

TAMING THE ANGRY

IT'S NORMAL FOR PARENTS TO LOSE IT, SAYS CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, RENEE MILL.



How many of us are caught off-guard by the fact that our precious children could make us angry? All parents - even educated, rational and/or mature mums and dads - can lose it at times. The shame parents feel over this extreme emotion can lead to silence, and prevent them from getting the support they need from other parents (who have probably experienced - or totally understand - what they're going through). So how do we handle anger?

STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGE IT

The first step is to acknowledge anger and share your frustrations with supportive friends.

STEP 2: ALTER YOUR THOUGHT PROCESS

Take a minute to work out what's getting to you, beyond the first level such as a child not behaving or a baby not sleeping. The second-level source of our anger is not as obvious. We get angry for all sorts of underlying reasons.

It could come from the past - for instance, maybe you grew up in a home where parents expressing anger was common. Sometimes we're angry because we are taking other, bigger issues out on our children. We might have a shorter fuse with the kids when really, we're frustrated with our partner or our boss, or we have money worries. Sometimes it might be because we're tired or hungry - so many mothers don't take time out to eat properly or can't find the opportunity to exercise, so our physical self-neglect takes its toll. Sometimes, it's none of these things and it's just the difficulties of adjusting to the unexpectedly high, hard demands of parenting.

For some parents, expressing anger is due to feeling helpless - they simply don't know what else to do.

STEP 3: TAKE THE TIME NOW

A big cause of anger is feeling helpless. Focus on upskilling or working through issues with your offspring to gain more cooperation.

For example, if you can't get your four year old to sit at the table at dinner time, work on ways to entice him to stay. Make it a playful time where you make faces out of the food or sing songs. Sit with him, make a star chart and every time he sits there for 10 minutes, he gets a star or a reward (not food or money).

If you are feeling rundown, consider getting enough food, sleep or exercise as a priority.

Take heart. Even if anger becomes chronic, there is a lot you can do to turn that anger around - if talking to friends doesn't help, seek the advice of a parenting professional.

Renee Mill is a Sydney clinical psychologist, mother and author, reneemill.com. She consults via Skype around Australia. Her latest book, *Parenting Without Anger* (Impact Press, \$32.99) includes non-coercive parenting strategies.

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