



## Angry Feelings



*Fred Rogers often said that one of his most important messages was helping children find constructive ways to deal with their angry feelings. He wanted to help children and their parents understand that anger is natural and normal, but that there are healthy things we can do when we're angry – things that don't hurt others.*

Almost everyone gets angry sometimes. That's just part of being human, whether you're a grownup or child. But we have to learn what to do with the mad that we feel, and that's a long, hard process. It happens little by little. In fact, it's something we work on all through our lives.

When do we get mad? Usually when we feel helpless or left out or frustrated. So it's no wonder children get angry a lot...and angry with the people who are closest to them, like parents and friends. It's the people we like the most who can make us feel gladdest...and maddest! In fact, love and anger are often intertwined in our closest relationships.

When young children get angry, they sometimes hit or bite or kick. That doesn't mean they're "bad." That's just how they show they're mad. They don't yet have words to tell us how they feel.



### Helping Children Learn Self-Control

There's such a good feeling in being able to control "the mad that you feel." But children aren't born with self-control. They learn it gradually as they grow from infants to toddlers to preschoolers — and beyond. And they learn it best with the help of the people they love.

Children want and need controls, and they need to know that adults will do all we can to keep them safe while they're developing their own inner controls.

When children know their parents care deeply about them and care about whatever they're feeling, they are more likely to be able to talk about their feelings rather than act them out. When your child seems to be angry, you could say something like, "I know you're mad about that, but you can't

hurt!" When a child is getting angry with a friend, you could say, "Tell him (or her) that you're angry! It helps when you use words." At a quiet time, talk about other things children can do when they're angry so they won't hurt anyone or break things.

It takes thought and emotional energy to work through our own angry moments. If that's what we'd like our children to learn, we're going to have to make it clear to them that we value being able to

“stop” from doing something that may hurt: stop and then do something else instead that doesn't hurt anyone. Children will “catch” that message from us if we believe it's important. And they'll want to make it their own, in order to become more like those they love.

## Helpful Hints

### Talking about angry feelings:

- Children learn from your example. When you use words to talk about your angry feelings, your child sees that there are things people can do when they're mad that don't hurt.
- Talk about different constructive ways people can handle their mad feelings at school, at home or with friends.
- Help your child know that listening and compromising are powerful tools for working out conflicts.



### Encouraging self-control:

- Give your child ways to practice self-control by playing games like “red light, green light,” or stringing beads, or moving toy cars along a “road” made from a piece of masking tape.
  - When your child is about to hit but holds back, that's an important time to say something like, “I'm proud of you! You wanted to hit, but you stopped yourself! Look how well you're growing!”
  - Praise your child for small moments of control, like for trying something hard, taking turns, or waiting.
- Try to help your child calm down. You may have to try different things to find out what works for your child. And that will change as your child grows.
  - When children get angry, sometimes parents get angry, too, and that makes the children more upset than ever. If you can stay calm but firm, your child may be more able to get back into control.

