

Lifestyle

How to help children manage their anger

Coping. Discover ways children can learn to recognise their feelings, communicate better and grow into emotionally strong and grounded young people. **P.22**





Caregivers, teachers, and parents play a significant role to make children learn anger management skills through different ways. PHOTO/FREEPIK.

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In a small village of Ntungamo, where the red earth meets endless green hills, lived a boy named Kashanku. He was 12 years old and known throughout the village for his quick temper. When other children played football and laughed under the mango tree, Kashanku often sat apart, scowling. If anyone teased him, he would shout or throw stones. Some said he had "fire in his heart."

His mother, Teopista, worried endlessly.

"My son," she would sigh, "anger will burn you faster than the sun."

But Kashanku would glare and stomp away. "You don't understand," he'd shout.

His father, Mureefu, believed discipline would fix him. "A boy must learn respect," he said. "If he misbehaves, he must face consequences." So when Kashanku broke things or yelled at older people, Mureefu would force him to fetch water for the entire family or weed the garden on his own. However much chores he did, it only made the fire in the heart of Kashanku stronger.

In school, it was not any better. Kashanku was annoyed by Madam Fulugensio, his teacher, who tried to help him, but he frequently quarrelled with his teacher as well. He threw his books and stormed out of the classroom when other children mocked him because of his errors. Very soon, he was recognised as the angry boy.

Mureefu got impatient one day after having another fight at school. "You are dishonouring this family!" he shouted.

Kashanku's eyes filled with tears. "You never listen! You just shout! You don't care how I feel!" he screamed back before fleeing to the shamba.

The following week, Teopista brought Kashanku to meet with the Rev Fr Dodovidio, a church man with a reputation of assisting troubled young people.

After many weeks of counselling, his parents observed the transformation. Gradually, the shoutings had become less, and the silence at supper had reverted to laughter. Kashanku had not lost his anger yet, but he was learning to master it.

Anger is a normal emotion to which all people feel, including children. It may be as a result of frustration, disappointment or being misunderstood. Although anger is not a negative feeling on its own, the way in which it is displayed can go a long way.

Uncontrolled anger may cause hurtful feelings, ruined relationships, or even violence. The ability to control anger will teach children to gain emotional strength, self-control, and positive communication skills. Thus, anger management instruction among children is a significant aspect of emotional and social growth.

Children have a tendency to be unable to control anger simply because they are yet to learn how to interpret and share their feelings about life. As opposed to adults, they may not

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have the vocabulary or feelings to describe what they are experiencing. A child that feels ignored or embarrassed may throw tantrums or break out physically, since he or she does not know how to otherwise express frustration. Devoid of guidance, these behaviours may turn out to be habits that may be difficult for the child to overcome in adulthood.

Caregivers, teachers, and parents play a significant role to make children learn anger management skills through different ways.

Emotional awareness

This makes children aware of their emotions and naming them. Children are in a better position to discuss any of these emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear when they learn to recognise them. An example is when a teacher tells the child that he or she seems angry because he or she did not understand in order to explain to the child and name the emotion.

Coping techniques

Such mechanisms can consist deep breathing, counting until 10, leaving the situation or speaking words rather than acting. It has been shown that some children have a so-called calm-down space where they go to relax until they are prepared to communicate.

Children can also be encouraged to use creative outlets (drawing, playing music, and writing) to get out anger in healthy ways.

Model relaxed behaviour

Most children observe their adult caregivers, parents and guardians. Children will emulate the behaviour of their parents or teachers when the parents or teachers act with calm and respect towards others with anger. Conversely, when adults react by screaming or being aggressive, the children might also learn that hostility is the way to show anger.

Regular, relaxed instructions allow the children to understand that anger is a problem that can be managed and solved not through confrontation but through the process of communication.

Positive reinforcement

Complimenting children when they deal with frustration in proper ways such as walking out of an argument or use of words to explain the emotions makes them repeat such behaviours. This accumulates emotional maturity and confidence in them with time.

To recap it all, anger management among children is not concerned with holding back feelings, but rather, teaching the children to know, interpret, and express anger in a constructive manner.

We can make children use anger as a growth and self-control tool rather than a destructive power by teaching them emotional control and coping methods along with positive adult role models. Early anger management can teach children to be calm and respectful in dealing with future problems. It is a foundation to having a good relationship with others and emotional stability.