



Mott Poll Report

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Helping Children Manage Anger and Frustration

Anger and frustration are common emotions for children to feel, and it's important for them to learn how to express it appropriately. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 6-12 years old about how they help their child manage anger and frustration.

One-quarter of parents (28%) strongly agree, while 63% somewhat agree, that they know how to help their child manage anger. Most parents acknowledge they sometimes set a bad example of how to manage anger (16% strongly agree, 54% somewhat agree). Parents report getting information or advice from family or friends (41%), outside resources (37%), school staff (26%), their child's healthcare provider (24%), or a mental health provider or counselor (22%); 30% say they have not gotten any information or advice. Although 62% of parents report their child's school has teachers or counselors who help children learn to manage their anger, only 45% say the school provides information for parents on this topic.

When children get angry or frustrated, parents encourage them to use strategies such as cool off activities (68%), talking about the cause of their anger (58%), taking a time out away from other people (53%), repeating affirmations to themselves (32%), or using positive imagery (28%) or a physical outlet (17%). More parents of boys than girls encourage a physical outlet (21% vs 13%); otherwise, parents report similar strategies for girls and boys. To help their child avoid getting angry or frustrated, parents try to ensure they get enough sleep (67%) and exercise (32%), help identify and avoid triggers (52%), avoid overscheduling (26%), have them practice meditation, prayer, or mindfulness (26%), and use punishments/rewards for handling frustration (26%).

While 34% of parents feel their child has gotten better at managing anger, 12% worry that their child's anger will cause problems for them. More parents of boys than girls (43% vs 33%; overall 38%) say that in the past year their child has experienced negative consequences when angry, including hurting themselves or others, having problems with friends, or getting in trouble at school. Fourteen percent of parents think their child gets angry more often than other kids the same age; these parents are more likely to feel that they sometimes set a bad example of how to manage anger, worry that their child's anger will cause problems, and report their child has experienced negative consequences when angry.

Parent strategies to help children manage anger

Among parents of children 6-12 years old

Cool off (e.g. count to 10)

68%

Talk about cause of anger

58%

Take a time out

53%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2024

Report Highlights

Nearly 4 in 10 parents say that in the past year their child has experienced negative consequences when angry.

7 in 10 parents feel they sometimes set a bad example of how to manage anger.

1 in 7 parents think their child gets angry more often than peers the same age.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in August 2024 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-17 years living in their household (n=2,010). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 67% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,031 parents with at least one child age 6-12. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 4 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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Implications

Children often react intensely to minor frustrations, as they are still learning to process their emotions. When children aren't able to manage their anger and frustration, they can say or do things that create problems for themselves and others. Parents play an important role in helping their child learn to manage their anger appropriately.

Parents in this Mott Poll endorsed a variety of strategies to help their child deal with anger or frustration. For many children, effective strategies involve a mechanism to take a break from the momentary frustration and give an opportunity to calm down and regain control. These strategies include cool-off activities like counting to ten or deep breathing, positive imagery like thinking about something happy or about a calm place, and affirmations like telling themselves it will be okay, or moving away from other people. Some children benefit from a physical outlet for their anger, like ripping paper or squeezing a stress ball. These are all strategies that children can practice and use on their own. Additionally, some parents find it useful to talk with children about what is causing their anger, giving them a chance to vent their frustrations; however, this strategy requires another person to be available for such a conversation.

Some parents may not feel equipped to teach their child techniques to manage their frustration, and even those who feel confident will find that there's no magic strategy that works for all children in all situations, and across developmental stages. Therefore, it's helpful for parents to seek out different sources of information and advice so they have a range of strategies to suggest to their child.

Most parents recognize their role in helping prevent angry outbursts. Children are more easily frustrated when they are tired or hungry, so parents should consider these needs when scheduling activities. Some parents encourage their child to practice some form of meditation, prayer or mindfulness, equipping them with a tool to keep calm and stay positive. Rewarding children for successfully managing a frustrating situation can send a positive message of parent approval; however, punishing a child for getting angry or frustrated will be less effective if parents do not emphasize the importance of using strategies to manage their frustration.

Parents also pointed to themselves as sometimes setting a bad example on managing anger. Just as it's natural for children to experience anger, adults do too. When parents feel they've set a bad example, they have a valuable opportunity to turn the situation into a teachable moment. By acknowledging their feelings, apologizing, and discussing what happened with their child, parents can demonstrate effective anger management strategies for their children to use when they get too angry. If a parent gets too angry to a point where it is unmanageable, they should seek a counselor to find healthier coping mechanisms.

Some children have temperaments that make them more prone to frustration, leading to quicker and more intense reactions. In this Mott Poll, 1 in 7 parents said their child gets angry more than other kids the same age. It's important for parents to let their child know that their anger does not make them a bad person; however, they need to learn strategies to manage their anger. Parents may want to enlist the help of their child's primary care provider, a therapist, or a school counselor to find options that match the child's needs.

It is common for children to have more difficulty managing their frustration at school than at home. At school, children have much less control – there are many others around, they don't have their own space, they are forced to follow someone else's schedule, and they can't avoid things that make them upset. Parents can inform teachers about what strategies work best at home, but should recognize that teachers often have to deal with a range of behaviors within the classroom space, so strategies may need to be adapted for the school setting.