

How to Talk to Creditors

When you are in a financial bind, speaking to your creditors often can help improve your financial situation. Not all creditors will negotiate repayment plans, but they will be more likely to work with you if you have been a good customer and if you contact them before they contact you.

Before contacting each creditor, make certain you will be able to pay the monthly amount you agree upon. If you fail to do so, most creditors will be less likely to work with you in the future.

Try these strategies to make discussions with creditors more effective.

First, prepare for the discussion. Develop a spending plan and be prepared to explain the following:

- Why you cannot make payments.
- Your current income and prospects for future income.
- Your other existing financial obligations.
- Your financial plan.

Second, consider your options when negotiating with your creditors. They may include:

- Reducing the current payment amount.
- Refinancing the debt at a lower interest rate.
- Deferring a payment.
- Reducing or dropping late payment penalties.
- Paying only interest on the loan until you can resume making regular payments.
- Returning the item purchased on credit (collateral).
- Selling the item and using the proceeds to repay – or partially repay – the debt.

Determine which alternative will work best for each of your

debts. Negotiating with your creditors may be unpleasant, but work hard to negotiate the best option for you. Visit local creditors in person. Contact out-of-town creditors by phone or mail. When mailing, send correspondence via certified mail to ensure delivery. When corresponding by telephone, keep a record of who you spoke to, the date and terms of the agreement.

Finally, after speaking to creditors and negotiating a new payment plan, live up to your end of the agreement by sticking to your payment schedule. Not only will failing to do so make your creditors less likely to work with you in the future, it may also hurt your chances of obtaining credit in the future.

If you fail to pay your bills, your creditors may hire a collection agency or take legal action. Your creditors also might require you to pay all of your debt at once if you miss a payment (acceleration), repossess the item, garnish your wages or foreclose your house or business. These legal actions are very serious

and can damage your chances of obtaining future credit.

If you have a large amount of debt and have no way to make the payments, you may need to consider bankruptcy – the option of last resort.

A bankruptcy

stays on your credit report for 10 years. Bankruptcy makes it difficult to get credit, buy a home, obtain life insurance or sometimes even get a job. But it is a legal procedure that can offer a fresh start to people who can't pay their debts. Hiring an attorney is recommended for bankruptcy filers. For referrals, contact the Louisiana State Bar Association referral numbers accessible online at www.lsba.org or look in the phone book for "Bankruptcy" listed as a specialty branch of the law.

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Don't Let Your Anger Control You

You've had a hard day. You've dealt with other people going through the same thing, and everyone is upset because of various things – the fisherman who can no longer fish, the restaurant owner who had to go out of business, the consumers frustrated because of the lack of seafood available and others. There is frustration all around.

Then you return to your home, your sanctuary from the craziness of the day-to-day stuff, and your children are screaming at each other because they both want the same toy. One child is 7, and the other is 5. One says he had the toy first and the other says it was her turn. Neither will back down.

What's your first instinct? To turn around and leave? To scream back at the children and tell them they need to share? Or to reach out and spank them both for their behavior?

Anger is an emotion everyone feels sometimes. Anger can take many forms, including irritation, disappointment, frustration or fury.

As children grow, they express anger in different ways. Infants may cry, kick and wave their arms. Toddlers throw temper tantrums. Preschoolers can't put their frustrations into words, so they may release anger by hitting a person or animal or damaging an object.

Children may cry or sulk because they are angry. They may avoid or ignore the person they blame for their anger. Children become especially angry when someone takes something from them and when they are teased or asked to do something they don't want to do. As children's abilities to speak and communicate increase, they often express anger verbally as well as physically. Older children may hit, tease, yell at and bully others.

Of course, teens and adults feel anger, too. Research shows high levels of anger and aggression in teens are associated with an increase in substance abuse, delinquency and vocational and school-related problems.

So, how do we control anger before it controls us? Even if anger is a natural emotion, it's important to think about how adults and children express anger. When expressed in negative ways, anger can lead to physical or emotional problems. When anger is used in positive ways, it can help us to express our feelings, influence others and resolve conflicts.

Anger can give us the energy to reach our goals and change for the better. Helping children deal with anger is no simple task. Often, a child's angry outburst can make a parent feel angry, too. A reaction such as children screaming at each other could make the most patient parent angry.

Take a few minutes to think about how you might react to the children screaming and fighting over the

toy. Some parents may feel like yelling at, threatening or hitting the children. But when parents express anger in aggressive or violent ways, they can hurt their children physically and emotionally. Also, through their actions, those parents are showing children it is OK to talk in disrespectful ways, scream at, hit, slap, kick and hurt others as ways of expressing anger.

Most parents don't want to teach this lesson. Other parents may want to walk away from the situation or pretend they are not angry. But avoiding or hiding angry feelings may keep conflicts and problems from being resolved. These negative reactions to anger may leave both parents and children feeling confused or resentful.

Try the following suggestions to think about your anger and how you might deal with it:

Recognize your feelings and why you become angry.

Sometimes parents react without thinking. For example, your first reaction to behavior like the two children in the example might be to slap both children and sit them in chairs for time out. Before moving, or saying anything, stop. Think about what is going on in your mind and body.

Our bodies tell us we are angry by giving us signals. We may feel hot and flushed. We may have a tense stomach, a pounding heart or clenched fists. We may feel like running away and avoiding the situation entirely. You may experience these same feelings at work!

These are signals to calm down.

Once you get used to stopping and thinking about the messages from your body, you may have a clearer idea about what things make you angry. It may not bother you when your child beats loudly on a toy drum or your teen talks on her cell phone for hours. But when your child challenges your authority, you may feel angry.

The "triggers" are different for everyone. What are your "triggers"? Are they when your child says, "I hate you" or demands you to do something or buy something for him or her?

By stopping and thinking, you may also begin to recognize the reasons for your anger.

For example, when the children in the earlier example continue to scream and fight about the toy, the parent may feel a

loss of power or a sense of rejection. Or

the parent may have felt frustrated because he or she didn't get the children to understand each other's needs and to share.



When you stop to think before reacting, you may learn there are many factors that add to your anger.

Work, busy schedules or financial worries may make you feel tense and tired. Frustrations about things that you may feel are beyond your control, such as a technological disaster, may set you on edge more than a typical day.

Learning to understand your anger will help you to use it in positive ways. If you know what makes you feel angry and why, you can find ways to change a situation. Adults who acknowledge and take responsibility for their own angry feelings generally are effective in helping children manage their anger, too.

When you realize that your face is hot and your fists are clenched, pay attention to these signals. Calm down. Take a deep breath, count to 10 or get away from your child. If there's another adult at home, or if your child is a pre-teen or teen, leave your child and go outside for a minute. If you're alone and you have a young child, put your child in a safe place such as a crib or bedroom for a few minutes. Go into the bathroom and close the door. Take some deep breaths or splash water on your face.

When you've calmed down, try to empathize with your child.

Ask yourself, "If I were my child, how would I feel?" You may realize, for example, that your child wants to be independent. Children often feel angry when they are told what to do. Even young children like to have choices and to make their own decisions. Children also may feel insecure because of the attention their brothers or sisters receive. Children's outbursts may be a way to test their parents' love. To show empathy, tell your child you understand his or her feelings.

You might have said to the 7-year old, "You're really feel angry. It's hard for you to share with your sister."

When you understand your feelings and your child's, you may be able to think of some positive responses.

Think about your job at that moment – to teach your child how to deal with anger. Don't hide your feelings. Try to express them in words. For example, say, "I feel angry when you yell at me. I also feel sad that you don't want to share with your sister. Let's think about some ways to solve this problem."

The suggestions listed above for dealing with your anger are similar to those you can use to help your child deal with his or her anger. You already have taken the most important teaching step. You've shown your child how you deal with your feelings. By stopping and finding a way to release your anger, you show your child there are positive ways to calm down.

By understanding your feelings and your child's feelings, you show that feeling anger is natural. You also show empathy. Putting your own feelings into words helps your child to identify and label feelings. It also shows that talking is a good way to deal with anger.

Here are some other ways to help your children learn to deal with their angry feelings:

1. Help your children find positive ways to release angry

feelings. They can use their energy to run around the yard, bang a drum or bounce a basketball. Buy your teen a meditation or guided-image tape to help release tension – or suggest he or she take deep breaths or take a "time out" to calm down.

2. Help your children recognize their feelings by putting them into words. "You are angry. Your face is red, your fists are clenched and your body is tense. When I ask you to share with your little sister, you become so angry. It's hard to share. Sometimes she gets in the way of you doing what you want, doesn't she?"
3. Encourage your child to think of different ways of thinking about or interpreting a behavior or situation. "I don't want to keep you from playing with that toy or interfere with what you're doing. But I do want your sister to have a turn with the toy and to enjoy it as well."
4. Set limits. Anger should be allowed, but aggression should not. What's the difference? Anger is a feeling. Aggression is an action that is meant to harm or destroy something or someone. You may have to physically restrain young children when they are angry so that they don't harm themselves or others. Do so calmly and gently, but firmly.
5. Teach problem-solving. Help your children think of the outcomes of acting aggressively when they're angry. Also, help them think about ways to solve their problems. If your child is angry because you asked him or her to share, get your child to think about what he or she could do instead of yelling or hitting. Ask for some ideas and help your child by giving some suggestions. He or she could say, "I don't want to share now." Or, your child may offer a different toy and say, "I want my ball. You can have my truck."
6. Teach your child to be assertive, not aggressive. By helping children and teens express their feelings and needs in a respectful way, we help them become assertive rather than aggressive. Sometimes children and teens act aggressively because they feel they don't have friends or they feel isolated in their school or community. If this is the situation with your child, help him or her find ways to contribute in your family, at school or to the community. Helping in a meaningful way with family chores, caring for an elderly neighbor or cleaning up a neighborhood park are some ways children can feel important, responsible and a part of their family and community. Feeling connected often helps to decrease children's sense of anger.

Research tells us that children and youth who receive help from their families to manage their anger appear to gain many benefits over those who do not have strong family support. They have more positive moods, better social skills and better psychological

well-being and are better able to manage physical reactions to stress.

When children learn to manage their anger in their families, they show less anger and more positive social skills during conflict situations with their peers.

These same skills can be applied on the job or as you deal with the day-to-day angst of trying to deal with the problems at hand.

Remember:

- Help your children find positive ways to release angry feelings.
- Help them identify their “triggers” and responses to anger.
- Help them put their feelings into words.
- Teach your children problem-solving skills to deal with conflict and anger.
- Set limits. Angry feelings are natural. Violence and aggression are not allowed.
- Practice and model the behavior inside and outside of your home.
- Help your children and yourself to control anger before it controls you.

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