

8. Teaching Anger Management

It is natural for students to get angry sometimes; however, when they also have difficulty controlling their anger, the academic and social outcomes suffer. These students are often perceived as hostile, have fewer goals, are at risk for expulsion or dropping out of school, experience lower academic performance, have higher rates of juvenile delinquency and adult criminal activity, and have low self esteem (Blum, 2001; Robinson, Smith, & Miller, 2002; Tamaki, 1994). Many teachers are finding that teaching anger management skills to students is effective in helping them to regulate their behavior and deal with their feelings of anger when they surface (Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 1997; Rutherford, Quinn, & Mathur, 1996). Acquiring these skills makes schools safer for everyone and helps these students to control their inappropriate behavior and, in turn, more socially accepted by others and themselves (Robinson, Smith, & Miller, 2002; Tamaki, 1994).

Anger is one of the most difficult feelings for students to manage (Phillips-Hershey & Kanagy, 1996). Students may get angry because they are frustrated or anxious, feel a lack of control over their environments, or do not know how to express themselves effectively in other ways (Brophy, 1996; Burden, 2003; Gootman, 2001; Rutherford, Quinn, & Mathur, 1996; Tamaki, 1994; Wilde, 2002). These students often have trouble accurately perceiving social situations and their misperceptions may provoke anger (Brophy, 1996; Goldstein, 1999). Many anger management researchers suggest first understanding how a student is thinking and feeling (Gootman, 2001; Kauffman, Mostert, Trent, & Hallahan, 1998) and then addressing the causes of a student's anger, if possible (Blum, 2001). Since the causes of anger cannot always be prevented, it is important that students learn methods to manage their anger effectively. The goal of any anger management program is to teach students to be able to identify when they are angry,

develop management strategies for dealing with their anger, and express their feelings more appropriately (Gootman, 2001; Phillips-Hershey & Kanagy, 1996). This can be accomplished by integrating anger management instruction into the regular curriculum, choosing a packaged program of instruction, or using a multifaceted approach that includes an anger management curriculum as part of a multi-faceted intervention for students (Guthrie, 2002). A number of instructional programs contain a combination of cognitive and behavioral approaches to teach students a sequence of steps toward monitoring their thinking about their perceptions of situations and feelings of anger and controlling their angry behaviors-- using problem solving skills and appropriate social skills (Brophy, 1996; Kellner, Bry, & Colletti, 2002; Kerr & Nelson, 1998; O'Donnell & White, 2001; Robinson, Smith, & Miller, 2002; Rutherford, Quinn, & Mathur, 1996; Tamaki, 1994).

Goldstein's PREPARE curriculum is perhaps the best-known packaged anger management program (1999). The first part of PREPARE emphasizes teaching skills and behaviors that are more appropriate than angry or aggressive responses. First, a teacher models the correct use of target skills that the students need to learn or improve, such as dealing with an accusation. Second, students practice the steps that comprise the skill they saw modeled through role-play situations. Next, the teacher or leader provides feedback to the students about their use of the skills in the role-play, which provides both guidance and reinforcement for using the skill. Finally, students are given homework to practice the skill to help them transfer the newly acquired skills to natural settings.

The PREPARE curriculum also outlines a number of steps that students can use to understand how they perceive situations that make them angry and how to remind themselves to think through alternate ways to perceive that situation and control their anger. Steps to

understanding and controlling anger include: (a) learning how to think through what triggered a conflict, (b) how the student responded, and (c) the consequences of that response. Next, students learn to understand what triggers them to become angry and how to respond to those triggers through relaxing, thinking about more positive things, and reminding themselves to control their anger. They next learn to evaluate how they respond to situations that make them angry when they use these techniques and think ahead to evaluate consequences to getting angry or controlling their anger using alternative behaviors. The method in which these steps are taught is similar to that used for teaching more prosocial behaviors described above; steps are modeled, students role-play them, they receive feedback, and practice the new skills for homework.

Rutherford, Quinn, and Mathur (1996) summarize the steps for teaching anger management to students that are common to the PREPARE curriculum and other effective anger management programs (Burden, 2003; Committee for Children, 1992; Kerr & Nelson, 1998; Peterson, 1995; Robinson, Smith, & Miller, 2002; Wilde, 2002):

1. Convince students of their need to change their anger-management style.
2. Make students aware of the personal signals that indicate increased anger arousal.
3. Teach students self-talk techniques.
4. Teach problem solving skills.
5. Teach relaxation skills.

Effective programs combine a variety of teaching techniques including direct instruction, feedback and reinforcement (Rutherford, Quinn, & Mathur, 1996). These techniques can be presented in small groups or as part of a classwide or schoolwide curriculum (Blum, 2001; Cangelosi, 2000; Kellner, Bry, & Colletti, 2002; Phillips-Hershey & Kanagy, 1996; Wilde,

2002). If these techniques are used over time, students can become more effective at monitoring and controlling their anger in provoking situations (Robinson, Smith, & Miller, 2002; Rutherford, Quinn, & Mathur, 1996).

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