

Being able to resolve conflicts is one of the most important social skills our kids need in order to thrive in relationships and life.

When kids (or adults) are really mad, words and reactions can be ugly. The inability to calm down, self-regulate, and manage anger can have lasting negative effects, the most important of which can be an adulthood that lacks meaningful, sustained relationships. And since the people and relationships in our lives are the most important predictor of happiness and well-being, this is a high price to pay for not learning to control anger.

For children, this can manifest itself in a number of ways, but the primary consequence of angry reactions is social rejection. In other words, anger in children is a deterrent to friendships, and lack of peer support at a young age often leads to an absence of fulfilling relationships later in life. That's why teaching our kids to regulate their emotions and learn how to calm down when angry are extremely important life skills.

Take a look at adults who have trouble managing anger and the damage it can cause in their lives and the lives of those close to them. Angry people cause others to feel upset, intimidated, and unloved, which in turn leaves the angry person feeling isolated and often miserable. This reminds us, then, of how important it is to help our kids learn to calm down in the midst of difficult situations. Because no matter how hard we might try to pave our child's path (also not a good idea), they will most definitely encounter people and situations that bring up negative emotions like anger, frustration, and sadness. And our kids need to learn how to process those emotions in a productive way.

For kids with low self-regulation, processing emotions productively can be a real challenge. Most are quick to anger, over-reacting to small things like being on the losing end of a card game or misplacing a prized toy. Such children often perceive themselves as targets of other kids (even when they're not). And even the kindest of kids can get annoyed at ones who have angry outbursts.

Modelling for Our Kids

Being aware of our own reactions to situations, and what we're modelling for our kids, is important as we try to teach them how to calm down. Unfortunately, (or fortunately, if you're good at calming down), our kids are going to learn to respond to situations the same way we do. The worst coping mechanism I've utilized when I'm frustrated is sarcasm. I'm not a yeller, but I have often found myself making a sarcastic comment to my kids in response to something they've done (or not done) that's bothered me. As soon as the words are out, I know I was wrong to say them. So, I, too, need to practise calming down before I respond to a situation. Teaching our kids ways to calm down, and practising these techniques ourselves, is an important way we can help ensure better relationships and overall well-being for our kids (and ourselves).

Never Problem Solve when Emotions are High

Especially in conflict situations, the people involved need to calm down before any talking or problem-solving can occur. Nothing useful comes from trying to lead a discussion with upset, emotionally fragile kids. So always gently help them figure out the best way to calm down before attempting to solve the problem. This goes for parents, too. If our child has done something that really makes us mad and requires some type of conversation or consequence, we need to step back and calm down before we respond, so that we can do so in a logical way that lets our child know we love them and that they will be held responsible for rectifying the situation or facing the consequences of their behaviour.