of the child getting angry – and vice versa!

When a child enters an angry state their 'lid has flipped!' and there is no point arguing or trying to reason with them until the lid is back down in place. To get the lid back down a child needs a calm, empathic adult to help them calm.

Remember - try not to take this too personally – your child's fight flight brain has literally taken control and they are behaving in a way they wouldn't if they were calmer.

Powerful Phrases Proven to Calm an Angry Child

- **I see that you are upset.** Letting a child know that you can physically see their anger helps them become self-aware of what is happening to their body when they are angry. It allows you the chance to talk to them about the situation without trying to solve the problem immediately.
- **It is okay to be angry.** Validate their emotions. Yes, they might be going off the deep end over something you don't truly understand, but right now that doesn't matter. They need to see the rational adult validating their feelings.
- **Would you like my help?** You might have read that the best suggestion for an angry child is to give them a hug. However, some children will refuse any touch or help in their most heightened emotions. Giving them choice puts ownership on them and allows them the ability to accept or deny your strategies and help.
- **I wonder if...** Children don't always have the ability to know why they are upset and what the underlying cause of their frustrations is. Offer an idea such as *"I wonder if you need to eat something. I wonder if you could use a nap. I wonder if you need a hug."*
- **I am going to...** When your child is screaming at you or stomping, they are often looking for your reaction. Staying calm and collected is essential. However, letting your child know your moves and plans is also key in letting them know what is coming next. *"I am going to wait over here until you are ready. I am going to move closer to you so you know where I am. I am going to wait out in the hall until you finish screaming. "*

- **Would you like to try....** While this is not the time to rationalise with your child, it is okay to offer your help. Often times a child is expressing extreme anger because they don't know how to self-regulate. You can offer many calming strategies or suggestions for help. Start with just one suggestion and then wait some time before speaking again.
- **Can we start over?** Sometimes, we all just need a start-over. Sometimes, children don't even realise they are getting worked up or emotional until it is too late and their brains have already entered the flight or fight response. Offering a simple start-over can be a great way to get through the frustrations.
- **You are safe...** One thing that causes children to act out with anger is fear. They could be afraid of what will happen when the fit is over, they could be worried you will be mad at them, or worse they may actually fear for their safety. Remind them in a calm and collected voice that they are safe.
- **I love you.** It is incredibly important to remind your angry child that you still love them. That no matter what they say to you, you will still love them. These three words should be repeated in a calm manner as often as your child will hear you.
- **It is not okay to...** It is important to set limits and be consistent. Let your child know that it is okay to have these big emotions and you will love them through these explosions, but it is never okay to hit or hurt others.
- **I remember last time we tried...** If your child is just beginning this journey of big emotions and hurt feelings, they might remember everything you have been trying up until now. They might need reminders of what works and what doesn't. The hope is that with each outburst, things start to return to calm a little faster each time.
- **I will be here when you are ready...** Above all, remind your child you are not leaving them. Sometimes, we as parents need breaks too! We need to step away from the situation to keep calm, however, our children need to know we are there for them. Letting them know exactly where you are going and how they can find you when they are ready is a great way to give them reassurance and avoid telling them to "calm down".
- **I am sure we can find a solution later...** Now is not the time to try to reason with your child. They might want an answer now. They might want to argue now. Now is not the time. Once they are calm and they have left the "flight or fight" response you can start to address what made them so upset in the first place.

Remember, loving an angry child is hard. It is exhausting for both you and your child. It is a journey that can't be solved or traveled in one day. Most importantly, remember you are definitely not alone in this journey.