

Helping Children Use Their Anger Productively

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Children are more primitive than adults in their expression of emotions. Tantrums and hitting are fairly common with young children. There are several ways that parents can help:

- **Provide children with a good role model.** The way a parent handles his/her own problems and frustrations will provide a model for the children.
 - Do you fly into a rage, hurling insults and humiliating remarks?
 - Do you sink into a depression (an adult temper tantrum or “silent storm”)?
 - Do you model a “problem solving” approach to handling problems?
- **Guide children with words to find more effective forms of expression.**
 - Example: “I can see that you are angry. Can you tell me with words instead of hitting?”
 - Example: “You have the right to feel angry, but in our family, we don’t scream and blame; we look for solutions to problems.”
 - Example: “When you get angry at me, please tell me without calling me names. I don’t call you names; please don’t call me names.”
- **Remove yourself from a power struggle.** When children have tantrums, you can acknowledge their anger. Don’t try to overpower the child; withdraw instead. This action says to the child, “I am not intimidated by your show of temper and will not give in, but I won’t punish or humiliate you either.” Children who get neither a fight nor their own way after throwing tantrums will usually find more acceptable ways to influence people.
- **Give your child a choice.** In those situations where a child’s tantrum interferes with the rights of others (e.g., in a restaurant, or when company is in the home), the child can be given the choice of either expressing him/herself appropriately or having a tantrum someplace else. You must be ready to act on the child’s choice by calmly and firmly removing the child if the tantrum persists.
- **Allow the child to influence your decisions.** When a person feels powerless to influence leaders, frustration gives way to anger and rebellion. If you allow your child to influence your decisions concerning him/her, he/she will also not be as likely to resort to tantrums.

The method your child uses to influence your decisions will be influenced by what you allow to work. If you “give in” to tantrums, whining or tears, the child will learn to use these tactics again. If you redirect your child to express his/her anger respectfully, listen to his/her arguments, and sometimes change your decisions, then your child learns the important skill of negotiation.