



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How does your child show anger?

Ages & Stages

PRESCCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

Angry feelings are normal. Young children usually get angry when they are not able to get what they want or need. Anger can also be a stand-in reaction for another feeling like jealousy, fear, or sadness. While feeling angry is normal, children need to learn healthy ways to handle angry feelings.

It will take many years of practice and patience to teach this, but keep the following ideas in mind as you help your child deal with angry feelings:

- Teach them to recognize the feeling of anger. (*“I see you are angry right now.”*) This will help your child name the feeling they have.
- Ask them to tell you how their body and mind feel when they are angry. Give them the words they need to talk about it.
- Talk with your child about the different angry feelings (like irritated, frustrated, annoyed, mad, and furious). They need to learn that there is a difference between being a little bit angry or a lot angry, and how they feel at each level.
- Ask your child to explain why they are upset, even if you already know the answer, so you both know what is bothering them.
- Practice expressing anger and hurt in words and remind them often to use their words.
- Act out angry feelings when the two of you are playing. Make-believe the toys are angry and show your child good ways of sharing those feelings.
- Allow your child to be angry. Try not to say things like, “It’s not that big a deal,” or “There’s no reason to be upset.” They need to know you understand their feelings before they can think about dealing with those feelings differently.
- Help your child find ways to work out frustration in a physical activity. Ask them to draw or scribble their angry feelings, take three breaths, or kick a ball outside. Sometimes being physical helps relieve anger.
- Teach them to think of anger as a problem that needs a solution. (*“What can you do to deal with your angry feelings?”*)
- Let your child know what they can and cannot do when they are angry. For example, it is okay to stomp their feet on the ground, squeeze a pillow, or walk away. It is not okay to hurt themselves, anyone else (including pets), or their own or anyone else’s things.

- Be a good role model when you are angry. If your child sees that you take a deep breath and count to 10 when you are angry, they may learn to do the same.
- If you are concerned about your child's anger, talk to your family health care provider or the local health department.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4KI>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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