

Dealing with Frustration

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Introduction

Frustration is the angry feeling that develops when we can't have what we want. Everyone knows what it's like to be frustrated. Children with speech and language problems are often frustrated.

It's not easy to deal with your child's anger and frustration. But your child needs your guidance about what to do with angry feelings. The best time to talk with your child about how to deal with anger is when you are both feeling friendly. Try the following methods to help your child learn to manage anger and frustration.

Share your ways of dealing with anger

First, your child needs to know that you get angry, too. Explain what you do to keep from showing anger in dangerous or foolish ways. Start by talking about the last time you felt frustrated. Tell what you wanted to have happen, what did (or did NOT) happen, and how you felt. Bring up the issue of your child's anger carefully and matter-of-factly. Ask your child to talk about the last time the child felt angry. What did your child want to have happen? What did happen? How did your child feel? How was the feeling expressed?

Try to help your child identify successful and not-so-successful ways of expressing anger. Be honest about your own anger. It really helps children to know that their parents are not perfect. Also try to help your child recognize the kinds of situations which are likely to cause anger. Point out how you prepare for difficult situations. Talk about the times when your child handled problems without getting angry. What did your child do to "keep cool?"

Help your child learn control words.

A child with speech and language disabilities is often made to feel like a second-class communicator. People may consider your child babyish, stubborn, or stupid for "not getting the idea." Other children can be particularly cruel. They are more likely than adults to deliberately shame or avoid your child.

Your child needs to practice some control words until they are known very well. Some of these are: "Stop!" "Wait!" "My turn!" or "Me, too!" If your child can't form these words, find other ways to express the message. A simple "No" with some gestures may do the trick.

Your child also needs to have some social words ready. In order of importance, these may be: "Thank you." "I like you." "I don't like it." "This is fun."

Provide opportunities for successful play with other children.

Speech and language delayed children need good humor, persistence, AND some play materials which other children enjoy. Show your child and describe in words the meaning of good humor and persistence. Find play materials for your child that don't require a lot of language for successful use. Tell other children that your child is trying very hard to be a friend. Make your house and outdoor play area inviting so children will come into your child's territory. You can be nearby to help resolve problems.

Help your child prepare for possible frustrating interactions.

Adults who interact with your child can create more complicated problems. Few adults would openly admit to negative feelings about a child with a disability. But, many adults are short-tempered with such children. Some adults tend to talk down to a child with any kind of delay. Finally, some adults are cruel but will say, "I didn't mean it" or "I was just kidding" if you challenge their behavior.

Be sure to share and talk about good times, too. It's not necessary to dwell on anger and frustration. (Your child might decide that being angry is the best way to get your attention.)

Help your child learn acceptable ways to deal with frustration:

1. Use words, rather than actions, to express your anger.
2. If one way of doing something doesn't work, think of another. Or, get help with the problem,

rather than hitting the person or object which is making you angry.

3. If you have a problem, it's all right to cry. But it's not all right to give up on trying to reach your goal.
4. If someone won't do what you want, try to persuade that person that it's important to you. If it's not important to them, trade. (Do something in exchange).
5. If you can't solve a problem, leave it for awhile. Do something else. Or, think about it some more. Then, come back to the problem.

All of these techniques may be standard for adults, but children have to learn them by experience. Your language delayed child is not unique. Talk about which ways of dealing with anger work best. Explain the situations where one technique is better than another. Point out how other people deal successfully with their problems. Try to describe what they are doing. Praise your child when the child deals with anger successfully.

Help your child learn what behavior is not allowed.

For your own survival, you have to have some house rules about expressing frustration. There are some ways of expressing anger that are not allowed. People may not hurt other people or animals. People may not destroy other people's property. (Most children break these rules occasionally, or act as if they're trying to.) Your punishments for infractions should be established with your child ahead of time. For hurting people or trying to, brief banishment from people—a time-out—is best. For hurting others' property, a child should be expected to make some repayment. Depending on the age and ability of the child, an apology should be made.

If you are consistent and use the teaching methods suggested here, you can help your child learn to manage frustration. As your child gets older and more experienced, the child will get better at dealing with frustration. There may also be less frustration as your child progresses in speech and language therapy.

Refer to:

- 9.3 Talking About Your Child's Feelings and Behavior
- 9.4 Dealing With Negative Behavior