



BRADLEY COUNSELING CENTER

HELPING KIDS HANDLE ANGER, FRUSTRATION WITH THE COVID-19 SHUTDOWN

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As Illinois' stay-at-home order persists and summer plans look different than usual, some kids are getting frustrated. They're angry. They're bored. Some of these feelings are normal. Some may have been issues before the COVID-19 crisis, but now are more pronounced.

And what is making them so frustrated? Kids have no choice but to stay home. They can't see their friends. All the end-of-year festivities they looked forward to were canceled. Things they could overlook before are getting under their skin now (including their families). Worst of all, there is no end in sight - no specific date on the calendar to look forward to.

Despite all this, there are strategies you can use to help your child cope with his/her frustration and anger, not just in the short term with COVID-19, but throughout life.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES THAT DON'T WORK LONG TERM

While it may be tempting to encourage your child to "get the anger out" through punching a pillow or stuffed animal, think twice. This actually reinforces in the brain that anger should be paired with aggression—not a concept we want to reinforce. Nor do we want kids to get the message that the only way to be heard is to become physically aggressive.

On the other extreme, your instinct may be to encourage your child to employ calming strategies: taking a bath, playing outside, going for a walk. These things can help kids learn to relax - and should be explored as long term strategies for managing stress. However, if we only focus on calming kids whenever they're angry, they may get the message that angry feelings are unacceptable. If they always push their anger down, it will only emerge more strongly later.

CALMING DOWN, BUT ALSO TUNING IN

While it's important to help kids find effective calming techniques, it's equally important to listen to what their angry feelings are saying—and to teach kids to listen, too.

Anger and frustration are cues that help us recognize when we need to stand up for ourselves or solve a problem in our life. Experiencing these emotions may help kids recognize that they aren't really taking care of themselves and need to find ways to do so. It can also help them realize that they need to approach a problem in a different way.



In other words, the things that trigger your child's anger are clues to the problem your child needs help solving. By listening to what it reveals, you can help your child address it, without resorting to outbursts and tantrums.

When we really listen to what our children are saying through their anger—and we coach them to hear themselves as well—we help them find ways to address their emotions in a positive, adaptive way.

You know your family and child best. You've already made many successful adjustments to this difficult situation, and chances are, you can tackle this. Of course, if you get to a point when you think your child needs a higher level of help, don't hesitate to ask for it. Shutdown or no shutdown, help is a phone call away.

Bio: Dr. Sandra Clavelli, PsyD, Clinical Psychology, is Director of Clinical and Outpatient Services as Allendale Association in Lake Villa. Allendale's Bradley Counseling Center is currently offering phone and video teletherapy services to adults and children struggling with COVID-19 issues, experiencing other mental health concerns, or looking to build on their strengths. For more information, visit Allendale4kids.org or call 847-356-3322.