

PRE TEENS

8-11

1. DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM	5
2. GETTING ON TRACK WITH LEARNING	7
3. BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS	9
4. HAVING A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE	11
5. STAYING SAFE ONLINE	12
6. UNDERSTANDING BULLYING	13
7. MANAGING ANGER	14
8. STARTING HIGH SCHOOL	16

1 DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM



Showing kids that you value them and you're optimistic about what they can achieve has a big influence on the way they see themselves. When they first arrive in care, some kids feel unlovable or worthless, or believe they are "bad". They may struggle to connect with you or the kids at school. They may even allow themselves to be treated badly by others.

Self-esteem will improve over time, but don't expect the change to happen quickly. The relationship you offer may be the first positive relationship with an adult they've experienced – and it might take a while for your child to get used to it!

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

PUT GOOD THOUGHTS INTO WORDS. Make a point of noticing good behaviour. You could say things like: *I like the way you got your homework finished so quickly or You were so lovely and gentle playing with the cat just now.* The little things you say can build up over time to have a big effect.

THINK ABOUT NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION. Kids who have experienced trauma are often incredibly tuned in to the emotions of people around them. If you're annoyed or feeling impatient, your tone or your body language is likely to give it away. It's better to give yourself a bit of time out and come back to the situation when you're feeling calm and constructive.

NOTICE WHAT INTERESTS YOUR CHILD. Every child has different strengths and passions. Talk to your child about what they like to do so they can develop a sense of pride and confidence in their personal choices and activities.

TALK POSITIVELY ABOUT FAMILY. Your child's sense of who they are is strongly connected to what they know about their biological family. Having a reason to feel good about family is a big contributor to self-esteem. Look at the positives in their family background and point out how the child shares those qualities. It could be anything from *You've got the most beautiful brown eyes, just like your brother to It looks like you're going to be as athletic as your mum.*

NURTURE CULTURAL CONNECTION. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, identity is rooted in community and culture, as well as family. Encourage curiosity by asking questions about language and country. For example, you might ask how to say "yum" or "yuck" or "Too easy!" in the child's language. If your child doesn't know the answer, you can find out together – then you can both start using the word. Your child should have a Cultural Support Plan with actions and goals around maintaining links with family, community, language and cultural activities. If you haven't seen the Cultural Support Plan, ask your caseworker about it.



MORE HELP

Raising Children Network

raisingchildren.net.au

Suggestions for helping kids grow up happy and confident.

Relationships Australia, NSW

nsw.relationships.com.au

1300 364 277

Courses for pre teens on building confidence and self-esteem.

Reach Out

reachout.com

Practical online tools and support for young people.



MORE HELP

Life Story

facs.nsw.gov.au

Learn more about Life Story work and download a copy of the book.

The Charter of Rights

facs.nsw.gov.au

Download comic book versions of The Charter of Rights.

Youth Beyond Blue

youthbeyondblue.com

1300 22 4636 (24 hours)

A resource that helps kids understand the thoughts and moods that make life hard, and what they can do to feel better.



USEFUL TIP

Explain things clearly and consistently

Every child should have a clear, age-appropriate understanding of why they are in out-of-home care. Have a talk with your caseworker and agree on exactly what to say and how to say it.

DESCRIBE THE QUALITIES AND ACTIONS THAT MAKE YOU PROUD. When you explain exactly what it is that you're praising, your child knows what you mean. For example, *I like the way you've organised your room. You've found a spot for everything or I was so proud of how you made sure your friend felt included, that was very kind.* Descriptive praise is much more convincing than vague praise.

TAKE NOTICE OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK. When kids make negative comments about things like how they look or how intelligent they are, it's probably a sign that they're struggling with self-esteem. Give your child smiles, hugs and lots of your time to show them how much you love and value them. If the negative self-talk keeps going, check in with your caseworker for suggestions or strategies.

CHERISH LIFE STORY WORK. Show how much you value your child's Life Story work by taking an interest in it and offering to help. Encourage them to use it as a way of understanding and being proud of who they are. Sometimes Life Story work may trigger a painful or traumatic memory. If your child shares information with you about past abuse, you must report it to your caseworker. Your child may want to keep their Life Story work private, and that's okay, too.



Nan tells us we are no better than the other and she loves us both the same.

8-year-old boy

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

MAKE KIDS FEEL IMPORTANT. Kids in care really benefit from knowing that the people around them care about them – and that includes caseworkers. It's great for caseworkers to have a rich relationship with the child in care, from doing fun things like going out for an ice-cream occasionally to making a special effort to help organise holiday outings.

INTRODUCE THE CHARTER OF RIGHTS. The Charter of Rights clearly states the rights of children in care, including the right to be treated fairly and respectfully, and the right to be involved in decision-making. Caseworkers should introduce the Charter and talk about how the child's beliefs, interests and opinions are valued and respected by the people involved in their care.

FOCUS ON LIFE STORY WORK. Life Story work creates a safe space for children to ask their caseworker questions about their family and why they are in care. Supporting kids to understand and accept their personal story provides a solid foundation for self-esteem. If sensitive or traumatic information is shared, the caseworker may recommend speaking to a psychologist to discuss counselling options. Some psychologists include Life Story work as part of therapy.

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT FAMILY CONTACT. Having healthy relationships with parents and siblings can help kids in care to deal with feelings of anxiety, grief or guilt about what has happened in their lives. Caseworkers should support kids to establish and maintain those connections.

2

GETTING ON TRACK WITH LEARNING

Sound skills in reading, writing and maths will help your child do well at school and in adult life. The good news is that kids of any age (even adults!) can become better learners and improve those skills with the right support.

Kids in care sometimes have gaps in their learning and struggle with numeracy and literacy. It could be because they have changed schools, or missed a lot of school, or because education wasn't a priority in their family home.

Some kids also have learning difficulties that affect how their brain processes and stores information. These problems can make it hard for a student to learn as quickly as other kids in the classroom. The earlier you act, the easier it will be to get things on track.



MORE HELP

School A to Z, Practical Help for Parents

schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au

Practical help for parents around education, wellbeing and technology.

Department of Education Learning and Support Services

dec.nsw.gov.au

1300 679 332 or 131 536

Available to all public school students. For details, talk to your school or call the Department.

Reading Writing Hotline

readingwritinghotline.edu.au

1300 6 555 06

Australia's national telephone referral service for adult numeracy and literacy.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

REWARD SMALL SUCCESSES. Children with learning challenges might be extremely capable and intelligent, but still think of themselves as "stupid" because of their school results. Support their self-esteem by noticing and rewarding their effort and their small successes.

MAKE USE OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY.

If you're concerned about your child's reading level or maths skills, speak to the school about accessing literacy and numeracy programs. Most schools run programs to help bring struggling students up to the same level as their classmates. Some schools run homework clubs, too.

LOOK AT STRENGTHS. If schoolwork is a problem for kids, look at the areas in which they excel – perhaps sport, art or music. Support and encourage those activities and let your child know you value their abilities in those areas.

TAKE PART IN SCHOOL LIFE. Getting involved at school is a way of showing that you think education is important and you want to support your child's learning. You may not have time to help out in the canteen or volunteer for classroom activities, but you can do your best to introduce yourself to the teacher, attend parent-teacher nights and get along to school events.

LEARN TOGETHER. Don't worry if your own English literacy skills are less than perfect. Both you and your child can get support from literacy experts. Learning (and even struggling) together will teach your child as much about persistence and problem-solving as it does about reading and writing.

USE YOUR HOME LANGUAGE. Carers who speak English as a second language might feel they can't help their child learn to read and write. Research suggests that reading and writing in any language helps establish fundamental literacy skills, so feel confident about using your home language.



USEFUL TIP

Get on track with help from tutors

Out-of-school tutoring can get literacy and numeracy back on track. Talk to your caseworker about including tutoring in the Case Plan and covering those costs.



MORE HELP

Reading Eggs

readingeggs.com.au

A subscription-based reading program for children aged 3 to 13.

SPELD NSW

speldnsw.org.au

02 9739 6277

Supporting specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia.

Your Tutor

yourtutor.edu.au

Subscription-based online tutoring service for kids aged over 7.

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (AECG)

aecg.nsw.edu.au

02 9550 5666

Programs and events about education from the Aboriginal community's perspective.

READ FOR FUN, NOT FOR SCHOOL. Think about what your child enjoys and encourage them to read more about it on websites, online forums, email newsletters, social media, magazines, comics or books. Let your child discover the benefits of reading, without making the link back to schoolwork.

TAP INTO LEARNING AND SUPPORT HELP. Talk to the teacher about the strategies used in the classroom and find out how you can back those up at home. Ask about accessing Learning and Support resources if you think your child needs them. These are available to all students in NSW public schools who are having difficulties with learning or behaviour, regardless of the cause.

MAKE CONTACT WITH THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICER (AEO).

Schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students usually have an AEO. It's the AEO's job to support Aboriginal kids at school and help them build on their strengths. Get to know your child's AEO. They can be an important and valuable part of your child's support network.

CHECK IN WITH A PSYCHOLOGIST. Psychologists are the health professionals with the expertise to diagnose a learning difficulty. Talk to your child's school or caseworker if you think your child would benefit from a professional diagnosis. School counsellors can also run assessments for learning difficulties. If a learning difficulty is identified, talk to your child about what it means and help them to understand there is no link between learning difficulties and intelligence.



I'd like to do more things I'm good at. I'm not good at school work. I'd like them to make sure I get to do some things I would be good at. I don't like always talking about what I'm not good at.

10-year-old girl

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

CONTACT THE SCHOOL. When a child first comes into your care, your caseworker will contact the school principal and let them know about the arrangement. If the child is moving schools, then the caseworker will also provide the new school with appropriate information about the child's history and medical conditions, current schooling arrangements and any existing educational support.

KEEP THE EDUCATION PLAN UP TO DATE. Caseworkers and carers are involved in the annual review of the Education Plan – but they are also responsible for keeping the school up to date, between reviews, on anything that may affect the child's ability to learn. Caseworkers can help organise the external services recommended in the Education Plan, including specialist literacy or numeracy support. Education Plans should be practical, useful and active.

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

3



Having a good bunch of friends makes children feel secure and valued. It also helps them feel like they belong. But making and keeping friends isn't easy for some people. Sometimes kids who have experienced abuse and neglect feel insecure and vulnerable, and find it hard to trust people. Create opportunities for your child to stay in touch with old friends as well as make new ones. And talk to them about what it takes to build a good relationship.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE. The way you behave and interact with your child will set the pattern for the relationships they make with others. Teach good conversation skills by using friendly eye contact, listening to what your child has to say, asking questions and taking turns talking. Let your child see you using good manners, at home and when you're out, and prompt them to say things like *please, thank you* and *excuse me*. Show how to be kind and considerate of other people, for example by standing back to let someone pass through on a crowded footpath, or picking up something someone has dropped to return it to them.

ENCOURAGE EMPATHY. Teach kids to understand how their actions affect others. Keep an eye out for opportunities to help your child see those connections. For example, you might say *Can you hear the dog growling now? That's because it doesn't like you pulling its ears* or *That little boy is hiding from us now. Do you think it scared him when you started shouting?*

TALK ABOUT BEING A GOOD FRIEND. Remind kids that friendship is a two-way relationship and that it's important to be a good listener. Teach them to be kind, caring and respectful, not to put other people down, not to pressure their peers, not to gossip and not to judge people by their appearance.

SUPPORT EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS. Do as much as you can to help kids stay connected with their old friends, extended family and existing social networks like dance classes or sports teams. It may mean that you spend extra time travelling to neighbourhoods, clubs or activities outside your local area, but your child will benefit from maintaining those relationships.

BE OPEN TO CONTACT WITH FORMER CARERS. Your child may want to keep in touch with carers and foster siblings from previous placements. Check in with your caseworker to ensure this is safe and appropriate, and do what you can to support the relationships that are meaningful to your child.



MORE HELP

Office of Sport and Recreation
sportandrecreation.nsw.gov.au
13 13 02

Outdoor holiday camps that help kids learn new skills and make new friends. The site also has links to local clubs.

Raising Children Network
raisingchildren.net.au

Practical ideas on helping kids with social skills and friendships.

CONSIDER PASTIMES AND HOBBIES. If your child is not making friends easily, think about encouraging them to pursue an interest like art or sport outside of school. If you have time, you could start up a regular activity for your child and some of the other kids at school or in the neighbourhood, like a weekly bushwalk, regular kick-arounds at the park, or a craft club at home.



I don't know... she knows what we've been through, somehow. She gets us and she helps us with our problems.

11-year-old girl

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S NEW FRIENDS. Invite your child to have friends over to the house, and try your best to help them get to social events and activities with their new friends. Make it as easy as you can for them to strengthen the new friendships they make.

DON'T RUSH TO JUDGE. Sometimes you might disapprove of the friends your child is making. At this age, your disapproval could just make those friends seem more attractive. First, listen without judgment and take the opportunity to discuss what it means to be a good friend. If you continue to be concerned about the connections your child is making and the influence they might be under, talk to their teacher or have a discussion with your caseworker.



MORE HELP

Connecting Carers NSW

connectingcarersnsw.com.au

1300 794 653

Creating opportunities for carers and kids to connect and share their experiences.

CREATE Foundation

create.org.au

1800 655 105

Supporting kids in care with forums, workshops and events.

Kids in Care (KiC) Club, UWS

02 9678 7603

An out-of-school-hours recreational and educational club for kids in Western Sydney.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

TAKE GAMES. When caseworkers play age-appropriate board games or card games with kids during visits, it not only helps build the relationship between them, it also gives the kids an opportunity to get used to winning, losing, taking turns and playing by the rules. All of these skills can support the development of friendships.

TRY ROLE-PLAY. Caseworkers can help kids learn about social behaviours through role-play. If the child is interested, try taking some typical pre-teen experiences and act them out with the child, taking turns to play different roles. Then discuss how different sorts of behaviour affected the outcomes.

GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRAMS FOR KIDS IN CARE. Some kids in care are more comfortable in the company of other kids in out-of-home care. Groups like Connecting Carers NSW, The Create Foundation and the University of Western Sydney run camps, workshops and other special programs specifically designed for kids in care.

AIM TO MAKE PLACEMENT CHANGES A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE. Caseworkers can help children maintain strong and stable connections with the people in their lives by sharing relevant information with both a new carer and a previous carer. If appropriate, caseworkers can also put carers directly in touch with each other so the child can have ongoing contact with their previous carer and foster siblings.

4

HAVING A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE



As kids approach their teen years they become more self-conscious and more aware of how their bodies look. At this age, a positive body image can be an incredibly influential contributor to mental health and wellbeing. You can encourage the child in your care to eat well, stay active and feel good about their body.

Body image can be particularly challenging for some children in care who struggle to hold on to a stable sense of self. It's not unusual for some kids to have issues with body image, low self-esteem, shame and guilt.

It's also not unusual for some kids to have a troubled relationship with food. Children who experienced neglect in a home where there was no regular source of food may secretly hoard food or binge eat. Others may have developed a pattern of food refusal as a way of asserting some control over their lives.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

INTRODUCE GOOD EATING ROUTINES. Have a regular routine around breakfast, lunch and dinner, and talk about what sorts of snacks are the smart choices between meals (things like fresh fruits and vegetables, or a glass of milk). It might help to put the meals timetable on the fridge or the family noticeboard.

KEEP HEALTHY SNACKS AT HAND. Have bowls of fruit and other healthy snacks in easy-to-reach places. This can be very reassuring for kids who have experienced food insecurity and may help them give up hoarding behaviour.

BE A BODY IMAGE ROLE MODEL. It will be easier for your child to feel good about their body if they see that you feel positive about your own body. Eat well, stay active, and talk in terms of what your body can do, not how it looks.

CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPES. At some stage, you'll probably notice your child comparing themselves to images they see in the media. Talk to your child about how the media manipulates body image and how real-life healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

DON'T ALLOW TEASING. Make it a rule that teasing about appearance is not allowed. Teasing can have a negative influence on body image and can also lead to children teasing and even bullying peers at school.

WHAT YOU CASEWORKER CAN DO.

BE REALISTIC AROUND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE. Caseworkers can remind carers that it may take time for children to let go of old habits and start to learn new ones. While carers should be encouraging healthy eating habits, they should also be flexible, have realistic expectations and be prepared to make slow progress.



USEFUL TIP

Talk about health (not weight)

If you talk to your child about their relationship with food, focus more on health and how they're feeling, and less on food, weight or body shape. Tell them you want to help them feel happier and healthier. If you get a bad reaction, don't argue. Let it go, and try again another time.



MORE HELP

Completely Gorgeous

completelygorgeous.com.au

Author and cartoonist Kaz Cooke tackles size, shape and self-esteem.

Positive Body Image – a weight off my mind

cyh.com/healthtopics/library/WOMM_bb.pdf

A journal that helps teens shift their thinking about personal body image.

The Butterfly Foundation

thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)

Support for eating disorders and negative body image.

5

STAYING SAFE ONLINE



USEFUL TIP

Teach kids to trust their instincts

Remind kids that if something is wrong or risky, they'll probably feel it: maybe their heart will pound or their stomach will churn. If they feel that way during any sort of exchange online or on social media, they should exit and let you know.



MORE HELP

Office of Children's eSafety Commissioner

esafety.gov.au

E-safety guides in languages including Arabic and Chinese.

Cyber Smart Kids Quiz

esafety.gov.au/kids-quiz

An online quiz about cyber safety issues.

Digital Citizenship

digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au

Information on how to stay safe, positive and responsible online.

At this age, it's best if kids only use computers and smartphones in shared family spaces where you can keep an eye on them. Make it a rule that all digital devices are left in a shared family space overnight.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

MAKE THE PRIVACY RULES CLEAR. Tell kids never to share their full name, home address, school address, current location or phone number. Explain that reputable people and businesses won't request that information, so if someone is asking for it, they should let you know. Let them know their safety is important to you and that's why you want to check the privacy settings of anything they download or sign up for. Choose strict privacy settings and make sure location sharing is turned off.

THINK ABOUT PARENTAL CONTROL SOFTWARE. You can get software that limits what sort of content your child can see, or the times when they can use their device. If you decide to use parental control software, let your child know so that they don't feel tricked or mistrusted.

HELP YOUR CHILD TO THINK AHEAD. It can be difficult for kids to understand that anything they post can be easily shared and could hang around the internet for decades to come. The general rule is that you should only post something if you are happy for anyone and everyone to see it. If your child is "cyber-bullied" by friends or anonymous users, encourage them to ignore the bullying and delete or block the bullies so they no longer see their messages.

BE SMART ABOUT ONLINE FRIENDSHIPS. Meeting up in the real world with people met online can be risky. Explain the danger, and let your child know that if they want to meet an online friend, you will come along and make sure they're safe.

REPORT IT TO THE POLICE. If you know your child has had inappropriate contact online, report it to the police, and also let your caseworker know.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

TALK ABOUT ONLINE CONTACT. Some kids want to speak or connect with their family online. In most cases that's fine, but if the Case Plan specifies that contact must be supervised, or if there are any other reasons for concern, then online contact will have to be discussed and agreed. Carers should be encouraged to use good judgment when it comes to online contact. For example, if a carer has confiscated a device for some reason, they should be sure to make it available when the child next needs to contact a family member.

6

UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

Because of their experiences, sometimes kids in care don't recognise bullying or understand that it's not acceptable. Your support will help the child in your care feel protected.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS. If you believe your child is being bullied, ask them what's making them feel bad. Listen calmly and take their feelings seriously. Offer to help find ways to deal with the situation. It could be as simple as walking home from school a different way, or having the confidence to say *Stop, I don't like that*. If your child is threatened, stalked or physically assaulted, report it to the police and notify your caseworker.

ASK THE SCHOOL TO RESPOND. If bullying is happening at school, speak to the school, tell them what you know, and ask them what steps they will take to prevent it happening again. If your child is anxious about talking to the school, let them know that you believe speaking out will make things better. Your calm but strong response will set a good example for the child in your care. Stay in touch with the school until you believe the matter has been resolved.

KEEP UP THE LOVE. Children who have grown up feeling unloved or who have experienced violence may start bullying other children. Your empathy and kindness are crucial. Continue to encourage good behaviour by praising them when they do or say the right thing. Kids who get lots of positive attention are less likely to bully.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

CONNECT WITH A COUNSELLOR. Building resilience will help children deal with bullying. It could be valuable to connect with the school's counsellor or get some outside support from a specialist.

FOLLOW UP WITH THE SCHOOL. Not all schools will respond quickly and effectively to reports of bullying. If the child's carer or caseworker are not satisfied, they should arrange a meeting with the school to discuss the matter.

TARGET THE ISSUES BEHIND BULLYING. When kids bully, it's often because they've been bullied themselves. Caseworkers can work with counsellors or psychologists to help the child understand the patterns and make better choices.

MAKE THE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN WORK. A good Behaviour Support Plan is built on an understanding of the impacts of trauma and the best ways to teach and support better behaviour. It is essential that the child's school keeps to the Plan and that consequences for bullying behaviour are consistent and appropriate. The caseworker should check in with the school to ensure that all staff, including relief staff, are aware of the Plan and understand how to implement it.



MORE HELP

Bullying. No Way.
bullyingnoway.gov.au

Information and links to the National Safe Schools Framework.

Raising Children Network
raisingchildren.net.au

Tips on how to work with the school to resolve bullying issues.

School A to Z
schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au

Search for videos on topics including "What is bullying?" and "Who will help my child?"

MANAGING ANGER



Anger is as valid as any other emotion and is something all kids need to learn to manage. The goal isn't about feeling no anger at all; it's about managing anger in the right way. Kids who have grown up around adults with poor anger management may be inclined to lash out. You can do a lot to teach self-awareness and self-control.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



USEFUL TIP

Calm down mentally

Have your child visualise a relaxing scene, such as floating on a cloud or in a swimming pool. Tell them to imagine a candle in front of them and then, as they exhale, ask them to imagine making the candle flicker but not go out. This combines deep breathing with visualisation for a calming experience.

From kidsmatter.edu.au

ACKNOWLEDGE THE ANGER. Your child will probably give you plenty of signals when they're angry: they'll scowl, slam doors, throw school bags, speak rudely to you or other people in the household. But they probably won't volunteer information about what made them angry. Let your child know you can see they're angry and encourage them to talk about what made them feel that way.

TALK ABOUT FEELINGS. Your child might find it hard to recognise that they are angry or to explain the reason for the anger. They may have difficulty identifying their feelings. Putting a name to feelings can be the first step. Talk about feelings on a day-to-day basis (not just when there is an anger crisis in the house), and encourage them to name and describe them. Visual cues such as happy, sad and angry faces can be helpful tools.

EMPATHISE, BUT DON'T EXCUSE. When your child explains why they're upset, let them know you can see how that might make them angry – but also remind them that anger is not an excuse for being aggressive or rude. If they have done or said something rough or inconsiderate, ask them how they think it made the people around them feel. And ask them how it made them feel, too.

MAKE EXERCISE A PRIORITY. Holding on to stress can make it all too easy to tip over into anger. You can help your child lose some of that stress by encouraging them to do some regular exercise. Some kids will enjoy fast-paced activities like team sports or athletics. Others will respond better to less competitive, more meditative activities like yoga, bushwalking, swimming and martial arts.

BE IN IT FOR THE LONG RUN. For some kids in care, anger, rage and even physical violence were the responses that helped them survive a chaotic or traumatic environment. Those behaviours can take a long time to unlearn. If you can be patient, understanding and supportive and continue to model good anger management skills yourself, you will be helping to set up a happier, healthier, more productive future.

SPOT AND RATE THE ANGER. Teach kids how to spot when they're beginning to get upset. Some will clench their muscles, grind their teeth, turn red or start breathing fast. Others will try to hide their anger and end up with headaches or stomach aches. Encourage them to rate their anger on a scale of one to 10. Get them to think about how their body is responding as anger increases or decreases. The angrier they are, the harder it will be to bring that anger back under control. If the anger level is low, tactics like deep breathing, going for a walk or listening to some music can help. If it is high, your child might need to spend some time on their own, or get some help from you to calm down.

ENCOURAGE A COOL-DOWN. Taking a break from a confronting situation makes it easier to keep anger under control. Let your child know that taking time to cool down is a smart strategy, and that you will respect their need for time and privacy. Encourage them to try one of the simple calming techniques recommended by kidsmatter.edu.au that appear on these pages.

TIME IN, NOT TIME OUT. Some families use “time out” to encourage a child to bring their behaviour back under control – but time out in isolation can be distressing for kids who have experienced trauma. For those kids, it is better to take a “time in” approach. When things are getting heated, ask your child to slow down, sit down, think about what’s going on and perhaps talk it through with you.

LOOK FOR PATTERNS AND TRIGGERS. When the episode has passed, think about what triggered the rage and consider whether there are some emotions, situations or even words that commonly spark anger. Keeping a diary can help. If you see a pattern emerging, try to find an opportunity to discuss it with your child so you can both think about ways to deal with those triggers. It could be about thinking ahead to avoid those moments. Or it could be about recognising the anger reaction and finding different ways to react.

GET THE HELP YOU NEED. If your child is frequently and intensely angry, or you feel like you are struggling to cope, let your caseworker know that you need support. For kids in care, anger is often related to genuinely challenging or traumatic life situations and it could be that professional psychological or counselling services are needed. It may also be appropriate for the caseworker to develop some behaviour support strategies with you.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

SUPPORT FOR YOU. These angry episodes may be more than you have ever had to handle before. If you’re really not coping, talk to the caseworker or psychologist. They may be able to suggest new tools or strategies for managing those situations. The caseworker may be able to organise some respite to give you a break.

SUPPORT FOR THE CHILD. Anger management can be a big issue and cause a lot of disruption in your home. If a child is having destructive tantrums or big shows of anger more than once a week, a caseworker should discuss the situation with a psychologist and make arrangements for professional help if appropriate. Something as simple as introducing some regular calming practices like yoga, music therapy or swimming could make a difference.

CONSIDER A BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN. A caseworker can look at developing a Behaviour Support Plan if the child is putting themselves or others at risk of serious harm, or if their behaviour is likely to see them excluded from school or other activities. The Plan is developed collaboratively by the carer, the caseworker and relevant specialists. It describes the behaviours that are a concern and outlines safe and constructive strategies to manage or prevent the behaviour. Kids in care should never be disciplined in ways that could make them feel scared or humiliated. If you feel like you’re struggling, have a talk with your caseworker.



USEFUL TIP

Calm down physically

Get your child to tense up all their muscles and visualise themselves as a robot. Have them hold this position for 15 seconds. Then ask them to release all the tension and visualise themselves as rag dolls, with all muscles very loose. Stay relaxed like this for 15 seconds.

From kidsmatter.edu.au



MORE HELP

ReachOut

[reachout.com/
anger-management](http://reachout.com/anger-management)

*Tips for recognising
and managing anger.*



STARTING HIGH SCHOOL

Leaving primary school and starting high school means going through a lot of changes – and some kids can find that much upheaval a challenge. Give your child plenty of information about what to expect and let them know you are there to help them cope with any worries or problems.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



USEFUL TIP

Find the local Homework Club

Kids who feel swamped by high school homework might benefit from a Homework Club. Your school or library might run one; if not, they can probably suggest where you can find one locally.



MORE HELP

School A to Z
[schools.nsw.edu.au/
gotoschool/highschool](https://schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/highschool)

Videos and checklists for starting high school.

Public School Locator
[online.det.nsw.edu.au/
schoolfind/locator](https://online.det.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/locator)

An online tool to identify your child's local public high schools.

GET TO KNOW THE HIGH SCHOOL. If you can, make sure you and your child get to the events offered for new students, such as orientation days, so there aren't too many surprises when school starts. Talk to the school about the best way to stay up to date with your child's progress. They may suggest a single point of contact, such as a Year Adviser, or they might ask you to go directly to individual teachers.

BE 100% READY. Make sure your child has everything they need for the first day. This will include a school uniform, books and stationery. Your allowance should cover these costs. If your child needs laptops or other devices and you're having trouble paying for these, speak to your caseworker. If there is a school camp planned, check in with your caseworker to make sure you have approvals in place.

LOOK FOR SCHOOL NOTES. Prompt your child for notes each day so you don't miss out on important messages. As the year progresses, aim to make school notes part of your child's routine along with homework and empty lunchboxes!

HAVE A LOOK AT YOUR CHILD'S WORK. Make it part of your routine to sit down and look through your child's exercise books with them every couple of weeks. This will give you an idea of how your child is coping with the workload, and is an opportunity for you to have a chat about how they're feeling about school.

MEET THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICER (AEO). Many schools will have an AEO to help Aboriginal kids make the transition into Year 7. Get in touch so you can support each other in making your child's time at school happy and productive.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

MAKE SURE THE EDUCATION PLAN IS UPDATED. The new high school will be responsible for obtaining the child's records from the old primary school. The caseworker will ensure the new school understands the child's care arrangements and reviews the Education Plan to put the necessary support in place. Caseworkers should be sensitive around their visits to school; many kids are uncomfortable when they are pulled out of a class for a meeting with a caseworker.

MAINTAIN OLD SCHOOL CONTACTS. It could be that starting a new school will take the child away from established friends, family members or other significant people in their support network. The caseworker and carer should work together to ensure those positive friendships are maintained.