



# Responding to an angry parent or caregiver

**Having difficult conversations** - Discussing a child's developmental needs and possible areas for support.

**Stages of Grief** - Coming to terms with a child's additional needs.

## Understanding the child

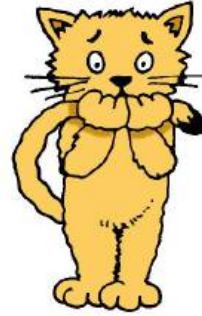
- ❖ Do you have concerns about a child's development?
- ❖ Finding the conversation difficult or finding that the parent/caregiver is angry or aggressive? See Gateways Support Services document: *Being the first to raise issues with a family.*
- ❖ Make sure you have records of planning and practice to show the things the child can do.
- ❖ Make the development guidelines and program goals easily accessible for families so they can start to learn about their child in relation to broader normative development of pre-schoolers.

# Acknowledging our own feelings





The angry parent



The scared teacher



The angry teacher



## Understanding anger

Anger- is a natural state and a response to something in our environment which makes us feel threatened, unwell, rejected, or when we feel a loss.

Anger can also be a thought response and may include personal assumptions, evaluations or interpretations of situations. Anger responses can be considered social emotions because they are individual and culturally mediated and are based on a person's ideals, values and social contexts.

# Anger does not make the pain or confusion of learning your child has a disability disappear

- Anger is an active response within the grieving process.
- The teacher can use this active energy:  
*“I would like to help you make a plan of how we can support your child at kindergarten.”*
- Develop positive intervention strategies with the parent.
- Focus on the child’s strengths.
- The teacher can also offer to help by providing information, support and contacts to services.



## Parents of children with additional needs frequently go through stages or steps of understanding.

- Kubler-Ross' (1969) model includes the emotions of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.
- Anderegg, Vergason & Smith (1992) include steps within the grief process including confronting, adjusting and adapting.

**Table 1. Grief Cycle Components with Parent Responses and Teacher Interventions**

Grief component	Parent responses	Teacher interventions
<b>Confronting</b>		
Shock	Immobility	Repetitions of diagnosis and prognosis
Denial	Refusal to believe	Brainstorm all alternatives
Blame/guilt	Irrational blame of self and others	
<b>Adjusting</b>		
Depression	Hopelessness	Moderate short-term effort
Anger	Hostility toward self and others	Strenuous short-term effort
Bargaining	"Shops" therapies and explanations	Practical problem solving
<b>Adapting</b>		
Life-style change	Social circle changes	Assess needs
Realistic plans	Looks toward future	Gather data on resources
Expectations change	Assesses every family member's role	Match needs with capabilities

(Anderegg, Vergason & Smith, 1992)



## Empathy

Use positive communication strategies which give validity to how the parent is feeling.

*“It sounds like you're feeling frustrated.”*

Pause and wait to see how the parent responds. Sometimes it is good for a person to hear that their feelings have been acknowledged.

Let the conversation be led by the parent for a while until they have expressed their concerns.



Remain calm and create shared goals. Our brains have mirror cells, which enable us to reflect emotion, so your calm and open body posture, facial expression and internal calm, may have a big impact on how the parent manages their emotions.



(Dimberg, Thunberg & Elmehed, 2000)





Supportive workplace

Quiet and private meeting place



Staying healthy helps us cope. Mindfulness based practices, exercise, healthy eating, and being connected to family and friends keep us mentally healthy.



## References & resources

Information regarding developmental red flags to share with families.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/child-development/Pages/child-development-concerns.aspx>

Information for parents/caregivers regarding children's development.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/development-tracker/4-5-years>

Anderegg, M., Vergason, G. and Smith, M. (1992) A visual representation of the grief cycle for use by teachers with families of children with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 13 (2).

Paul, N., and Beernink, K. (1967) The use of empathy in the resolution of grief. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 11 (1) pp. 153-169. Accessed <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/404600/pdf>

Dimberg, U., Thunberg, M., & Elmehed, K. (2000). Unconscious Facial Reactions to Emotional Facial Expressions. *Psychological Science*, 11(1), 86-89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00221>