

Rewarding Anger Control

1. Praise children for when they could have lost their temper but did not. Please do not take your child's anger control efforts for granted. Point out situations of frustration, disappointment, unfairness, or provocation that they handled well
2. Compliment children on the anger control strategies they use. Referring to specific anger control techniques (e.g., "I'm glad you walked away from your brother instead of fighting with him") is more helpful than a generic compliment (e.g., "Thanks for controlling your temper").
3. When children cooperate and/or control their temper they are accomplishing a number of important things. They need to be told that they are saving us time and demonstrating self-control that will directly lead to more privileges and opportunities. Responsible behavior enhances the entire mood of a family or classroom, and a child should receive recognition and "credit" for positive attitudes and behaviors.
4. Focus on attitudes and not just behaviors. Praise and reward a child for doing a chore or complying with a request with a positive attitude. If you are using a reward system (see below), give extra points for a "can do" or "no big deal" attitude.
5. If a child does have problems with their anger, wait till they calm down to talk with them. Try and focus on the steps they took to keep their anger in check, even if those steps were unsuccessful.
6. Try and put anger outbursts in perspective. Point out indications of improvement (e.g., "Yes, you lost your temper, but you did not hit your brother when you got mad at him").
7. Set up a reward program that focuses on anger control. When your child handles an anger control trigger without breaking the anger rules (no hitting, no hurting people's feelings, no damage to other people's property, no disruption of another person's activity) they should receive some type of credit (a point on a chart, a token for a token system). As the child earns credit, they can trade them in for a fun activity with a family member or friend (try and avoid using toys or gifts as rewards).
8. Consider a very tangible, visible reward system. Filling a jar or plastic bottle with marbles or packing popcorn works very well. As the youngster demonstrates anger control, we add the marble to the jar. When the jar reaches a certain level (it need not be filled) we celebrate in some small way. As they reach another level, plan another celebration. When the jar is full, the major celebration takes place. Please be careful not to use too large of a container.
9. When using a reward system, consider doubling the "credit" for observable anger control techniques. If a youngster keeps his or her cool by taking a deep breath, walking away, or saying, "it's no big deal", they get an extra "point". Multiple anger control methods would earn multiple points.

10. Use a “time bank”. When a child takes “no” for an answer or cooperates with a request, they are saving us valuable time. If they control their temper, they are again saving us time. If they accept our limits without arguing, time is not wasted. Keep track of the time that is saved and use it to have a fun time with your child (movies, swimming, biking, etc.). Anger control saves time which can be better spent doing fun things.
11. Consider adding a “response cost” component to the reward system. Some children will work to control their temper if they are gently reminded that an anger outburst is going to lose them a point from the reward system or time from their time bank. Other youngsters react very negatively to the prospect of losing credit and benefit from a “reward only” system.
12. Reinforce anger control that is demonstrated by other family members. The child with an anger problem can learn from this and may be more motivated to achieve similar recognition and rewards.
13. Make a list of the fun opportunities that your youngster might be looking forward to that require anger control. Your child might want to go to a ballgame with a friend or have some friends sleep over. To get to do those things, they must show anger control improvement. They can’t very well lose their temper when a group of friends are sleeping over.
14. Some children need a gentle reminder as to what is at stake. If they are trying to earn time to go to an arcade, they may decide not to argue about turning off the television or going to downstairs to pick up in their room. A simple comment about what they are working towards can be very helpful (e.g., “I thought you were trying to earn time to go to an arcade? Is it worth arguing and losing time?”)