

# **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES COPING WITH AN ANGRY STUDENT**

**NICHOLAS MILLER, EFES COUNSELOR  
LPC., ED.S., NCC., NCSC.**

# COPING WITH AN ANGRY STUDENT

Almost every student becomes angry at some point in school. After all, anger is a normal human emotion. It is not a problem if a student becomes angry as long as he expresses his feelings appropriately. It is a problem, however, if he expresses his anger in a way that is hurtful to peers or disruptive to your class. A student who displays angry outbursts can throw a classroom into turmoil. He can also trigger strong feelings in you. Your challenge in working with a student whose emotional temperature often reaches the boiling point is to control your own feelings as well as those of the student.

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## What you can do

I. Model calm behavior. The most effective way to foster a calm attitude with your students is to engage in this behavior yourself. Calm begets calm. In dealing with an angry student, avoid arguing with him or threatening him. This will only fuel his anger and risk triggering an outburst. You can send a strong message without raising your voice. Similarly be aware of your body language; for example, crossing your arms might provoke the student's anger. You may want to recognize his concern and let him know you care about him by saying something like "I can see that what happened really upset you."

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## What you can do

2. Do not take his words personally. In a fit of anger, the student may say things that make your blood boil. Remind yourself that his comments may be unrelated to anything you said or did. Indeed, his anger may have nothing to do with events in school and may be more related to home issues. If you fear you may react in a way to fuel the student's anger, try taking a deep breath and counting to five before responding to him.

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## What you can do

3. Have a private, non-threatening talk with the student. He may expect you to be angry with him for his outburst. Surprise him by reacting supportively. Tell him that he must be hurting to lose control as he did. Your effort to connect with him may encourage him to open up and discuss why he is so angry. If he does, listen to him attentively without interrupting him. Let him know that it is okay for him to get angry but tell him that he has to find a way to express his anger in a way that does not disrupt the class. Offer some suggestions of your own. You may even want to suggest what he can say. Many students act out when angry because they lack the vocabulary to express their feelings.

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## What you can do

4. Problem-solve with the student. Tell him that you think he can control his temper especially if the two of you work together. Ask him what is making him angry. If he has trouble answering this question, suggest some possibilities, including schoolwork, peer problems and home issues, and then ask if you are on target. Consider your interactions with the student and ask him if you might be upsetting him in any way. If you are able to identify a cause for his anger, work with him to develop an action plan to deal with the issues that are provoking his anger. You may even want to role-play with him by presenting various situations that make him angry and have him try out new ways of responding.

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## What you can do

5. Support the academically frustrated student. It is not uncommon for a student to have an outburst in class as a result of his frustration with schoolwork. If this is the case with one of your students, give him support and provide accommodations in class to lessen his frustration and increase his academic confidence.

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## What you can do

6. Intervene early. Keep a close eye on the student and if you observe behavior that suggests an outburst is imminent try to distract him. You might change the activity, have him do an errand, or take him aside and talk with him about a new topic. Within a few minutes, he will likely forget what he was upset about.

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## What you can do

7. Have the student engage in activities that vent his frustration. You might, for example, have him draw a picture, work with clay or play dough, write in a journal, tear up paper or take a walk (supervised, of course). You might give him a ball to keep in his desk to squeeze every time he is feeling stressed or angry. If you see him engaging in an activity to release his anger, acknowledge his effort.

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## What you can do

8. Reach out to the student. Angry students typically distrust teachers and perceive them in an adversarial manner. If you have a student with a chip on his shoulder, make a special effort to connect with him. Eventually he may begin to trust you and perhaps talk with you about what is upsetting him. You might greet him at the door every day in a friendly manner and with a positive comment. When he speaks to you, listen attentively and show respect for what he says. Find a few minutes every so often to talk with him about his interests and hobbies. You might also call him at home after he has had a difficult day to show your concern.

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## What you can do

9. Look for a pattern. Identifying the circumstances surrounding a student's outbursts can help you anticipate when they might occur and what you might do to prevent them. In observing these incidents, consider the following: What happens right before the outbursts? What is the response of others? Do they happen at a certain time of the day or in the presence of certain people? Does the student do something to signal that an outburst is imminent? Answers to these questions may help you figure out what is fueling his flare-ups and what may be reinforcing them, and then you can act accordingly. For example, if a student with a reading disability often gets upset right before he is expected to read aloud, you will want to find a way to relieve his obvious discomfort about reading in public.

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## What you can do

10. Ask the student to write down what happened. After the student has calmed down, ask him to write down what triggered his anger, how he responded, how others reacted to his outburst, how he could have handled the situation differently, and how you and others can help him avoid this problem in the future. Review his responses with him and use them as a jumping-off point for a lesson in self-control.

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## What you can do

11. Provide the student with a cooling-off area. Tell him that when he feels on the verge of having an outburst that he is to signal you he is leaving the room and going to a prearranged spot to calm down. Let him know that this is not a punishment but rather a way of helping him calm down and that he can return when he is feeling more in control. Some possible cooling-off areas: the back of the classroom, the classroom next door (ask the teacher if this is okay), the bathroom or water fountain, the guidance counselor's office or the main office. You might have him bring along a favorite book, a toy, an art project or even some schoolwork. Be careful that he does not abuse this privilege as a way of leaving the classroom whenever he wants.

- Adapted from:

Shore, K. (2020, September 17). *Coping with an Angry Student*. Ken Shore.  
<http://drkennethshore.nprinc.com/for-teachers/>