

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

Anger is sometimes referred to as a 'secondary emotion' or a 'masking emotion'. That's because as well as being a valid emotion in its own right, we can also feel anger as a response to other, more vulnerable feelings such as shame, loneliness, sadness, nervousness, embarrassment...or a combination of any of these, and the list could go on! Teaching young people to identify the feeling beneath the anger is an important part of teaching self-regulation.

1 Co-Regulation

Children and young people – particularly those who find self-regulation difficult – look to the adults in their lives to help them regulate strong emotions. The adult can do this by consistently modelling the desired tone and behaviour (i.e. not joining them in their anger!) and narrating what's happening and what needs to happen.

This explicitly shows them how to react and respond appropriately. The adult remains calm but engaged, continues to communicate with warmth, and ensures that predictable and consistent boundaries and consequences are in place so that children learn to recognise the cues.

2 Feeling the Feeling

Anger can be unpleasant to feel – it can often seem easier to act on it, even though in the longer term this could make things worse. Learning how to tolerate an uncomfortable emotion takes practise. Encourage the child to take deep breaths and focus on the areas in their body where they feel the anger. This takes their attention to what they're feeling instead of why they're feeling it. Encourage them to continue breathing deeply, noticing what they feel without judging the feelings or trying to make them go away. After a while, if they notice any other feelings with the anger, ask if they can put names to the other feelings that are there.

3 Go-to Activities

Once children are able to identify the physical cues that tell them they're becoming angry, support them in identifying 'go to' activities that help them to feel calmer before it becomes a problem for them. Quite often this is physical activity – anything that gets the heart rate going. Favourite activities can also help, such as playing computer games. In a school context, this quite often needs communication and imagination! Having a 'squeeze ball', a scribble pad or an activity that occupies without raising stress levels, such as a word search, are ideas that have been used successfully.

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