

Helping the Often-Angry Child



All children get angry on occasion and may even act aggressively when upset or frustrated. Some children, however, seem to be angry and aggressive much of the time. Conditions at home or at child care, along with a child's temperament, influence a child's level of aggression. Teachers may not be able to change these conditions, but they can help children learn how to respond to their anger.

Observe to understand.

What triggers the child's anger and aggression? Does he get upset during transitions from one activity to the next, when his mother drops him off in the morning, when he is tired or hungry, or when there is a lot of noise and commotion?

Minimize the triggers.

If morning drop-off time is difficult, be available to spend a few extra minutes with the child to help ease her into the day. If transitions are hard, quietly give the child advance notice that the activity will be ending soon and explain what comes next.

State rules clearly, consistently, and matter-of-factly.

Let the child know what you want her to do and don't want her to do. "I don't want you to hit. I don't want anyone to hit you either. Tell Amber you would like a turn on the tricycle, and if that doesn't work, we'll talk about other things to try."

Anticipate problems that are likely to arise.

Position yourself near the child so you can provide quiet reminders about how to behave before tempers rise. If Ben often argues with Jamal over building block structures, follow Ben to the block area and whisper, "Remember to use your words with Jamal. Ask him if you can help build the tower with him."

Break the cycle of attention for misbehavior.

Focus on a child's interests or abilities. If Sharon is interested in drawing or playing ball, plan time to join her in these activities a little each day before any misbehavior occurs. Comment on the child's interest and effort. "Your drawings include a lot of detail!" or "I'm impressed at how far you can throw the ball!"

Notice and applaud progress.

Let the child know when he is having success. "I heard you use your words with Josh in the sandbox today. You asked him to make room for your sandcastle and he did!" An additional hug, smile, or pat on the back can reinforce the good feeling that comes with hard work and success.

For related Web resources, see "Helping the Often-Angry Child" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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