

Counselor's Corner

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Safe Ways to Expend Angry Energy *by Shari Steelsmith*

Learning how to maintain good judgment even when emotions run high is a sign of maturity. Many children who have intense personalities struggle with anger. All their feelings are big and when they're mad, well, they're *very* mad. One point we tend to lose sight of when we deal with such a child is that quite often, there is a good reason for him or her to be angry. Maybe a sibling snatched his toy or a parent cancelled her playdate. Maybe someone called him an unkind name on the playground, or perhaps the teacher blamed her for something someone else did in the classroom. Becoming angry isn't the problem—it's how that angry energy is expended that is likely the problem. Whereas a child of moderate temperament might protest or throw out a "Hey, that's not fair!" comment, a child with an intense personality might scream, hurl loud accusations, or even hit.

Therapists Jennifer Brown and Pam Provonsha Hopkins, authors of *What Angry Kids Need: Parenting Your Angry Child Without Going Mad*, say it has been their experience that intense children often get the message that it's not okay to be angry. More helpful, they say is the message that there are safe and unsafe ways to express anger. Teach them how to express anger safely.

One important concept for children to learn is that they can be mad and still make a good decision. Children can learn over time that they can separate their feelings from their behavior. Making a good decision means taking steps to calm down, say Brown and Hopkins, and then concentrating on solving the problem. It is particularly important for them to see parents modeling the skill. The following are just a few of the many ideas and techniques for safely expressing anger in *What Angry Kids Need*: Take several deep breaths, count to 5 or 10, say "I'm mad because. . .", run around outside, or squish play dough.

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