

Episode #7: ADHD AND ANGER ISSUES IN KIDS

In this episode, I discuss ADHD and anger issues, ADHD strategies, ADHD and aggression, and the consequences for this type of behavior. Thanks for joining me. This is episode seven. Let's get started.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, the parenting coach for ADHD. Here to heal and elevate lives is your parenting coach, Siopo Kinikini.

Well, hello everybody. I hope everybody is doing well today and that everything is working out for you. I would like to start by saying I started off today a little bit stressed out because there was so much to do and so much to take care of. I finally got around to recording this, which I think is my favorite part of the day because I am really excited to talk about anger and ADHD. It sounds odd to talk about anger and be happy about it, but the reason that I am excited to talk about it is because I think it's part of ADHD and parenting that a lot of parents struggle with. I feel that we are going to be able to discuss this in a way that will help parents address the real issue behind anger and also find solutions for them.

I wanted to talk about a family that I have worked with in the past. I've worked with a lot of families in the past with a lot of varying issues. Couples, youths, teenagers, little children, parents, families, the whole thing. Anger tends to be one of those things that consistently pops up during the course of a therapy session or during the course of discussing issues with families. What I learned in working with one particular family is we had to find a way to describe anger to their child who is very young but in a way that they could grasp and understand that it wasn't about losing the emotion or their feelings of control and then behaving because of that, but in a way that would empower them to look at anger in a new and different way.

As we were working through the session, trying to simplify something actually is one of the hardest things to do when you're trying to explain a complex topic in the simplest terms possible. After some give and take between me and the parents and the child, I came up with this definition and it stuck. I think it's been very helpful to that family and also to me as I continued to work with families who have issues with anger. The definition that I came up and the way that I explained it to this child was that anger usually stems from the feeling that what you want or what you hoped for didn't happen the way you wanted it to happen. Now that seems like an oversimplification in a lot of ways, but I want you to really seriously think about it.

The reason that we feel angry about something or about someone is that their behavior or the action didn't happen the way we wanted it to happen and so the result is this feeling of frustration, which can be defined actually as a part of anger. Now, let me give you an example. Let's all just think back to the last time you were angry. Now, you can ask yourself this question,

why were you angry? You can give a reason and what would have happened in order for you not to be angry anymore. Usually, if it's situational, let's say, well, I was driving down the street and this guy cut me off, and so it made me angry. Okay? In essence, it's what I expected to happen, what I had hoped for or what I had wished didn't happen the way that I wanted it to happen and so it built up this feeling of frustration and it resulted in me acting out in anger, right? This can be said with people too. Take for example, a spouse who may be cheating on their spouse. What makes you angry?

Well, I'm angry that he cheated on me, I'm angry that he behaved in a way that I did not expect or that I did not approve of. Right? Now that doesn't say what's right and wrong. Did the guy have a right to cut me off in traffic? I don't know. Did the person have a right to cheat? Absolutely not. You don't do that. We're not looking at it that way. What we're looking at is how did I arrive at this emotion? Now, the reason that it's important to talk about anger in this way when you're dealing with a child who has ADHD is that children with ADHD already have something that they're working on and so the frustration level is actually a lot higher than it would be otherwise, right? Add on additional frustration to that and their outbursts can be really angry. They could be violent even. They could be yelling and screaming, throwing tantrums, destroying property. This can all be a manifestation of a child who has ADHD and anger issues, right?

What may seem like a trivial topic for us to be angry about on top of what they're already dealing with, it actually makes things even worse. We can look at something and say, "That's not a big deal. Why are you so angry about that?" Remember, they're dealing with everything else and they're already at a level where the frustration is super high and we add just one more thing on there and then they lose it. For parents, understand that your child, when they're exhibiting anger, it's not just the topic that they're expressing anger about. There are multiple levels of things that they are dealing with and that is the thing that most currently is the straw that broke the camel's back. That's what makes it even more intense for them. Adjusting your expectations and understanding this should be super helpful.

Now, in talking to youths, once they're capable of understanding this, helping them understand that anger stems from their expectations and that their expectations were not met will be a super helpful way for them to understand, okay, well my expectations weren't met, but how can I deal with this in a different way? Right? Getting used to disappointment, getting used to things not working out the way that we want should be something that we learn to accept and then we can address how we behave about it after. Right? Let's talk a little bit about this whole approach to anger and ADHD and this ability for you to explore these emotions and these feelings with these children who are dealing with ADHD and anger at the same time, you should be able to separate the behavior, which is the anger outbursts with their expectations, what they hoped and wished and wanted to happen. Okay?

From there you can begin to work. Now, this is super helpful a lot of times because it gives an opportunity for some middle ground. A lot of times children with ADHD and parents just feel like,

"Well, he's just behaving this way. He's angry," and boom, you know, he's just behaving because of this A, B, boom. It's not necessarily that way. What this does is it provides an avenue for the parent and the child to come to a consensus on how they can react differently to a certain stimuli. In working with families, this has been super helpful in helping parents and children come to some type of communication about what it is that they're working through. It's been very, very helpful. Now, what I want to give to you during this discussion or this talk, is this idea that anger stems from our inability to accept what has happened the way that we wanted it to happen, or that the person behaved in a way that we wanted them to behave.

They didn't do that, and so we have to be able to figure out what are the best ways to deal with that and how to adjust. I do have recommendations though, for parents when they're working with a child who is having an anger outburst and has ADHD, the three things. First, be calm. Now, if a child is freaking out, your ability to remain calm will actually help deescalate the situation. Now, in some children, it may escalate them first, but it will deescalate them eventually, right? The reason being is that they need someone to model how to remain calm. They need to be able to see that, and if you're not freaking out and they're not freaking out, things tend to be a lot more doable when you're working together on something, right? Remain calm. All right. The other one is remain focused. You need to be focused on what it is that you are addressing at the time. A lot of times children will try and throw out random things and divert attention.

They'll say things like, "Hey, well last month you said this and you did this." They'll be like, "Do you remember the time that you call me this and it hurt my ... " Okay. They'll be throwing these different diversion tactics as you remain calm to try and escalate the situation again or to try and veer off what it is that's happening. The suggestion is to remain focused. This is what we're dealing with right now so the response should be, if your child brings up comments like that, your response should be simply, "Okay, what we're dealing with right now is your behavior. You are not listening to me, you are struggling to follow my instruction," or whatever it may be. You just bring it right back and you end up being a broken record and repeating those statements where you're like, "What we're dealing with right now, what we're focused on," and doing that actually is a wonderful thing because with you remain focused, you actually start to remain more calm between the two.

Okay, always stay focused, always be calm, and those are things that you're going to have to do and endure over a period of time. They're super helpful techniques for you. Remain calm. Now, if you feel your feelings escalate, you feel free to take a timeout and step away and calm down and then come back to the situation. Now, the other part is that you need to be able to discuss what's happened and you want to do this actually at a neutral time and perhaps later. After this escalation happens, you need to go back and address what happened, talk to them calmly about it and then talk about this whole anger perception that, okay, things didn't work out the way you wanted them to work out or this person didn't behave the way that you wanted them to behave. What's a better way to behave?

What's a better way to react to that other than throwing a tantrum? Okay? Because at that time they should actually have received some type of consequence. We'll talk about that in the different part of the discussion, but absolutely essential that you go back, you work it through with them, you role-play what it is they need to do instead whenever they have those feelings then they adjust them and they fix them. All right. These are the tips than I would recommend for any parent actually, parents working with children with ADHD actually. It's a little more challenging largely because you're dealing with frustration on top of frustration and then you behaving a certain way may cause more frustration for the child. Consistency is key.

You want to be consistent in the way that you work with your child. You don't want to change things up. You want to be as consistent as a wall. There is a metaphor actually that relates to children and walls. You know, children may have this irrational belief that they can walk through a wall until they actually do it and they may try multiple times, but eventually after three, four, five times and some kids more, running into the wall will teach them, hey, this is a solid and I cannot walk through this wall. Well, parents need to be able to set that type of consistency where, "Hey, this is as far as it goes and it doesn't go any further than that." Being able to be consistent is a huge part of working with an ADHD child. It actually creates a feeling of safety and helps them grow into happy and reliable and wonderful adults. Again, if you want to have a discussion topic with your child about anger and ADHD, just remember your child on ADHD is at a higher level of frustration and stress already.

Typically, things that would be smaller in other instances actually may be a big deal to your child. Remain calm, remain focused on the task at hand, and understand that there should be some discussion around the feelings of anger in that. This is a response to things not working out your way and so what can you do and how can you behave in a more positive way? That's it for me. Feel free to download some of the notes. There's a transcript of this that is available on the website, Smarter Parenting. Actually, if you found that this was helpful, please share it and leave a comment and rate. Rate this video and rate this podcast. Our hope is actually to reach out and help as many parents as possible with our suggestions and tips. Now this is in no way a replacement for individual therapy or things that you're working on with your child.

Any good therapist or physician will tell you that in addition to anything else that you're doing, if you choose to do medication with your ADHD child, behavioral interventions are always recommended, largely because the behavioral part of helping to teach your child will help them long term and in the future to become more successful adults. Now that's it for me. Next week, we will be talking about a different topic related to ADHD. I am out of here because I have so much more to finish and accomplish before the next time we meet. Feel free to leave a comment and I look forward to seeing you again. All right. Bye.

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