

HELPING A YOUNG PERSON WHO IS FEELING ANGRY

*This document has been produced by
Clyst Vale Community College's
Counselling Service.*

This document is not intended to be a definitive guide, but does hope to provide some support to families with a young person experiencing anger. Having a child who is angry and perhaps violent can be very distressing for any parent, and can present issues of safety to themselves or other family members. The counsellors at CVCC will work to help identify what is the root cause of your child's anger and help them come to terms with this. Often anger will be a flag, letting us know something is not right in the student's world. We will also promote self-help interventions that you as a parent can support.

The counsellor's approach

When the counsellors work with a child who presents with anger issues we try to achieve the following:

- Find a safe means for anger expression
- Introduce the student to a relaxation regime
- Help the student work through any identifiable issue causing them to be angry

Anger expression

By anger expression the counsellors mean an activity that allows the student to get in touch with their anger and vent it in an appropriate and safe way. Typically the counsellors will frequently come across students who kick in doors or punch walls, windows or even other people. This can cause the student serious harm, many have already broken knuckles from their activities. You might think of your child's anger as a steam cooker. Steam cookers have a safety valve that allows steam to escape and so prevent the pot from exploding and causing serious damage.

The counsellor will try to help the student find an alternative means to express their anger, designed to minimise any risk of harm to themselves or others around them, and so let off steam more safely. Any such safer anger expression activity can help to reduce the student's need to harm themselves or others. Please notice we do not recommend stopping your child from expressing their anger. Unexpressed strong feelings that may have been around for some time are known contributors to anxiety and depression.

Unusual remedies...

This is where the counsellors and your child need your support. Some of the activities we may suggest might appear very unusual. Here are a few of the more typical suggestions:

- Rolling up a newspaper and slogging it out with a pillow, while screaming and yelling.
- Going to a private place like an open field and yelling at the top of their voice
- Finding a suitable physical activity, such as swimming or running, weight training, getting in touch with their anger and channelling it into their sport. This should be done on a regular basis.
- Setting up a punch bag in a private place and encouraging the student to get in touch with their anger as they throw punches.

Often we recommend loud music to be played of the student's choice to help them get in touch with their feelings.

Your support

You can help by allowing your child to perform whatever activity appeals to them. Give them the space and privacy to carry out the activity without interruption. Perhaps agree that they put a sign on their door, carry out the activity, and you won't interrupt or enter until the child comes out on their own accord.

Relaxation

The counsellors will promote self-help relaxation techniques for your child. We usually provide a leaflet to teach the young person how to relax. We encourage the student to perform the relaxation technique regularly, typically while they lie in bed before they go to sleep. The technique taught can, with regular practise, be used to help the student 'cool down' in moments of crisis. This is best achieved if the student has practised the skill many times before.

Other relaxation activities

The counsellors recommend your child receive a regular massage. Massages can have many therapeutic properties.

Eating small amounts of dark chocolate, typically with 70% cocoa or more depending on the preference of your child. Such chocolate has well known properties that help a person to relax.

Reducing stressors such as siblings, by ensuring your child has access to privacy, peace and quiet.

Uncovering what is behind the anger. The counsellor will encourage your child to explore what is behind their anger.

Often a child's anger will be associated with other feelings such as sadness. Anger can be used to shield and protect us from getting in touch with painful feelings. The counsellors will encourage the young person to talk with a parent about how they feel.

Please remember that your child has most likely not been able to talk to you about their feelings, for whatever reason. Any sharing your child is able to do is a definite step forward.

As a parent you can be of enormous help by providing opportunities for your child to speak their mind. Please avoid judging them, and try not to react if they say something that upsets you.

Recent research has shown that a young person actually benefits, developmentally, from regular heated debates with their parents. These debates are not designed to be shouting matches, instead a chance, and permission, to present strongly held opinions and have them listened to and to be argued with by a rational adult.

You may be able to engineer opportunities for your child to talk with you. Try to organise an activity that suits your child, provides quality time with just you present and in a place they feel safe. Such as activities might include:

- Cooking
- Gardening
- Shopping
- Car journeys
- Outings
- Car maintenance

Be patient, be present.