



## CENTRE DE COUNSELLING FAMILIAL DE TIMMINS

### **TIMMINS FAMILY COUNSELLING CENTRE**

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## **HELPING TEENS MANAGE ANGER**

Is anger just a normal part of growing up and learning to manage angry feelings? How can a parent or caretaker help? Teens can be as confused about their angry outbursts as you are.

Anger and tears when you try to talk to them may indicate that they could feel embarrassed and helpless to change. We will look at a variety of possible causes of teen anger and some strategies for helping both you and your teen to express feelings in safe, appropriate ways.

Anger can be triggered by many factors. Some people are temperamentally more volatile, more sensitive and more easily angered. Developmentally, there are periods of life where growth struggles bring about increased frustration (like when you're a toddler or a teenager), because kids are trying to understand what they get to control and what they don't get to control. Finally, there are stressful circumstances with friends, sports, school, or home which can cause increased feelings of anger.

In thinking about anger, it is important to remember that it is usually a secondary emotion. The underlying emotion is more likely to be rejection, fear, failure, frustration or sadness. For boys, society is often more accepting of anger than it is of these other underlying emotions and so anger may be what your son shows most readily.

However, it's important to bear in mind that there are other feelings underneath that need to be expressed and resolved. Here are some suggestions for working with your teenager:

- **Approach discussions from a supportive place.** While it is natural to be disappointed and frustrated with your adolescent for losing control one more time, he/she needs your support and understanding. They need to know that you have confidence in them. It is from this base of support that they will be able to pay attention to their feelings, think clearly and figure out what is happening inside of them. Try saying something like, "I know we both get frustrated when you lose your temper, but let's see if we can understand what happens when you start getting mad and come up with some solutions."
- **Understand that feelings are not wrong.** In our society, certain feelings are viewed as "negative" and others as "positive." In fact, every feeling is a normal part of being human. When adolescents get the message that there is something wrong with some of their feelings, they come to believe that something must be wrong with them. Understanding that feelings are normal can turn our energies to learning to express them appropriately rather than repressing them.
- **Help your adolescent explore acceptable ways to express anger and other feelings.** An important distinction to make is that we want our kids to learn to control the expression of their feelings, not the feeling itself. So rather than asking your adolescent to suppress or ignore their anger, tell them you would like them to learn alternative, safe and appropriate ways to express that anger. Each family needs to decide what ways are acceptable and which aren't: "In our family, we yell a lot. We don't call names or say hurtful things, but people get loud when they are angry." "Dad prefers to have time alone when he is feeling mad. It helps me to punch the punching bag or take a run around the block."
  - It can sometimes be tricky when people in one family have different ways of expressing anger. It is important that you and your adolescent think about ways they could show their anger that are both satisfying to them and acceptable in your family.

- **Think about the models your adolescent sees.** Even more important than what we tell our kids is appropriate, is what they see. They are watching the people in their family, people on TV, friends. Work on modeling the ways you would like to see your adolescent express their anger and discuss with them the other models they are seeing.
- **Explore your own feelings.** When our children are struggling with big feelings, especially anger, very often our own feelings get stirred up. Take some time to think about what you learned about anger as a child and what healthy messages you would like to pass on to your adolescent.
- **Help your teen discover the sources and triggers of their anger.** By age fourteen, most people haven't yet learned what events and circumstances are likely to trigger their anger. Many of us, as adults, have still not learned this!) Helping your adolescent figure out the things that are likely to get them mad will give them some power. ("I've noticed that every time you call Susan after school and she can't get together, you blow up.") As your adolescent learns the things that are likely to trigger their anger (not eating enough, not getting enough sleep, having a disappointment in school, experiencing a setback in sports), they will feel less blindsided by their feelings. Eventually, understanding their triggers will give them the ability to choose alternative routes so they don't end up so angry.
- **Help your teen learn to recognize their feelings before they get out of control.** Once your adolescent has identified some of the things that they have been mad about, they may be able to think about how they felt just before they "lost their temper." Often this is the moment when they experienced the underlying feelings of hurt, fear or sadness. When your adolescent can learn to recognize that they are "on the way" towards being mad, they can make some decisions about what they want to do with the feeling, rather than letting the feeling overtake them.
  - Sometimes it can be helpful to share your own stories: "I remember when I was in a big track meet and I could tell I was going to come in second in a race I really wanted to win. As I started thinking about who I wanted to punch, I realized I was really sad about not winning and I decided to go off and be by myself for a while."
- **Get help when you need it.** When your adolescent's angry outbursts continue or feel out of control, or when they are being violent toward pets or people, seek out the support of a counselor or other professional who works with angry adolescents.

### **Do you need more help?**

Don't be afraid to reach out for more help. If you're not sure who to talk to, consider calling **Timmins Family Counselling Centre** to learn more about anger and if counselling is right for you.

You can reach us at **705-267-7333**.

You can also visit our website at [www.timminsfamilycounselling.com](http://www.timminsfamilycounselling.com)