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Anger and frustration worksheets

When we become upset about something, we need time to process the emotions we experience. Even after the problem has gone away or an apology has been received, we may still have those same feelings (Peters, 2018a). Learning to handle feelings, especially powerful ones such as anger, can be difficult, especially for young children. Learning to understand how they feel and improving emotional regulation techniques can help children respond to the emotions and environment around them with more control and skill (Snowden, 2018). This article explores and shares tools, activities, and games to help children make sense of and manage their internal states and emotions. Before you continue, we thought you might like to download our three Positive CBT Exercises for free. These science-based exercises will provide you with a detailed insight into positive Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and give you the tools to apply it in your therapy or coaching. Anger Management Therapy for Kids 101 Anger is a difficult feeling for children. It can make them want to destroy things or hurt comments that hurt others. With the right tools and techniques, even young children can be taught to see anger differently and maintain or regain control over how they feel (Snowden, 2018). Many of the most helpful techniques in anger management therapy are ones that children can take to adulthood. The approaches that follow encourage healthy habits for life, where the child chooses what works best for them (Peters, 2018b). Mastery of such techniques is important in childhood and crucial as children reach adolescence, where unchecked anger can have a “variety of maladaptive adolescent outcomes” (Ho, Carter, & Stephenson, 2010, p. 246). Early anger management therapy relied on applied behavioral interventions, such as manipulating environmental stimuli, punishment, and reinforcement, and typically required individuals with challenging behavior to receive ongoing support (Ho et al., 2010). Cognitive-Behavioral approaches to anger management, on the other hand, empower the child. They involve the client and therapist working together to think through and practice new behavioral solutions, including (Ho et al., 2010): Problem solving Relaxation Self-control and coping strategies Cognitive restructuring (teaching alternate ways of thinking) Stress inoculation (gradually increasing exposure to triggers) When compared with the traditional behavioral approach, developing self-control and coping skills leads to better maintenance and generalization (Ho et al., 2010). Despite the early onset of aggression in children, it needn’t develop into unstable personality traits in adulthood. Through effective interventions, at-risk children and adolescents can learn to deal with situations in nonaggressive ways and lead productive lives in adulthood (Nelson, Finch, & Ghee, 2012). In anger management, kids are taught to recognize when anger is likely to show up, how it makes them feel, see behavioral patterns, and find healthy ways to remain or return to calm (Snowden, 2018). 3 Strategies to Teach Children In her book, Anger Management Workbook for Kids, Samantha Snowden (2018) offers three essential questions to consider when working with children. Together they form valuable strategies to manage anger and better understand emotions and feelings (Snowden, 2018). Each question can be explored and answered (in groups or one-to-one) to encourage children to understand their anger. The more open the adult is about their experiences, the more likely the child will feel safe and comfortable being vulnerable. They will recognize anger as an emotion common to everyone. The three questions are (modified from Snowden, 2018): Why do I feel angry? What happens when I feel angry? What should I do with my anger? Why do I feel angry? Sometimes it is difficult to recognize why we are angry. It can appear out of the blue and unexpectedly. When we know what triggers our anger (e.g., people, places, situations), we can anticipate it and react quickly to stop it from getting out of control (Snowden, 2018). “Thinking about your anger will help you see patterns more clearly and find healthy ways to feel calm again” (Snowden, 2018, p. 1). Knowing why you feel angry and how you are impacting those around you will promote better choices when you are angry. Exploring why a child feels anger – the triggers and situations – can provide early warning to help them remove themselves from the situation, stop their anger from escalating, and feel in control. What happens when I feel angry? When anger appears, it can be fast, seemingly unavoidable, and yet unsurprising. Each of us is attempting to fulfill our own needs and live according to our goals. Inevitably, what we want or do may not always match the expectations or demands of those around us (Snowden, 2018). When this happens, we can feel angry and upset. Children must understand the causes of their anger, such as tiredness, anger, people breaking their ideas regarding fairness, or having to stop doing something they enjoy. It is also essential that children learn how anger is stopping them from getting what they need and want (Snowden, 2018). Learning how to spot these triggers means we can avoid them and redirect our energies and attention elsewhere. It is an essential and logical step that forms part of a bigger strategy to regain control over anger. What should I do with my anger? We all get angry at times. Recognizing the emotion and learning to greet it with kindness can help you “host your difficult feelings, like you would welcome a visitor at home” (Snowden, 2018, p. 89). Refocusing our attention on what is good in our lives is a powerful technique to create balance and gain control over our feelings. Being kind and patient with ourselves can create more healthy ways of being open with others about how we feel and what we need while remaining aware of others’ feelings. Asserting control and knowing what to do when anger visits next time can restore the child’s self-belief and regain their trust in their own abilities to manage situations. Tools and techniques to teach kids anger management strategies The activities that follow encourage children to approach their anger habits with openness and kindness. Once identified, they can adopt coping mechanisms to cultivate more pleasant, positive states of mind (Snowden, 2018). Top 3 Activities and Games for Kids Children often learn best when they are playing. Games and activities promote self-learning and, when focused on emotions, help children identify their anger and associated triggers and behavior (Peters, 2018b). The following activities and games offer a fun and insightful way for children and their parents or teachers to understand the situations that lead to anger and how they can react differently (modified from Peters, 2018b; Snowden, 2018). Role-play Children sometimes have to do things they do not enjoy: completing homework, turning off the TV, or going to bed at night. The gap between what they want to do and what they must do can be a source of anger (Peters, 2018b). Self-discipline is an essential skill for children to learn and helps them manage their more reactive and emotional side. Role-play can be a valuable way for children and adults to explore particular anger triggers such as being told to stop doing something or perform an activity that does not factor in their plan despite being good for them. For example, you could role-play that the child is asked to clean their room, but their emotional side takes over and starts acting up. Peters (2018b) refers to our reactive, emotional side as our “chimp.” Encourage the child to practice saying ‘stop’ to their emotional chimp and talk through how they will get things done. It can help to have them speak out loud to their chimp, telling it not to argue, stop misbehaving, and be sensible so that everyone can be happy (Peters, 2018b). Such self-discipline can be a valuable approach to preventing the onset of angry behavior. Scenarios and their outcomes Understanding the different options available to them can help children choose thinking and behavior more appropriate to their own and others’ needs. Work through several scenarios that typically lead to anger, and discuss three possible responses for each one (Peters, 2018b). I have been blamed for something I didn’t do. a) I am going to get angry and behave badly. b) I am never going to do anything again. Or, more helpfully, c) I am going to explain that I am upset because I didn’t do it. I can’t do something new. a) I am going to cry and get angry. b) I am going to sulk and give up. Or, more helpfully, c) I am going to talk to someone and learn how to do it. My friend has borrowed something and hasn’t given it back. a) I am going to get angry with them and demand they give it back. b) I will never talk to my friend again. Or, more helpfully, c) I am going to explain that I am upset and would like to have it back. If that doesn’t work, then I will talk it through with an adult. Encourage the child to explain why the two extremes (a and b) are not helpful or the best outcome for everyone involved. Then discuss why option c leads to a better result and less upset. Who’s in the driver’s seat? “Anger can change the way we see people and situations.” Snowden, 2018, p. 80 Work with the child to help them understand and recognize the clues that indicate an angry or a calm mind. A calm mind can enable us to: Consider the consequences of our actions How would the other person feel if I took away their toy? See different sides Perhaps it was an accident rather than something they did on purpose. Be understanding Perhaps they are just having a bad day. Hold back or walk away I need to calm myself before saying or doing something I will regret. See feelings more clearly I am sad, frustrated, or angry. An angry mind is like this: Reactive I’ll do what I want. Does what it wants, when it wants I was hurt, so I should hurt them back. Recognizing each of the above signs can help prevent angry outbursts and improve the child’s self-awareness and empathy. Best Worksheets and Resources for Children There are many strategies, exercises, and activities to increase awareness and gain control when experiencing unhelpful feelings and behaviors. We list several helpful worksheets below that can build healthy habits into children’s lives (modified from Peters, 2018b; Snowden, 2018): Recognizing When We Have Been Angry Children and adults sometimes do things they wish they hadn’t done. When they become grumpy or angry, they can say things they don’t mean or behave in destructive ways. Try out the Recognizing When We Have Been Angry worksheet to capture when the child got angry and how they could have handled it differently. Answering how the child could react differently can start the process of building better habits around positive emotions. What I Want to Be Before learning new coping skills and ways to behave, it can be helpful for children to describe the type of person they want to be (such as well behaved, happy, and without worries) versus who they don’t want to be (such as angry, worried, and naughty). Ask the child to complete the What I Want to Be worksheet with behaviors and emotions they would like to avoid and ones they want to display. Such exercises promote reflection and, therefore, metacognitive processing, which encourage greater self-awareness of emotions (Fleming, 2021). Promoting Positive Behavior Anger is mostly negative and unhelpful for children. But rather than focusing solely on what emotions and behavior to avoid, it can be valuable to consider a wish list of emotions and behaviors that are helpful (Peters, 2018b). Use the Promoting Positive Behavior worksheet to create a list of positive behaviors with the child and how to enact them in their lives. When positive behavior is promoted, it can become habitual and create a happier and more constructive atmosphere (Peters, 2018b). Building Our Feelings Vocabulary It can be hard for children to know and use the right words to describe their feelings to others. Building their feelings vocabulary can help them share what they are experiencing and seek the help they need (Snowden, 2018). The Building Our Feelings Vocabulary worksheet provides a list of helpful feeling words and example situations. With practice and a little help, children can become very good at sharing their emotions. Requests Versus Demands It can take time to learn that how we phrase something can change how a person experiences what we have to say. When children have big feelings about something they really want, they can become demanding (Snowden, 2018). The Requests Versus Demands worksheet helps children understand how to turn demands into requests. Conflict at School School is a significant part of children’s lives. Fellow students are all different, with their own likes and dislikes. As a result, it can be challenging to get along with each person, even when we like them (Snowden, 2018). The Conflict at School worksheet helps children reflect on the different relationships they have at school, what is difficult, and what they need from each one. A Look at Anger Management Toys Fun activities can be ideal for exploring the triggers, emotions, and behaviors associated with anger. The following is a small sample of some games to help. Mad Dragon: An Anger Control Card Game This fun emotion-focused therapy game teaches its players about anger control. The card game is aimed at children between 6 and 12 years old and helps them identify and avoid anger-provoking situations, and express and understand how they feel. Available from Amazon. Don’t Go Bananas – A CBT Game for Kids to Work on Controlling Strong Emotions Based on CBT principles, this game teaches children how to identify emotional triggers, understand the beliefs underpinning them, their consequences, and how to change negative thought patterns. The game is played by groups of two to four children and can include adults. Available from Amazon. Mad Smartz: An Interpersonal Skills Card Game This CBT-based card game helps children learn about empathy, social skills, anger management, confidence, and cooperation. It is designed to support parents and therapists working through emotional issues with children and can be played in groups of two or more. Available from Amazon. 3 Helpful Videos for Your Students There are plenty of videos online to explain emotions, including anger, to young children in a friendly way. Here are three of our favorites: Anger Management for Kids This short video explains how to manage anger in five easy steps. Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns It’s OK to Back Away Follow Howard in this engaging animation to see how he learns to back away from anger. Anger Management for Kids! This learning video teaches children about anger, what it does to them, and effective ways to manage their feelings. Positive Psychology Resources for Kids There are plenty of resources, tools, and worksheets based on positive psychology designed to explore emotions and cope with anger. The following are all appropriate to children; though, depending on their age, they may benefit from a degree of support: Decorating Cookies Sometimes it is important to step away from a situation and have some downtime. Drawing and art can be excellent ways to take a breath when tempers flare. Inside and Outside Worksheet This exercise helps children compare how they think, feel, and behave when struggling with an emotion. Self-Control Spotting Recognizing self-control versus lack of control in behavior can be the first step to acting more appropriately. Red Light: Anger! This drawing exercise is ideal for young children. They learn to picture anger when it’s small or growing too big. Meditation Grounding Scripts for Children Meditation can be helpful at any age. This script for children is ideal for grounding and introducing calm. A Take-Home Message Anger is typically upsetting for everyone involved and can change how children see people and experience situations. Whether we say hurtful things or act in inappropriate ways, we usually look back and wish we had done things differently (Snowden, 2018). If given a safe place to learn and explore their emotions, children can find new habits to make them happier and calmer, allowing them to maintain or regain control and avoid angry outbursts (Snowden, 2018). Working through games, tasks, and worksheets, especially in groups or with an adult, can help children explore ways to calm an angry mind or avoid the situation altogether. Acting out real-life situations can allow children to experiment with what works and what doesn’t, then use the right skills when the problem next arises (Snowden, 2018). Try some of the worksheets and activities with children. The learnings are not solely in the task itself but in discussing the thinking (metacognition) behind it and its application in the real world. The benefits will last a lifetime. We hope you enjoyed reading this article. For more information, don’t forget to download our three Positive CBT Exercises for free. Fleming, S. M. (2021). Know thyself: The science of self-awareness. Basic Books. Ho, B. P., Carter, M., & Stephenson, J. (2010). Anger management using a cognitive-behavioural approach for children with special education needs: A literature review and meta-analysis. 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