

Solutions is a parent newsletter published by ESS during the school year. Each issue highlights an important topic related to children's mental health and provides practical applications for parents in the home environment.

## PARENTING YOUR CHILD: YOU DON'T HAVE TO ATTEND EVERY FIGHT YOU'RE INVITED TO

*Parents and kids have the ability to provoke each other as no one else can. Our children can push our buttons simply because they are our children. They often trigger the intense feelings of our own childhoods, so we tend to respond by unconsciously re-enacting our past.*

Anger is also a powerful emotion because it can be a disguise for other intense feelings like fear, pain, inferiority, disappointment, powerlessness, shame, sadness or grief. It's little wonder that we struggle to control ourselves in the face of such an intense, complicated emotion. The good news is that there are ways to effectively de-escalate the situation and begin to create a new generation of conflict resolution. Here are some strategies to add to your parenting tool kit:

### 1. Avoid triggers.

Dr. Vasco Lopes, a clinical psychologist, says most kids who have frequent meltdowns do it at very predictable times. The trigger is usually being asked to do something they don't like, or to stop doing something they do like. Time warnings ("we're going in 10 minutes"), breaking tasks down into one-step directions ("first, put on your shoes"), and preparing your child for situations ("please ask to be excused before you leave Grandma's table") can all help avoid meltdowns.

### 2. Don't yell or challenge your child when he's angry.

The best thing you can do is remain calm in a crisis. If you respond with aggression, the tension either stays at a heightened place, or escalates. So, just wait until he calms down. As an adult, you rely on logic to defuse a tense situation. But, when you're dealing with your angry child, you have to use different techniques. Instead, wait until he calms down and talk it through later.

### 3. Praise appropriate behavior.

When he has calmed down, praise him for pulling himself together. And when he does try to express his feelings verbally, calmly, or try to find a compromise on an area of disagreement, praise him for those efforts.

### 4. Never get physical with your child.

In the heat of the moment, anger can become physical. **It is never ok to put your hands on your child in anger.** If you get physical with your child, among other things, you're just teaching him to solve his problems with aggression. So, take a break and come back and interact with each other later when everyone is calm.

### 5. Don't negotiate during a crisis

It's easy to become emotionally overwhelmed when your child is in the midst of a tirade. So your job is to *not* take the bait—don't get angry, and don't give in. Avoid the temptation to renegotiate with your child because there is the danger that if you give in and renegotiate, even occasionally, you're teaching your child that it's worth it to act out. Instead, let them calm down and try to coach them to use their own problem-solving skills later. Choose not to give in!

**RESOURCES:** *Helping Young Children Control Anger and Handle Disappointment*, Gail E. Joseph, Ph.D. & Phillip S. Strain, Ph.D. *Center on Evidence Based Practices for Early Learning*

*Angry Child Outbursts: The 10 Rules of Dealing with an Angry Child* By Carole Banks  
<https://childmind.org/article/angry-kids-dealing-with-explosive-behavior/DrVascoLopes>

**PARENTS MATTER:** *In every interaction with your child, you have the power to calm or escalate the situation.*