



Did You Know?

FAMILY SERVICES NEWSLETTER
Mandala Children's House • Anne Kangas, L.C.S.W.



Strategies for Managing Strong Emotions

Help! - Parents frequently want to know how we deal with the challenging behaviors of preschoolers in the classroom. Young children can become easily frustrated, which means they often have quick, intense reactions. Unfortunately, they don't come into this world knowing how to manage their BIG feelings. It takes a lot of coaching and practice for them to learn social skills. That's our job as teachers and parents.

Tools Are Necessary - At Mandala, we use a number of teaching tools to help children learn self-regulation. We want to share some of these with you, as well as some of the words and phrases we use to talk about feelings and help children manage them. You may find it helpful to bring some of our strategies into your home. The more children experience *consistency*, the better. They learn new behaviors more quickly when everyone in their world responds in a dependable way. The worst mistake parents can make is letting children "run the show." Giving in to avoid conflict can be tempting. But it will come back to haunt you. Using these tools will help your child express his feelings and learn to regulate them. Setting limits is also an important part of the process.

Calm Him First, Talk Later – Remember this important rule that we have learned from neuroscience. Children cannot *think* until their brains are calm. When children have a "flipped lid" (as Dr. Dan Siegal calls it), they are acting out of their dysregulated, hot and intense emotional Limbic brain. Only when the Prefrontal Cortex of their brain is back in action again can they think and problem-solve with you. Give up any talking other than helping a child soothe and calm first. Conversation comes later.

Remain Calm Yourself – Most important of all, remember that these strategies are *only* effective if you stay regulated yourself. You **MUST** be the one to show how to do it. Angry parents invite angry kids.

Anger Rules

These are the simple Anger Rules we teach the children at Mandala.

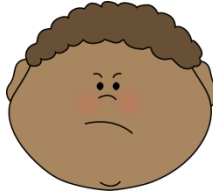
It's OK to feel angry--but...

We don't hurt other people.

We don't hurt ourselves.

We don't hurt our things.

We DO use our words.



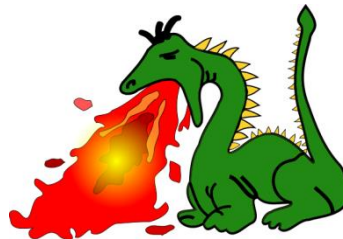
Kitty Words and Dragon Words

We start by teaching the children the difference between "Kitty Words" and "Dragon Words" very early on. Dragon Words are mean words. They are hurting words. Sometimes when we get angry, we say Dragon Words. Kitty Words are kind and friendly words. They make us feel good inside. When the children talk with their friends, we help them notice whether they are using "Kitty Words" or "Dragon Words." Young children seem to really relate to the meaning behind these images.



Kitty Words/**Helpful Words**

You can play with me.
That hurts my feelings.
I'm sorry.
Please don't say that.
Thank you for helping me.
I love you.
Thank you.
You're welcome.
I don't like that.
That hurts my feelings.



Dragon Words/**Hurting Words**

You can't play with us.
Get out of here.
You're stupid.
Your clothes are ugly.
I don't want to be your friend.
I hate you.
Gimme that!
Go away.
You stink.
Shut up.

The Red Beast

We use the book *The Red Beast* (by K.I. A-Ghani) as a way to introduce children to the concept of emotional reactivity. When Rufus's Red Beast "wakes up," he gets bigger and BIGGER! He gets very, very angry--doing and saying horrible things.

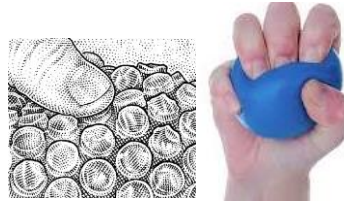


The children LOVE this book. Through story and images, they can easily relate to what happens inside their own bodies when they become frustrated. It shows them that they can learn to control their own Red Beast. This book is definitely worth reading to your child.

When a child is becoming angry, we ask: "Is your Red Beast waking up? What do you need?"

Taming your Red Beast - Rufus learns how to calm his Red Beast in various ways. Try some of these:

- Taking a deep breath and counting to 20
- Using a stress ball
- Popping bubble wrap
- Drinking a glass of ice water
- Shredding paper
- Getting a foot massage
- Listening to soothing music



When your child is calmer, you can ask: *Is your Red Beast calm now? Has he gone back to sleep?*
When he is calmer, bring out “The Bean Jar.”



The Bean Jar - Rufus gets to put 10 beans in a jar when he has tamed his Red Beast. When your child is calm again, encourage him to put 10 beans in his Bean Jar. Save the jar and use it every time his Red Beast wakes up. When the jar is full, plan a special treat or outing with your child. Affirm him for learning to “tame his Red Beast.”

Daniel Tiger

Daniel sometimes has trouble managing his big, mad feelings. When his “mad” gets too big, Daniel starts to ROAR. But then he suddenly stops...and remembers the song his mommy sings to him at home to help him calm down. This simple rhyme is especially good for Early Preschoolers. It comes from the board book, *I’m feeling Mad* (Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood), by Natalie Shaw.

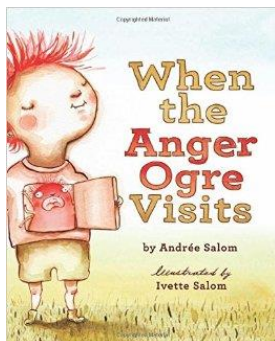
*When you feel so mad
That you want to roar,
Take a deep breath
And count to FOUR!
One...Two...Three...Four.*



We use our own version of a Daniel Tiger puppet to help the children talk about their mad feelings after they have calmed down. Typically, you can engage children in conversation about their feelings much more easily through play, which makes using puppets another helpful tool.

The Angry Ogre

You might want to read *When the Angry Ogre Visits* by Andre Salom with your child. It’s a clever book. The Angry Ogre normally stays asleep inside our tummy, but he visits when things don’t go our way.



When your child begins to get angry, ask whether the Angry Ogre is coming to visit? This gives you different language to talk about what’s happening inside your child. Ask what he needs?

Usually, these things help when the Angry Ogre visits:

A drink of tea and honey.
Breathe...and relax.
Stretch out. Relax your belly. Relax your toes.
Lean back and float upon the sea.

Sensory Tool Box (Figits)



Each teacher in our classroom has a Sensory Box filled with figits. You might want to do the same at home. Finger fidgets can be squishy balls, tickly balls, balls with lumps or bumps, or any fun stretchy manipulative toy. Having something very tactile for little hands to play with helps calm and focus them. Many children feel uncontrollable urges to fidget and move around. A small, simple toy that can be manipulated is often just what kids need to give them the tactile stimulation their mind is craving which calms their whole body.

Tucker Turtle Technique: “Stop. Tuck. Think.”

Tucker Turtle teaches the children what he has learned to do when he gets angry. This is called “The Tucker Turtle Technique.” Remind your child to curl up (like Tucker) and take 3 breaths to calm down first. When your child is angry, encourage him to “think like a turtle.” Practice this ahead of time.



1. Something Happens
2. Stop and Think: What am I feeling?
3. Go into your shell. Take 3 deep breaths and think calm thoughts.
4. Come out of your shell, express your feelings, and think of a solution.

Safe Solutions

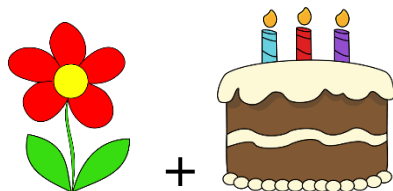
Here are some things to do to let off steam. Tucker thinks of these when he is in his shell. You can help your child use choose one of these when he is angry too. You can even put various solutions on slips of paper in a basket and ask him to choose one. Choice gives children a sense of power and control, but you need to be the one to determine the options first.

Tuck and think.
Tell someone you're mad.
Get help from a grown-up.
Count to ten.
Tell someone to stop.
Take a DEEP big breath.
Go to another room.
Ride my bike.
Stomp.
Run up and down stairs.
Run to the fence and back.
Ask for a hug.
Listen to music.
Have a cup of “tea” and honey.
Pound a hammer and nails.

Squeeze a squishy ball.
Throw a ball.
Move away.
Tear up newspapers.
Put my hands on my hips.
Pound play dough.
March to music.
Jump rope.
Scribble with crayons.
Hit a pillow.
Pound pegs.
Take a bath.
Sing a loud song. (Jingle Bells)
Run up and down stairs.
Dig in the dirt.

Smell the Flower. Blow Out the Candle.

When a child is really dysregulated and his motor is running too fast, you can teach this deep breathing strategy. Ask him to “Smell the flower...” (breathe in) and then “Blow out the candle...” (breathe out). It works like a charm! This will help your child to “calm her motor.” It also works well if a child is crying hysterically. You just have to *breathe with* your child to engage her in the process.



Simple Mantras

We teach these simple phrases to the children. Sometimes, we will remind them after we have asked them to stop and take 3 deep breaths. We often say, "Repeat after me..."

"I can take a deep breath."

"I can tuck and think like Tucker Turtle."

"I can use my words when I am mad."

"I can calm my engine."

"I can make good choices."



If You're Angry and You Know It

Sing this song with your child and encourage him to act it out.

If you're angry & you know it, stomp your feet.

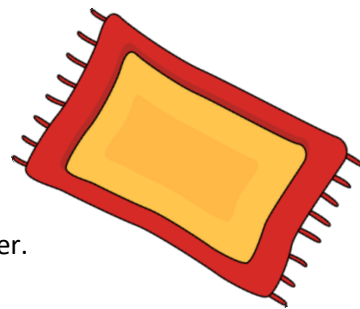
If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet.

If you're angry and you know it, then you will surely show it.

If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet

The Mad Mat

Bring out a "Mad Mat." (Use a rubber-backed mat or a small rug.) Tell your child that this is where we let our "mad" out. It is used only when your child is angry. Encourage him to stomp his feet, shake his arms, jump up and down and yell, "I'm so mad!" See if he can find different ways to physically release his anger. Shake it out. Wiggle it out. Jump it out.



Calm-Down Sensory Jars



glitter, etc. to water in a jar.
(Find easy directions online.)

Calm-down sensory jars can be used to help calm a child when emotions become overwhelming or as a meditation technique for children. Focusing on the glitter or objects in the calm-down jar will help a child relax and focus their attention. They're mesmerizing. As the bottle clears, so does the mind. Give your child one of these after a tantrum or meltdown. You can make your own DIY calm-down jars by adding glue, hand soap,



Moody Cow

Moody Cow is another character we include as a teaching tool at Mandala. He is from the book *Moody Cow Meditates* by Kerry



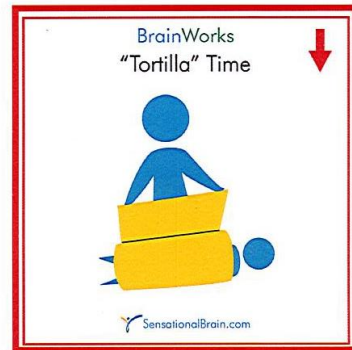
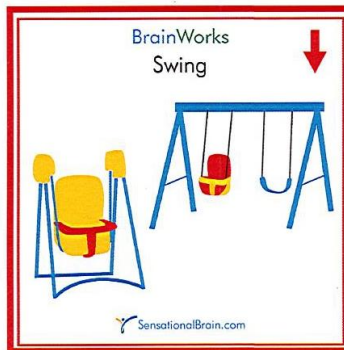
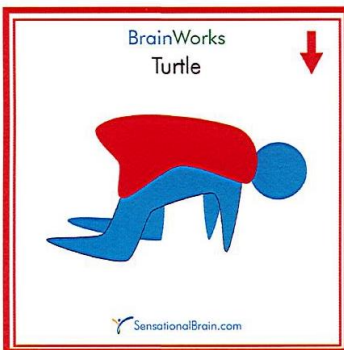
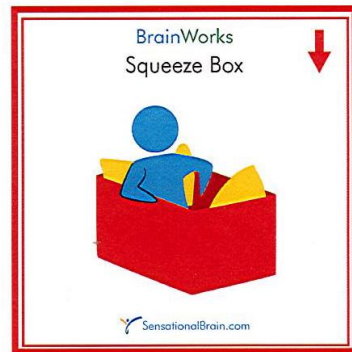
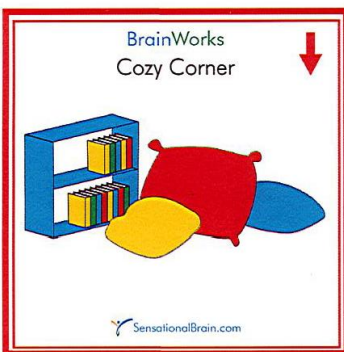
MacLean. When Moody Cow has a bad day, he loses his temper and gets in lots of trouble. His grandfather comes over and teaches him how to settle his mind and let go of his frustration. He uses a simple activity to show him how his mind looks when it is still and quiet. You can do this too.

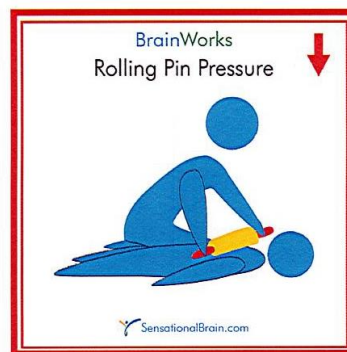
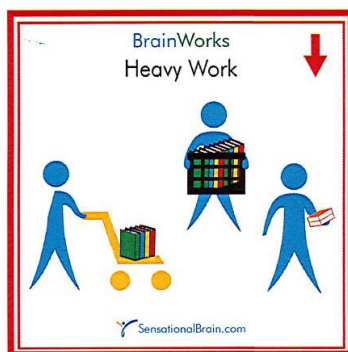
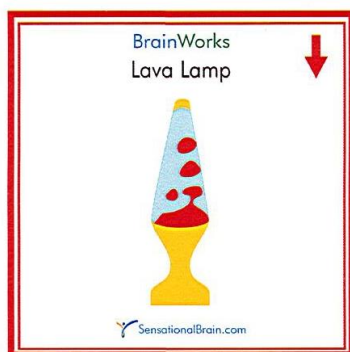
Fill a glass jar with water. Tell your child, *"It's like your mind during a quiet moment. It is clean and clear, like the sky."* Now add a little bit of sand or soil and dump it in the jar. *"Each tiny grain is one of your thoughts. Some are happy thoughts, some are sad, some are exciting wishes, some are dark and angry feelings. Now, let everything calm down by letting the jar sit still on a table. This is your mind during relaxation and meditation. Now you can act peacefully, because you can think clearly."*

Engine Calmers

We talk a lot about **"calming our engines"** or **"calming our motors"** in the classroom. The children understand this concept. Here are 10 low-budget tools you can try using to help your child calm his engine with no special equipment needed. These are tried and true strategies recommended and used by occupational therapists. When the body is relaxed, the brain can think calmly again. Try one of these to quiet your child.

(From *Brainworks Sensational Brain*: www.sensationalbrain.com/brainwords -software).





Our Favorite Anger Books for Kids

The Red Beast by K.I. A-Ghani, 2009

When the Anger Ogre Visits by Andree Salom, 2015

I'm Gonna Like Me: Letting Off a Little Self-Esteem by Jamie Curtis, 2002

The Chocolate-Covered Cookie Tantrum by Deb Blumenthal, 1996

How Do Dinosaurs Say I'm Mad by J. Yolen & M. Teague, 2013

I'm Feeling Mad (Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood) by Natalie Shaw

Mouse Was Mad by Linda Urban, 2009

Cool Down and Work Through Anger by C. Meiners

Tobin Learns to Make Friends by Diane Murrell

Angry Octopus: An Anger Management Story by L. Lite

Peaceful Piggy by K.L Maclean

Play with Me by Marie Halletts

When Emily Woke Up Angry by Rian Duncan

I'm Sorry by Sam McBratney

Moody Cow Meditates by K.L Maclean

Rotten Ralph by Jack Gantos

Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild! by Marla Frazee

Hands Are Not for Hitting by Martine Agassi

Words Are Not for Hurting by Martine Agassi

When I Feel Angry by Cornelia Spelman

Fancy Nancy Bonjour Butterfly by Jane O'Connor

When Sophie Gets Angry--Really Really Angry by Molly Barry

When You're Mad and You Know It by Crary & Steelsmith

Sometimes I Get Angry by Watson & Switzer **Contrary Mary** by Anita Jeram

The Hating Book by Charlotte Zolotow

Mr. Grumpy's Outing by John Burningham

I Was So Mad by Nora Simon

Sometimes I'm a Bombaloo by Rachel Vail. Scholastic, 2002

Little Monkey Calms Down by Michael Dahl

Anne Kangas, L.C.S.W., *Head of School/Family Services* • 12/2017