

## Hot Perspectives and Hot Thoughts That Fuel Anger

“Your beliefs, either positive or negative, helpful or hurtful, largely determine everything you do and how you do it.”

Our anger is fueled by how we think about things. People with anger problems tend to interpret situations negatively. It is this negative interpretation that sparks and fuels their anger reactions. We need to understand these anger thoughts and help children develop a healthier perspective.

**Opportunity.** Children get angry because they believe that they "will never" get what they want. They discount previous moments where things have gone their way and focus on when they don't. If a child cannot do or get what they want right that moment, they react as if they never will. Such children can be taught to delay gratification. They can develop a "maybe later" approach to things not going their way. If they understand that "not now" is different than "never" they will have an easier time handling disappointment and unfairness. We can help make future opportunities more tangible by scheduling them on a calendar.

**Entitlement.** Some children react with anger because they believe that they should get what they want simply because they desire it and because others receive it. They don't accept the connection between their actions, rewards and consequences. They have a distorted view of what other children have or do. They emphasize peers with privilege while failing to acknowledge that others far less. We can and should, for example, counterbalance such claims as “everyone has a phone” or “everyone has a later bedtime” with the reality of those that don't.

**Effort.** Some children do not understand the importance of work. When asked to help out around the house or complete their homework, they react as if they were being asked to do some enormous job. The trash becomes heavier and the homework more difficult. We can help them understand why work is important, how such tasks benefit them. As we will discuss in the modules that address the **FIRED UP** triggers, we can teach children how to view work as the path to getting what they want instead of a barrier.

**Time.** Children may have a distorted perception of time. They may think that a chore will take longer to finish than it really will. A few hours of waiting seems like forever. We can help our youngsters by giving them activity markers (e.g. we can go to the store after dinner). Avoid such phrases as "in awhile" or "maybe later." Short, specific time frames help children understand how long things will really take. You can build time references by comparing them to experiences that are more tangible and relatable. A half hour, for example, is the length of a TV show.

**Negative view.** Most of us could benefit from a more positive perspective. Of central importance is the view of self. If we consider ourselves incapable or lacking power, we are more susceptible to frustration. When we view ourselves as less fortunate or unlucky, we are generally more susceptible to disappointment. A negative view of our world (family, community, country, world)

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certainly makes us vulnerable to unfairness and provocation. Learning to appreciate the positives; in our lives (self, family, community) has a profound impact on our anger and our happiness.

**Intent.** The perception of hostility or ill will is one of the biggest factors in people with anger problems. They believe that others are deliberately trying to annoy or harm them. Children believe that their parents are specifically trying to interfere with their fun, that they are choosing the most inconvenient time to do a chore. When children learn to look at things from another person's view and not jump to the negative they are not angered as easily.

**Appraisals.** Some children and adults have a tendency to view outcomes more negatively. They have a more perfectionistic view, setting their goals too high and viewing mistakes as failures and failures as catastrophic. They overreact to feedback as a personal attack. They are harsh in their own self-evaluation, emphasizing their failures and comparing themselves to others who are more successful. Learning to interpret outcomes in a more positive, balanced way is a very important element of anger control.

**Distortions.** Our response to anger triggers often includes cognitive distortions that can be best described as hot thinking. Always/never thinking (e.g. "You never let me" or "You always say no") leads us to overreact to virtually all anger triggers. Magnified, catastrophic thinking ("I was the worst on the team" or "I will never get better") makes us far more sensitive to even a relatively mild anger trigger. Victimization thoughts ("She always picks on me", "She doesn't like me") causes more reactivity to unfairness and provocation. As mentioned above, self-efficacy distortions (e.g., "I am no good at anything" or "I am so dumb") make us more vulnerable to frustration. Always blaming others makes it far more difficult to accept responsibility. Please review the handout that provides examples of positive thoughts that counter the negative thinking.

## **Hot Perspectives and Hot Thoughts That Fuel Anger Summary**

People with anger problems tend to interpret situations negatively

- Children get angry because they think they will never get what they want.
- Some children react with anger out of a sense of entitlement.
- Some children do not understand the importance of work, make it a path to what they want not a barrier.
- Children may have a distorted perception of time.
- A negative view of our world makes us vulnerable to unfairness and provocation.
- People get angry when they think another person is hostile.
- Some people view outcomes more negatively.
- Anger triggers may include cognitive distortions or hot thinking.

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