

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANGRY KIDS

By Todd Clements, M.D., and Kim Ferren, L.P.C.

Kids get angry just like adults. Anger is not a bad emotion but is an emotion given to us by God. It can be used as a protective mechanism or to bring about change in a bad situation. The Bible places great emphasis on how we handle anger (Ephesians 4:26). Even Jesus became angry when he encountered the money changers in the temple, yet He did not sin. However, aggressive anger is a destructive way of handling anger that usually results in accomplishing more harm than good. We want to help you as a parent, friend, teacher, coach, or someone else involved with a child or teenager learn how to deal with that kid's anger.

**Realize that hurting kids hurt other people.** Kids who are depressed or lonely are more likely to “explode” when frustrated. Depression is often characterized more by irritability than sadness.

**Kids must be allowed to express their anger.** The best way to diffuse anger is to discuss it, find the root source, and see what changes can be made to correct it. When a kid is told to go to his room until he “is over with his anger,” the anger only becomes repressed and often comes out later, many times in a destructive way.

**Kids model your behavior.** How do you handle anger? Do you scream and yell? Physically throw objects or attack someone? Guess what. . .your kid thinks that is the normal way to express anger and will react the same way. Children and teens watch what you do more than listen to what you say.

**You cannot punish away anger.** By the time teens reach our Breakaway program, we notice several things: 1) parents are worn out and frustrated, 2) teens have had most of their privileges taken away as punishment, and 3) the teens are very angry. Punishing anger does not resolve it but rather represses it.

**You must allow time for anger to dissipate.** You cannot expect a kid to get over his anger right away just because you tell him to. As with any emotion, it takes time and a safe environment to overcome painful and volatile feelings.

**You cannot force a kid to talk to you.** If you try to force them to talk before they are ready, they will push you farther away. Many angry kids will not talk to their parents but will talk to another adult or counselor. A wise counselor will find a way to incorporate the whole family into learning to communicate appropriately.

**Bargaining with an explosive kid does not work.** Kids learn very quickly how to use this as a means of manipulation, just like throwing a temper tantrum for attention. Never reward explosive anger. Instead, have a standing agreement on what the consequences will be if your kid chooses to explode, and then be faithful in following through.

**Head injuries, mental illness, and drug/alcohol use can sometimes lead to explosive behavior.** A fully functioning brain spends 90% of its energy inhibiting itself; that keeps us from acting on every emotion. Some injuries, as seemingly insignificant as getting hit on the head by a soccer ball, can lead to minimal brain injury. Other medical conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia can cause kids to be explosive. Drugs and alcohol can also interfere with the brain's ability to inhibit itself. If you suspect a medical condition or any substance abuse, please do not delay in seeking professional treatment.

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For additional information, we recommend “The Angry Teenager” by Dr. William Lee Carter, Thomas Nelson Publisher. Meier Clinics' Intensive Outpatient Program for Adolescents, *Breakaway*, is available in Wheaton, Illinois.

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