

# ***Strong Emotions and Self-Esteem***

**Anger in Toddlers:** *Anger is a part of being human. Managing anger means learning self-control, and children have to be taught.*

**Toddlers.** Toddlers can be easily frustrated when they cannot do what they want. They have limited language skills but can begin to communicate their feelings with few words. Since they can't control their emotions very well, tantrums may occur.

**Children from about ages 3 to 5.** Children gradually understand more and get angry about what people say, as well as what they do. They express themselves better and begin to aim their aggression at hurting someone else by actions—like hitting—or using threatening words.

**Anger is believed to have three components:**

- 1) **The Emotional State of Anger:** an arousal stage experienced when a goal is blocked or needs are frustrated. May occur when there is:
  - Conflict over possessions, which involves someone taking children's property or invading their space.
  - Physical assault, which involves one child doing something to another child, such as pushing or hitting.
  - Verbal conflict, for example, a tease or a taunt.
  - Rejection, which involves a child being ignored or not allowed to play with peers.
  - Issues of compliance, which often involve asking or insisting that children do something that they do not want to do—for instance, wash their hands.
  
- 2) **The Expression of Anger.** May be expressed through:
  - facial expressions, crying, sulking, or talking
  - through active resistance by physically or verbally defending their positions
  - aggressive revenge through dislike by telling the offender that he/she cannot play or is not liked or avoidance/escape from the provocateur
  - through adult seeking and looking for comfort.
  
- 3) **The Understanding of Anger**– Involves interpreting and evaluating anger.
  - Children's ability to reflect on their anger is somewhat limited so they need help in understanding and managing their anger.
  - Children need to be reminded about the less aggressive ways to handle anger until their memory develops
  - Talking about emotions and labeling them helps young children to understand their feelings

## To help your child learn about anger and how to handle it:

- Tell him/her it's okay to be angry. Create a safe emotional climate where all feelings are acknowledged
- Teach that there are "okay" ways and "not okay" ways to show your anger. It's not okay to hurt anyone, to break things, or to hurt pets when you are angry.
- Teach that it's okay to tell someone that you are angry.
- Teach ways to calm yourself when you are angry
- Read books that show different emotions and how the characters deal with their anger in positive ways
- Model responsible anger management. Acknowledge, accept and take responsibility for your own angry feelings and express anger in direct and nonaggressive ways
- Help your child to produce labels for their anger by teaching them that they are having a feeling and that they can use a word to describe their angry feeling. Tell them to "use your words to tell why you are mad."
- Use your words when talking about your own angry feelings
- When possible, stop your child from hitting before it happens so he/she can learn what it feels like to stop
- Help your child to release angry energy and express feelings in safe, creative ways like pounding playdough, running, drawing, making up stories or songs
- Praise your child for small moments of control
- It is important for children to learn that they are in control of themselves and their emotions. Freeze tag and red light, green light are games that teach physical self-control.
- On index cards, draw simple faces with different feelings on them. Place a magnet on the refrigerator and let your child attach the faces that best describe how each of you feel. If feelings change during the day, let your child change the faces on the refrigerator. Talk about the feelings with your child.
- Children must practice positive ways to handle their anger at times when they are not angry. Play a "What If?" game to practice new skills. For example, ask your child, "What if your little brother breaks your toy (someone calls you a name, you lose at a game)?" Help your child think of ways that they can handle each situation in a positive way.

**Self-Esteem in Toddlers:** *Self-esteem enables them to try new things without too much fear of failing, to reach out and make friends, and to manage problems they are likely to meet along the way. Good self-esteem builds a solid foundation for life.*

Toddlers see themselves through their parents' eyes. If their parents see them as special and lovable and show them and tell them this often, they will develop self esteem. If they keep getting messages that they are not lovable or a nuisance they will not so easily develop self-esteem.

## **Build your child's confidence and feelings of worth by:**

- focusing on the strengths of your children
- focusing on what's good about the situation
- accepting your children as they are
- having faith in your children
- letting them know their worth (recognize their efforts)
- praise for things well done (encourage efforts, improvements)
- have realistic expectations

- avoid comparing
- avoid encouraging competition
- Tell your child often that you love her and let her see that you are glad she is who she is.
- Help your child feel that she is needed in your family. Within reason for the child's age, ask and expect some help with the family chores such as feeding pets, setting the table etc (not just clean up her own mess but contribute to the family).
- When you play games with your child make sure that she has opportunities to win. If children win sometimes it is easier for them to learn to be good losers.
- Keep special mementoes of their successes and important milestones.
- Keep little family rituals eg story at bedtime, kiss goodbye and the other ways of doing things that are special to your family.
- Celebrate achievements and successes.

Websites referred to:

<http://www.actagainstviolence.com/anger/atschool.html>

<http://www.athealth.com/Consumer/issues/childsanger.html>

<http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Family/Toddlers/ToddlerSelfEsteem.htm>

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=141&id=1702>