

Recently, a young student made a comment to me that really got me thinking. He said "I'm not supposed to get angry – it get's me in trouble." While on the surface, many of us might agree with that statement, I couldn't help but wonder at how that belief might harm this child throughout his life. Anger is a feeling – simple as that. While our thoughts and actions *will* affect how we feel, they do not control them. In the end our feelings flow through us (quite rapidly sometimes) in order to help us survive. We don't want our kids to ban a feeling – especially one that signals to us when something is wrong.

"It's how we respond when we feel angry that get's us in trouble," I told him. "Not the feeling itself." "That's not what my mom says," he responded, looking sad, "she says if she finds out I got angry at school I'll lose all my stuff - forever."

I walked away from that conversation wondering how I could help. As parents it is our job to guide our kids towards appropriate behaviour. That's what this parent is trying to do. But how can she (or any of us) do that if we don't understand pieces of it ourselves?

I decided my newsletter articles might be a good place to begin sharing some short pieces on understanding emotional control. Use it wherever it fits in your life and feel free to call should you require further explanation.

Three common styles of dealing with anger:

1. **Stuff it:** Rather than feel the anger and deal with whatever is causing that feeling, people put a huge amount of effort into pushing the anger deep down inside so that it can never come out. The problem is, by not dealing with the feeling and by just stuffing it away you actually create an even stronger feeling than you started with which in the end will make things even worse. I like to tell kids that stuffing their anger is like putting water in a glass. If you keep adding to it, at some point the cup will reach its full mark and then - like it or not - it is going to spill over. Stuffers will often seem very calm and relaxed on the outside, while on the inside they are building up to a major explosion.
2. **Escalate it:** Anger will often start with a tiny spark of irritation (or some other similar feeling). You might bump your elbow on a door frame you've walked through 100 times before without incident and the spark is ignited. A person who likes to escalate their anger looks around for something or someone to blame. They fan the fire. This style results in the person being very defensive and trying to pass responsibility for their feeling onto someone or something else. The result is the little spark becomes a flame which becomes a bonfire... you get the picture.
3. **Diffuse it:** It takes an aware person to practice this method and sometimes it can be really challenging. To do this a person must first recognize that they are feeling angry (or frustrated, irritated...). They might even state aloud, "I'm getting angry." This person then goes on to think about why the situation is affecting them this way. "I am angry that all the breakfast dishes have been left on the table for me to clean up." This information helps the person deal with the situation accordingly. "Kids... you need to come back to the kitchen and clean up your dishes before you can go outside." Sometimes this person will need to take a deep, centering breath before assertively outlining their requirements.

**Exercise:** Think of one situation where you might get angry. Try to imagine how things would turn out using the different styles above. Compare the outcomes. Which style(s) do you recognize having used in the past? Which style(s) do your kids appear to use?

The ACE method of diffusing anger:

- A**wareness – become aware of your feeling and give it a name (anger)  
**C**onnect – Connect with the feeling by figuring out the cause  
**E**xpress – Express the feelings either to a 'safe' person or by addressing the source of the anger

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