



RELATIONSHIPS

Helping Children Deal with Anger at Friends

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All children get upset at their friends once in a while. They argue and they disagree. This is a normal way that children learn to get along with other people. It is important that children learn how to deal with angry feelings and conflicts so that others don't get hurt.

How children deal with anger is important for good relationships with other children. Children who learn to express anger without hurting others or being aggressive usually have better friendships. Also, kids who learn not to respond to other children's aggression are more able to stay out of fights. Learning how to cooperate and being kind will result in better friendships and more happiness. Parents and other adults can play an important role in helping children learn to handle anger.

Solving Problems

Children get angry at their friends for many reasons. Some of the most common reasons are teasing or calling each other names, hitting, slapping or just playing rough, and being left out of a game or activity.

As adults it may be easy for us to look at these situations and say, "Don't let those other kids make you mad." But in reality, these kinds of situations are bound to cause hurt feelings and anger. Children should understand that feeling angry is all right in itself. Anger often makes us want to change something about a situation that is unfair. But we all must be careful to deal with our anger so that it does not hurt others.

We want children to learn how to act in situations where they feel anger. In general we want to teach them how to express their anger without getting into a fight and hurting anyone. Children often act before they think in angry situations. Help children avoid this by giving them ideas about other things to do in these situations.

Children sometimes are too quick to think that the other person was mean on purpose. Somebody gets shoved or says something, and nobody stops to think that this might have started as an accident. Help children stop and ask themselves if the other child was being mean on purpose. Go over the situation and all the reasons why it might have been an accident.

Children can be cruel in many situations. Again, help children think about what they can do if someone is cruel or frustrates them. Help children tell the other person when they feel angry and why something bothers them. Remind children that others don't always think about what they do. By expressing their anger, children have a chance to change the situation. For example, if a child is not allowed to play with others, he or she can say, "I feel angry when you won't let me play." This lets the other children know that he or she is upset. Sometimes this is enough to make the other children act differently.

Still, many times this is not going to change the situation. Children need to understand that some children will be mean and thoughtless. And some will try to cause fights on purpose. The best solution here may be to ignore the troublemaker or stay away from him or her. In these situations, children can try to keep themselves calm and try not to take it personally. For example, children might just say to themselves, "They must be having a bad day," or "Too bad for that person, being so mean all the time." By staying calm, children can stay out of some trouble.

Finally, let children know that sometimes there is nothing to do but talk about how they feel or work it out on their own. Hopefully, the person they talk to can help them understand their anger or suggest what they can do. The important thing is to help children understand that there are many things they can do in conflict situations.

Aggression

Sometimes all children will be aggressive. They may get into fights with other children or yell at each other. Children should learn that yelling and hitting may help them get what they want for the moment, but it will not help them get along with others. Help them understand that other children like people who are kind and cooperative.

Children need firm guidelines that aggressive behavior will not be permitted. The best tool against aggressive behavior is “time-out.” When children yell or hit another person, remind them that this is not permitted and do not allow them to play for a while. They might be sent to their rooms or somewhere else where they will be alone. During this time, ask them to think about what else they could do to solve the problem besides hitting or yelling. It may be difficult for you at first, but it is important to handle all aggression in the same way. This pattern will help children learn that aggressive behavior is not allowed.

Children also need praise when they solve problems without being aggressive. This is just as important as stopping the hitting. When children are cooperating, sharing, and taking turns, tell them how nice it is to see them playing together. Remind them that it’s more fun to get along.

Sometimes children don’t understand that mean words and hitting make other people feel bad. Parents can help children understand how their actions affect others. When children have been aggressive, help them think about how they would feel if that had been done to them. Then ask how they think it makes the other person feel. These types of questions help children learn to care about the feelings of others. By understanding that, children will be less likely to hurt others.

Another important step in helping children deal with aggressive behavior is to be a good role model yourself. As parents and as adults, we must show that we can handle our angry feelings without hitting and yelling. Children who see adults handle their feelings by being aggressive all the time will assume that it’s okay for them too. Television can also provide strong role models. Children who tend to be aggressive should not watch violent programs on TV.

Love and Acceptance

The most important force that will help children deal with anger is knowing that people love and care for them. They need our active attention, our loving concern, and lots of hugs. Affection and knowing how to solve problems in frustrating and conflict situations will help children get along well with their friends.

Discussion Questions

The following questions could be used to talk with children about anger.

1. Kids sometimes get into fights. Do you ever have arguments or fights with other kids that seem to start over nothing? Why do you think this happens? What could you do in these situations?
2. Sometimes you can feel disappointed when your parents don't do what they promise. Sometimes you don't get mad at your parent, but you get mad at someone else? Have you ever been mad at one person and then taken it out on someone else?
3. Some people say that, "just staying mad" won't help. They say that you have to tell others how to feel. When you are angry, how can you tell others how you feel?
4. Have you ever been mad at a friend? What do you do to get over being mad?

Activity

Ask children to write down some of the things that other kids do that make them angry. They might name things such as hitting, teasing, not being included in a game, and so forth. Together with the children, talk about each situation and help them think of all the things they could do to handle it without being aggressive.