Making Sense of an Angry Child

Brad Bridges, LMSW

One of the most common reasons parents bring their children for therapy is concern about the child's anger. How a child expresses this anger can disrupt a family and leave parents wondering what is normal and what to do about it. Although there are many causes for anger, there are a few strategies that can help parents better understand what the child's behavior means and when to seek professional help.

What is normal?

Children get angry. They live in the moment and find it hard to wait or work for things. When they are toddlers we expect them to throw tantrums. But as the child gets older, the expectations for acceptable ways of expressing anger change. It is expected that they learn to not hit or kick, to not call names, and eventually to use language to express feelings and solve problems. It becomes a problem if a child does not develop these other ways of expressing anger as he gets older.

What is anger?

Anger can be thought of as a "secondary emotion," meaning that the anger we see on the surface might be masking underlying emotions that can be
harder to identify. These other feelings – fear, frustration, hurt, disappointment, etc. – are quite painful and give a sense of vulnerability and helplessness. Anger can be very addicting because it serves as a sort of emotional anesthesia to numb these painful feelings. Rather than feeling powerless and out of control, anger can create a sense of power that numbs the underlying pain and makes a child feel in control of the situation. In reality anger solves nothing because, not only does it not fix the original problem, but the child must then deal with the consequences of whatever he said or did when angry. This can lead to more frustration and a greater sense of feeling out of control. With more pain and loss of control comes a greater likelihood that the anger and accompanying behaviors will return in the future.

Many things can lead a child to experience chronic and severe anger. Children who have experienced significant trauma might have overwhelming feelings. Anger can numb these feelings and help the child feel in control. Anger and aggression can be learned from an early age. A parent who deals with the child through overly harsh or punitive means can inadvertently teach a child to behave in a similar manner. In fact, overly punitive and authoritarian parenting is one of the greatest predictors of Oppositional Defiant Disorder in childhood. Cognitive and learning challenges can also result in problematic ways of expressing anger. The child might find school and life in general to be especially frustrating if they do not learn as easily as other children do. ADHD can make it more difficult for a child to solve problems and control impulses appropriately. Underlying mental health concerns like anxiety or depression can also result in intense anger. Commonly, children will attempt to cope with these emotions through avoidance. They might develop intense interests such as a video games or reading that distract them from painful feelings. When adults try to take away the interest the child can become overwhelmed and desperate for another avenue of escape. An abrupt and angry response can occur suddenly out of desperation.

What should I do if I have an angry child?

Dealing appropriately with anger typically involves identifying the underlying feelings, expressing the feelings, and learning to experience the feelings. This last part is especially important, because many children learn to escape unpleasant feelings at all costs. For example, many children can become angry in response to boredom. When needing to complete a mundane task, no matter how brief, these children might explode with anger. This problem is made more difficult by the constant stimulation and immediate gratification that the world provides today. It might be easier than ever to find distractions and opportunities to feel good immediately.

First, parents can help angry children by modeling how to deal with emotions. This also means talking to the child about what you are experiencing, how it feels, and how
you are going to deal with it. It is valuable to sometimes do this in the moment and not only after the fact. For example, most children are aware that their parents become angry when stuck in traffic or when they are unhappy with another driver. This can be an opportunity to tell the child how you are feeling, what your options are, and what you are going to do. Coping with anger is largely about learning skills that don’t always develop on their own and have to be explicitly taught. When you see your child becoming angry, it can also be useful to identify underlying feelings the child might be experiencing. If you point out that the child might be disappointed because someone else ate the last cookie, you might be able to help him identify appropriate ways of expressing disappointment rather than expressing it as anger.

When to seek professional help

If there are concerns that the child's anger is excessive, and he is not responding to some of these strategies it could be time to consult with the pediatrician or a mental health professional. Early interventions often result in shorter and more effective treatment than attempting to change patterns later in life. Identifying other contributing factors such as ADHD or learning problems is also more helpful when identified early. If you are unsure if the child's anger is excessive, consulting with teachers, school counselors, pediatricians, or others who are familiar with developmental milestones could be helpful. Frequently, families will consult with a mental health professional to gauge whether further assessment or treatment would be helpful. And remember that a child's behavior is a way of communicating. When he does not have the language or awareness to express himself with words, his behaviors will tell you what is going on beneath the surface. Instead of merely punishing the behavior and ignoring the root of the problem, change can require uncovering what the child is trying to communicate and finding more appropriate ways to meet those needs.

Concussion Management Program

Michael Wolff, PsyD, ABPdN

There has been a wealth of education relating to concussions in the news, magazines, and in our schools. The attention is well deserved, but can be overwhelming. Here are the basics.

• A concussion is a form of mild Traumatic Brain Injury.
• Nearly everyone is at potential risk to experience a concussion. These injuries can be from slipping on the ice, striking your head against an object, playing in sports, etc.

• Most individuals who experience a mild concussion will recover without lasting influence or need for routine care.
• Younger children and older adults are at the highest risk, followed by student athletes and late adolescent/young adults.
• There are nearly as many concussions involved in playing on the playground and parks as there are in sports, but this is a highly unreported area.
• Helmets and gear do not prevent a concussion from happening.
• The target of nearly all concussion management programs is children and young adults, but realistically the target should be anyone who is involved in an activity that would increase their risk for a...
What is a concussion management program?

At BRAINS we believe a good management program should begin with solid education and pre-concussion screenings. Dr. Wolff or other licensed staff will engage student athletes and/or parents through free seminars providing education about head injuries, head injury response, and other factors. We use the Impact Test for pre-concussion screenings. This is an incredibly cost effective tool that is used by nearly all professional teams in the NFL, NHL, colleges, and others. The pre-concussion screening provides not only a baseline in case a concussion were to occur, but also establishes a history so we can make informed decisions relating to the influence of the injury, assist with school accommodations, and plan for recovery as well as Return to Play.

Thereafter we have therapists that can work with the family and/or athlete to assist in the rehabilitation process. We have Occupational, Physical, Speech, Behavioral Health and Neurofeedback (qEEG) services, in house in addition to established relationships with neurology and behavioral optometry.

It is not too late to establish a concussion management program for your team or we can work with families/athletes individually as well. Any athlete at any level of sports involvement can be screened. Athletes 10 and older can use the Impact, we use different screenings for younger children/athletes.

Let us work with your team/agency, athlete, or you to establish the baseline and to assist in the recovery process if needed.

To Schedule a Team/Group or Individual for Pre-Concussion Screenings or free educational seminars, please call: 616-365-8920 or email: mwolff@brainspotential.com

Be Informed, Be Prepared, Let BRAINS Be a Part of a Positive Athletic Participation Plan for Elementary, Middle, High School, Traveling or Community Leagues. This is a responsible approach to participation.
Annual Giving Plans

It is not too early to think about end of the year giving. The BRAINS Foundation continues to meet the needs of grateful patients and needs the support of organizations and individuals. Your generosity makes it possible for us to meet our mission and continue supporting the community.

Mission Statement:
To empower and transform children and families with limited resources that are facing developmental, behavioral, and learning challenges through complete understanding of their unique strengths and limitations. To then offer personalized strategies to help them achieve their potential in life. Through our innovative service model, we also train new clinicians who are helping to serve unfulfilled needs in our community.

If you are interested in donating please visit our website at brainsfoundation.org.

Please join us for the inaugural MomsBloom Book Club! Our first selection is Brene Brown's *The Gifts of Imperfection*. This book perfectly illustrates the importance of embracing yourself and your life wholeheartedly with love and forgiveness for your own mistakes and imperfections.

We will be discussing this book beginning in October and continuing throughout the winter and spring. The book is broken into ten guideposts, including subjects such as cultivating authenticity, self-compassion, creativity, meaningful work, and laughter. There are also exercises to perform in order to delve deeper into the concepts Brown puts forth. We will explore this book together in person and in an online discussion forum. Please visit our webpage and Facebook page to find more details in the coming days. www.momsbloom.org or www.facebook.com/momsbloom or contact Becca at (616) 828-1021
Divorce Group

We look forward to offer our divorce therapeutic support group again in January 2015.

Rollercoasters®
Rollercoasters® is an 8-Week structured group therapy format for children going through the transition of divorce or similar family change.

Clinical Positions:

**Psychologist/Counselor**
Several part-time positions are available for Psychologists, Counselors, or Social Workers to join our unique program of services through Behavioral Resources And Institute for Neuropsychological Services. Some of these positions may progress to full time employment as caseloads develop. There are office share positions available for evenings and Saturday hours.

BRAINS provides comprehensive services for children and families, infants through adulthood. In a unique venture, BRAINS has developed an interdisciplinary team of experts working collaboratively.

Responsibilities could include: individual therapy; couples/family therapy, groups, and a possibility of supervision. Assistance with the continued development of a continuum of care, and ability to collaborate with schools/other agencies, and to be a part of the community is desired.

**Qualifications Include:** Doctoral or Master’s level psychologists or social workers with background in developmental disabilities, ASD, behavioral challenges, and/or mental health challenges in pediatrics or adults are encouraged to apply. Candidates must be either licensed or immediately license eligible in Michigan, and possess the ability to offer innovative ideas and an entrepreneurial spirit to assist with developing your practice. Candidates must also possess appropriate computer skills to effectively use electronic medical records and e-mail.

**Description of the organization:**
BRAINS is an organization that has provided collaborative services for several years. We are accredited by the Committee for Accreditation of Rehabilitation (CARF). BRAINS works with individuals ranging from infancy through late adulthood. The services clients are looking for are treatment for challenges in behavior or mood regulation, intervention for a neurodevelopmental disability, family counseling for marital and/or family tension, or supportive services. To meet these needs the company is expanding service hours to enhance accessibility and to provide a wider variety of interventions for the community.

**Other Positions:**
If you are another allied health professional, OT, PT, Speech, Neuropsychologist/Psychologist or other professional with a skill set you believe would be beneficial for BRAINS to consider, we always encourage you to share your resume/vita with us for consideration.
8-Week Mindful Parenting Course
Cultivating Clarity and Compassion on the Parenting Journey
with April Hadley, MSW
Program Fee: $300 per individual/$550 per couple
Includes practice CD's and a workbook. Scholarships available.

8-Week Course: Tuesday, October 21 - December 9, 2014, 6:30 – 8:30 pm
Location: BRAINS 3292 North Evergreen Drive NE, Grand Rapids 49525

Free Information Sessions: Tuesday, October 7 and October 14, 6:30-8:00 pm
Attend a Free Information Session and learn how mindful parenting can help you!
Offered in partnership with:

Mindfulness means to pay attention to the present moment with full acceptance. Mindful parenting will help you step out of reactivity and into clarity so you can respond more effectively in the present moment with compassion for yourself and all members of the family.

Learning Objectives:
• How to practice mindfulness as a parent and with children
• How to respond to parenting stress with compassion
• How to take responsibility for your behavior and teach your children to do the same
• How to take the parenting journey one moment at a time
• How to start over when you feel like you blew it

April Hadley, MSW
Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Instructor
Co-Founder Grand Rapids Center for Mindfulness
April received her MSW from Grand Valley State University in 2001. After practicing in the nonprofit sector for several years, she discovered Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction when she realized that her own health and family life were being compromised by growing stress. April has been teaching Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in the Greater Grand Rapids Area since 2010 and has led hundreds of students through the program. Her training is from the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.
Special Education Workshop
Hosted by Debora Blake, Director of ACCESS Education
Advocates & Consultants

Saturday October 18th, 2014
9:00AM to 4:00PM
Continental breakfast will be provided at 8:30AM
Lunch break-11:30AM to 1:00PM
Cost: 50.00 Per Person

Please contact BRAINS at
616-365-8920 to register

Topics May Include (depending on time and audience discussion):
- Legal basis for special education
- Special education services and supports
- Referral and eligibility
  - IDEA vs. Section 504
- School evaluations and Independent Education Evaluations
- Education Records
- The Individualized Education Plan/Programs (IEP)
- Behavior Intervention/Support Plans (BIP) Functional Behavior Assessments/Analysis (FBA)
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Problem Solving/Informal vs. Formal
- Infant/Toddler/Preschool Programs
- Transition
  - Year to year
  - Level transition
  - Postsecondary transition
- Discipline, Suspension & Expulsion
- Seclusion and Restraint
- Protection against disability-based harassment/bullying

LIMITED Space! Reserve your spot