

GET RESULTS WITH BETTER CONVERSATIONS

What do you do about angry outbursts?

First, manage your expectations. Don't be surprised when children in your care do something impulsive in anger. The more trauma a child has experienced, the more likely he or she is to act out in anger. The good news is that when children show their anger, it's because they feel safe enough to do so.



Here are some suggestions for healthy responses to angry outbursts:

- Calm yourself before you speak to the youth.**
You may feel angry or betrayed by their behavior. If you exhibit your anger to the youth, you will trigger their flight or fight response and they will not process your message. **Pause and take a deep breath before you do or say anything.**
- If the outburst has put anyone in immediate danger, deal with that first.** Eliminate or mitigate the danger before responding to the outburst. **Make sure that the angry child knows you are not ignoring them, and are not mad at them but have to help the person in danger.**

Kids who have been traumatized often overreact to perceived unfairness.

☑ **Create a space between the event and your interaction with the youth.**

If either you or the youth cannot calm down or if you believe that a conversation at the time of discovery will cause flight or fight do not undertake the conversation.

If the outburst prompted anger in you, put off dealing with the child until your anger has subsided. **Responding to anger with more anger models the wrong behavior.**



☑ **Defuse fear that the child may be feeling, a fearful child cannot pay attention to what you have to say.** Physically lower yourself to the child's level so that you're not a scary adult towering over the child.

☑ **Always use words that let the child know you are concerned about their safety and the safety of others.** Say something like, *“what you did could have hurt you or someone else.”*

☑ **Never ask “Why” questions.** Asking the youth, “Why they were breaking the rules,” or “Why they were responding in an abusive fashion” are hard questions to answer and may lead to them lying. **Instead ask “How and What” questions.** For instance **“How did the response you got from the other person make you feel? “ What were you feeling that caused you to act that way?”**

The best way to eventually eliminate angry outbursts is to model appropriate behavior in the child's presence. When you get angry, **SHOW** the child healthy responses to anger. For instance, you can say something like, *“That makes me so angry. I'm going to tell that person how her actions made me feel, ask her why she did it, and ask her not to do that again.”*

Do Not Lecture. Listen. Teach the child critical thinking skills by asking the child for ideas on what he or she could do differently in the future. Listen to what the youth has to say. Reflect back to them your understanding of their thoughts and needs in a value neutral or sympathetic fashion. Do not tell them you know how they feel. Tell them you hear what they are saying. Never use the word But.

Remember your job is to teach them how to be safe, NOT to judge their behavior.

Empower The Youth To Create A Safer Way to Deal With Their Feelings. Collaborate with the youth in exploring creative ideas to safely deal with the feelings, and needs that caused them to act in an angry and abusive fashion. **If an idea is the youth's (even if you guided them to it) they will embrace it more strongly than if it came from you.**

Make sure the consequence for the youth's rule breaking is not larger than the size and scope of their offense and is directly related to their behavior and their safety.

“Kids who have been abused have pent up anger and frustration that can be triggered by a perceived unfair situation, or by something seemingly unrelated like a smell, sound, or anything that reminds them of a painful experience or abuser.”

For example, if the child broke something, you could have the child clean it up or pay out of allowance to replace it. If the child refuses, don't force the issue. **Make sure they understand they are not being punished but that your actions are to help them remain safe.**

Understand that children who have been traumatized may look and be chronologically one age but are psychologically a much younger age. A child of eight or ten may be acting in a fashion you

—RHONDA SCIORTINO

would expect a five or six year old to act. **Teach them how to control their anger and use non abusive words to express their feelings act in situations that frustrate them.**



Realize that one interaction probably will not end the youth's inappropriate behavior. There are deeply rooted psychological reasons a youth acts out sexually. Some of these reasons may be tied to their feelings about or their experiences with their birth parents.

It will take time, patience, and a commitment to love and listening to heal the youth in your care. **They are worth it.**

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