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HOW TO RESPOND TO A CHILD'S ANGER

- 1) **STAY CALM.** If you get angry, your child's temper will escalate.
- 2) **IF YOU HAVE BECOME ANGRY, FIND A WAY TO COOL OFF.** It is okay to be honest that you have become too angry to continue talking. Then model for your child how to cool off.
- 3) **END THE CONVERSATION WHEN ONE OF YOU IS STARTING TO BECOME ANGRY.** Do not try to discuss anything with your child (or anyone else) when either of you is angry. People cannot think clearly when they are angry. You may think you are helping your child by trying to talk him into calming down, but it usually only irritates him further. End the conversation politely during the early stages of anger, so that you do not have to end it when one of you is explosive and/or out of control. When your child is again calm, be sure to stick with the rule that caused the anger. Be careful of letting him or her use a temper outburst to avoid responsibilities.
- 4) **YOUR BEHAVIOR WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY MODELS COPING SKILLS FOR YOUR CHILD.** Are you demonstrating positive or negative coping skills?
- 5) **VALIDATING ANGER CAN DIFFUSE IT.** Notice what has caused your child to become angry. Let your child know that you hear his anger and that you can see why he feels angry. Validate his anger in a soft, loving way. You may find that the anger has decreases or even disappears. Other ways to validate anger are to ask him to show you with his hands how big his anger is. Or ask him to draw what his anger looks like.
- 6) **FATIGUE, HUNGER, SUGAR AND STRESS CAN CAUSE TEMPERS TO FLARE** (both yours and your child's).
 - Be sure you are both getting enough sleep each night
 - Keep a stash of healthy snacks and water in your car and in a backpack or handbag when you are shopping.

- Remember that your child may surprise you by what he finds stressful. Be respectful of his needs.
 - Children can be stressed by a change in schedule, illness, a visit with a relative, a visit to the doctor, etc.
 - Be alert for situations that might stress your child, and then talk about them and help with problem solving.
- 7) **LOOK FOR PATTERNS.** What time of day or what situations lead to anger and tantrums? Make a prevention plan.
- 8) **TEACH ANGER MANAGEMENT SKILLS WHEN YOUR CHILD IS CALM.** Do not try to do any teaching when your child is angry. Even if your child has calmed down, if you try to teach too soon, the anger may resurface and prevent your child from being open to what you are teaching.
- Read children's books together about anger and other emotions. Be sure to discuss the book as you are reading it.
 - Discuss situations that your child encounters when others get angry.
 - Comment on how people's body and faces show their feelings.
 - Reflect together on situations that happen repeatedly and help your child problem solve what to do the next time.
 - When your child has a plan of action for the next temper situation, you can coach him with one or two brief reminders when that situation comes up.
- 9) **TEACHING ANGER MANAGEMENT SKILLS DOES NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT.** When you begin teaching about anger management, your child may resist what you are teaching or be slow to catch on to the concepts. Be patient. Stick with it. At each developmental stage new issues with anger may surface. Be prepared to make this an on-going process throughout childhood.

Margaret W. Neal, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Riverside, CA. Her work focuses on "helping young children and their parents." For more information, visit Margaret's website at www.margaretwneal.com.