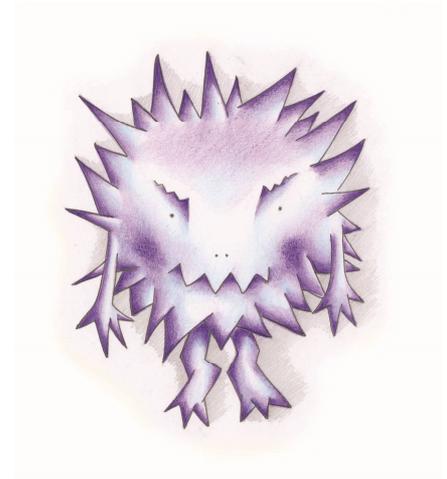


The “Steaming Feeling”

As adults we know that anger is a natural feeling. We can consider it a positive as it shows passion, awareness and determination in a cause. If not managed effectively however, anger can do a lot more damage than many other emotions – at worst physical or mental scarring to the child or another person, at best it leaves behind feelings of guilt, sadness and regret.



So, how can we teach the management of anger?

It's particularly difficult to break a really intense state such as anger; the unconscious mind has taken over and is convinced that this is a necessary and helpful state, possibly to manage a perceived fear or a threat of some kind. Using a particularly shocking activity, noise or action, one that is completely unexpected, may interrupt the behaviour and bring the child out of their heightened state long enough for you to coach them back down to something more resourceful. When thinking of such shock tactics the advert for Vicks First Defence springs to mind – where the mum throws the tantrum on the supermarket floor just as her son is moving into his escalation phase– an amazing form of breaking state. I'm not suggesting you throw yourself on the floor whenever your child starts to get angry but you can see how such a shock tactic can cause the child to forget what they are doing long enough for you to move them into doing and thinking something different. Sometimes, however it is not possible to break such a heightened state and the child may need to be left, in a safe environment where they can cause no harm to themselves or others, until they manage to reduce the feelings themselves.

When in good resourceful state (happy, calm, relaxed) there are a number of things you can do to help your child understand and manage their anger successfully so they don't get as far as the "Steaming Feeling", here are 5 tips:

1. Identify the underlying feelings

Understand the physical feelings behind the anger. Feelings can mean something very different to each of us. For some anger can make us feel a bit queasy in our tummy, make our throat constrict a little or develop heat in our cheeks, for others, it can be a faster beating heart, a clenching of fists or a tightening of the jaw. Find out from your child exactly what angry feels like to them when it is first triggered and what happens as it builds. Find out what your child thinks to themselves as the angry feelings start and build. Work with your child to write these things down or draw them so they are clear to you both and you can spot the signs.

2. Understand the triggers

Understand the triggers. Work with your child to write a list of the activities, words or sounds that can trigger their anger. Note which ones cause a small amount of anger (e.g. 2 on a scale of 1 – 10) to those that can bring about an instant 10. Remain positive and understanding as you work through this list. Also, ask your child if they can clarify the meaning behind the anger, sometimes this can be through fear, perceived failure, pain, embarrassment, guilt etc.

3. Consider alternative options

Define alternative options to anger. For each trigger, ask your child to think of something else they could do instead of feeling angry. Is there an alternative activity or feeling?

For example – If your child gets angry when they don't come first on the wii games you play together, options to explore together could be:

- Think of other times when they weren't so good at something and remember how much better they are at it now. How did they make that change?

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- Remember that they can practice this game whenever they have wii time and with practice they will get better.
- Ask someone who did well at the game to show them how to get better.

Each of these options is providing an alternative to the anger and is helping your child to become more solution focussed in their thinking.

4. Keep track

Ask your child to keep a diary for a week. Create a table together which allows them to log the Triggers, Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviours and Consequences. Review entries at the end of the week, working together on alternative solutions for each trigger.

5. Develop a new strategy

Put a new strategy into place. Your child previously ran an unhelpful strategy which allowed the anger to build until they were unable to manage their state, feelings and behaviour. Consider using the POP system:

PAUSE! – Understand which trigger has been activated, note the reasons, feelings and thoughts behind it.

OPTIONS! – Think of different ways to deal with the problem. If it helps, take yourself out of the situation to think.

PROCEED! – Put one or more of your different solutions into practice. If your first option doesn't work, use the next one.

Praise and reward your child as they progress in managing their anger triggers and praise yourself for working through this with them, hopefully without having to throw yourself on the supermarket floor!

Then take a well-deserved relax!!

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If your primary aged child is struggling with their emotions, check out The Feelings Basket books and toys at www.feelingsbasket.co.uk for support.

