

SDDDFS Notes

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Anger Management and Schools

The decade of the 1990s has brought into focus the importance of Anger Management as a skill area for teachers and administrators in our schools. In the wake of several high-profile acts of school violence, as well as the media emphasis that accompanied them, there is a consensus among educators that comprehensive science-based anger management programs could have a positive impact on total school climate. Coupled with emergency response plans that have been and continue to be the focus of local and state level administrators, these programs can make a difference.

“Over the past twenty years, researchers have identified early indicators of violent behavior. The early indicators—deficient skills in empathy, impulse control, social problem solving, anger

management, and assertiveness—have been consistently correlated with adolescent and adult antisocial behavior” (www.cfchildren.org).

The National School Safety Center has developed a list of 20 behaviors that may predispose a child to violence, and two behaviors from the list are directly related to anger or the lack of anger management skills. Educators and experts alike know that when children have “tantrums and uncontrollable angry outbursts” and “habitually make violent threats when angry,” there must be some intervention. To neglect such behavior without intervention is to place that child and others at great risk of harm or violent behavior. Simply put, anger very frequently leads to violence, especially if there is no intervention (www.keystosaferschools.com).



What is Anger Management?

The goal of all anger management programs should be to assist people in learning how to reduce the emotional and physiological arousal that anger causes. The program's goals should never be aimed at the impossible task of eliminating anger, but to learn to control its effects on people and their environment (www.helping.apa.org/daily/anger.html).

Studies indicate that anger management techniques can be taught effectively to young children, adolescents, and to adults as well. Teaching anger management strategies has been found to reduce aggression in both children and adolescents (www.helping.apa.org/daily/anger.html).



The emotional and physiological stimulation that both precedes and accompanies a person's angry reaction is unique to each human being, of course. It is necessary therefore that any adult dealing with an angry child be equipped to help that young person identify the specific emotional and physiological cues that allow him or her to regain control of the anger and to curb a violent response.

Some experts believe that, rather than waiting until violence has occurred and then devoting increased resources to hiring additional school resource officers, creating in-school suspension centers, suspending or expelling students, a more effective approach would be to redirect resources to the implementation of violence prevention programs, particularly for young children and pre-adolescents (www.cfchildren.org).

Educators, parents and others "reduce the chance of violence in our youth when we give them the ability to arrive at nonviolent solutions to problems by teaching them skills such as:

- problem-solving,
 - stress management,
 - assertiveness,
 - anger control, and
 - impulse control"
- (www.apa.org).

Additionally, if an angry child is left alone to deal with feelings of hostility, the result can be:

- "poor school performance,
 - interpersonal conflicts, and/or
 - verbal or physical assaults"
- (www.apa.org).

What is Anger?



Anger is an emotion and not a behavior. It is normal, experienced by everyone, and it is manageable. (www.pac.uc.edu). It serves as our instinctual and natural "fight or flight" protection. It helps us to recognize ". . . threats to our own safety or our well-being or to the safety or well-being of those we care about" (www.about.com).

It is a fact of life that human beings become angry, but the way each of us expresses anger is learned -- from parents, other family members, friends, community, and media. (www.apa.org). Many children experience abuse or witness a parent or caretaker being abused. Television cartoons depict characters committing violent acts on each other without consequence, and many of the most popular video games involve extreme violence fighting and shooting weapons, seemingly encouraging remorseless violence.

Regardless of when we experience anger, however, all humans must find ways to express it in constructive rather than destructive ways.

Possible Causes of Anger in School Children

What could cause a child to become angry at school? While many issues that provoke children to anger seem inconsequential to adults, they are very real issues to children.

The following are some things that make children angry in school (Marion, 1997).

- Conflict over possessions (taking or contending over property or space),
- Physical assault (harsh physical contact with others, such as pushing, hitting, or fighting),
- Verbal conflict (teasing, taunting, or arguing),
- Rejection (being ostracized from peers or being ignored by those in authority), and
- Issues of compliance (involving, asking or insisting that children conform to a standard that may not be what they want to do).

Of course, many children arrive at school angry. Teachers and school administrators may not always be able to pinpoint the source of the anger, but we have the responsibility to help children learn to control and to express anger appropriately.

To Explode or Not to Explode: That is the Question.



Anger is not bad. The way anger is expressed renders it inappropriate or “bad.” Whether students perform explosive behavior (outbursts or acting out) or suppress their feelings (exhibit no body language, facial expressions or words), both are inappropriate ways to express anger and can hurt the child and others around them.

Everyone can identify the explosive personalities. They usually yell, scream, wave their arms, seethe, breath hard, and otherwise call attention to themselves. However, children who suppress their feelings are difficult to identify. They appear passive and hardly exhibit any emotions.

Many children who suppress their feelings do so because they have been told that anger is bad, were punished when they became angry, or they were ignored when they had legitimate issues that caused them to become angry. Nevertheless, both behaviors are equally dangerous. Here are a few medical/physical manifestations of students who suppress their anger (www.psc.uc.edu).



- Frequent headaches (medical attention has ruled out any physical disorder as the cause),
- Gastrointestinal disorders,
- Respiratory disorders,
- Skin disorders (hives),
- Genito-urinary disorders,
- Arthritis,
- Disabilities of the nervous system,
- Circulatory disorders,
- Aggravation of existing physical symptoms,
- Emotional disturbances, and
- Suicide.

Aggressive or passive behavior disrupts the academic environment. When teachers are confronted with either behavior, the safe and orderly learning environment of the school is at risk. Students deserve the opportunity to learn appropriate ways to express anger effectively and appropriately.

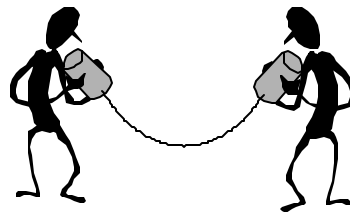


Helping Students Manage Their Anger

Anger management is a skill that students can learn. The following list is by no means comprehensive. It is merely a brief catalog of common sense behaviors and strategies that teachers and other adults can use to develop anger management skills in children. Educators should, of course, always remember that emotions are triggers that incite anger, and the keys to individual responses to anger and its control are unique to each particular child.



- ❖ Create a safe emotional climate — Teachers should create a classroom with clear, consistent, and flexible boundaries, one in which every student is treated fairly and is subject to consistent enforcement of a set of rules known and respected by everyone.
- ❖ Model responsible anger management — Children emulate behaviors, so to be the best teacher of anger management techniques, teachers must model their own anger effectively.
- ❖ Help children develop self-regulatory skills — Self-control and reflection skills allow children to regulate their own behavior.
- ❖ Encourage children to label their feelings — Usually a feeling precedes an angry response. It may be frustration, embarrassment, shame, or any number of triggers. If children learn to identify and label their feelings that precede reactions, their ability to exercise self-control will grow.
- ❖ Use books and stories about anger to help young children understand and manage anger — There are many books for young children that can help validate their feeling and educate them as to what is taking place inside them.
- ❖ Communicate with parents — Educators should share with parents what is being done to teach children to manage anger. Such efforts are much more likely to be successful if parents model the appropriate skills and reward responsible behavior in their children (Marion, 1997).



Helping Students Manage Their Anger, cont'd

When helping students to manage their anger, there are certain verbal responses that adults should avoid using, including confrontational comments beginning with:

- "You should..."
- "You're wrong..."
- "I demand..."
- "We can't..."
- "We won't..."
- "We never..."
- "You don't understand..."
- "That's stupid..."
- "You must be confused..."
- "I'm too busy for this..." or
- "You have to..." (Luhn, 1992)



Guidelines for Listening

Perhaps the most important component of anger management, from the viewpoint of an educator, is the skill of effective listening. To help students who become angry, teachers and administrators must exhibit the traits of effective listeners:

- Be attentive (Give a nod of the head; make eye contact -- without challenging),
- Be genuinely interested in the others person's needs or problems,
- Allow the other person express himself without reacting judgmentally,
- Resist getting drawn into the anger, and
- Help decide what needs to be accomplished cooperatively to resolve the conflict. (Luhn, 1992).

Resources, Assistance, and Information

The members of the FIE/SDDFS staff, as well as the staff of the Safe Schools Office at the Department of Education, stand ready to provide support through training and technical assistance to schools and school districts. We invite educators and other interested persons to take advantage of our services and resources. Please contact Melissa Hatch at (850) 414-9976 for further information regarding resources in the SDDFS Resource Center.

Listed below are additional sources of information on anger management that you may find helpful in your district. Those items available in the FIE/SDDFS Resource Center are specified with an asterisk (*).

Suggested Readings

Eggert, L.L. (1994). *Anger management for youth: Stemming aggression and violence*. Bloomington, IN. National Educational Service*

Potter-Efron, R. (1993). *How to Control Your Anger (Before It Controls You): A Guide for Teenagers*. New York, NY. Carol Publishing Group.*

Moser, Adolph. (1994). *Don't Rant and Rave on Wednesdays!. The Children's Anger Control Book*. Kansas City, MO. Landmark Editions, Inc.

Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2000). *Early Warning Timely Response: A Guide to Safer Schools*. Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of Education.*

Wilde, Jerry. (1995). *Anger Management in Schools: Alternatives to Student Violence*. Lanham, MD. Scarecrow Press, Inc.*

Other Selected Resources

Shapiro, L.E., et al. (1994). *The Anger Control Tool Kit*. King of Prussia, Pa. The Center for Applied Psychology, Inc. (Includes video.)*

Sunburst. (1999). *Student Workshop: Angry? Ten Ways to Cool Off. Grades: K-2*. Pleasantville, NY. Sunburst Technology (A three-part workshop on how to deal with anger.)*

Schloat, A.W. (1999). *Expressing Anger: Healthy vs. Unhealthy*. Mt. Kisco, NY. Human Relations Media, Inc. (Includes video and teacher's resource book.)*

Colvin, Geoff(1999). *Defusing Anger and Aggression: Safe Strategies for Secondary School Educators*. Eugene, OR. Iris Media, Inc. (Staff development video program for secondary school educators.)*

Suggested Electronic Resources



Conflict Resolution Network helps to create safe schools and civil communities by making conflict resolution education universally available. (www.crenet.org)

Geocities is a web-site that takes teens through a step-by-step guide on managing their anger. (www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/6729/anger5.htm)

Parenting Toolbox contains an article for parents entitled "*Talking to Children About Violence*." This article is for parents that are interested in helping teachers and administrators guide their child(ren) in dealing with anger issues. The article gives parents an ideal on where and how to begin to deal with issues of anger. (www.parentingtoolbox.com)

Electronic Resources, cont'd

PsychPage is a web-site with useful information that parents can use to help their child(ren) with anger issues. This information can also be applied to the school environment.

(www.psychpage.com)

YouthVision, a unique program started in 1998, offers young people the opportunity to find their own creative ways to resolve conflict. Youth across the nation are challenged to describe how they can work with other youth and adults to craft innovative projects that address issues of conflict, prejudice, or violence in their schools and communities.

(www.ncpc.org/ythvisn.htm)

School Mediation Associates is a site featuring school conflict resolution and mediation information, book excerpts, discussions, news and links. Hosted by School Mediation Associates, an international leader in resolving conflict at school.

(www.schoolmediation.com)

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