

Anger and Annoyance

Why Students May Exhibit This Behavior

ACADEMIC Academic frustration and failure over a period of time can reduce a child's sense of self-worth and confidence and can drain energy from patience and motivation. As a result, the child may lose perspective and become angry when faced with a real or perceived academic failure situation.

ENVIRONMENTAL Children whose parents are overreactive, highly critical, or easily agitated may exhibit the same behaviors in school. They learn to deal with frustration in this manner and respond to many situations with anger or annoyance.

INTELLECTUAL Children with limited intellectual capacity may exhibit anger or annoyance because of ongoing frustration due to their limitations.

LINGUISTIC See *Academic*.

MEDICAL A tendency to become angry or easily annoyed may be due to a chemical imbalance. If a child has a medical, neurological, or organic problem, she may exhibit lower levels of tolerance than do other children.

PERCEPTUAL See *Academic*.

PSYCHOLOGICAL Children who are vulnerable as a result of a dysfunctional or abusive home life may use anger or annoyance as a defense against the perceived possibility of criticism, rejection, or devaluation. Also, children who exhibit these symptoms may be suffering from oppositional defiant disorder.

SOCIAL Social fears, poor social skills, or social rejection may reduce a child's sense of self-worth and cause her to become angry or easily annoyed.

What to Do

- Try to determine what, exactly, is angering the child. Often there is a specific event or task, or another child, that triggers the reaction.
- Talk with the child privately. Describe what you are observing, and have her explain why she is so easily angered or annoyed.
- After listening to the child, do whatever you can to make the necessary changes in the classroom so that she can function more easily. For example, seat the child at the front of the classroom so that you can better observe her behaviors and defuse her anger. Or seat the child next to a classmate who you know will not provoke feelings of anger or hostility.
- For your own safety and for liability reasons, do not leave this child alone with other children. Be sure that supervision is constant.
- If the child cannot maintain self-control, remove her from the environment for the safety of the other children.
- If necessary, contact the parents to see if there is anything happening at home that is creating the anger in the child.
- Let the child know that if she feels an outburst is imminent, she does not have to participate in class activities at that moment. Devise an acceptable way for her to deal with such a situation, and create a signal she can give you when she feels anger building.
- Consult with the school counseling or social work staff or the school psychologist about appropriate intervention.
- If the problem is severe and persists, consult the school's child study team.

Cheating

Why Students May Exhibit This Behavior

ACADEMIC Cheating is often a cover-up for academic weakness. Children who fear being seen as academically inadequate by their teacher or—more important—by their peers will often cheat to protect their fragile egos. They believe that because they cannot succeed on their own, their only chance is to cheat.

ENVIRONMENTAL Cheating may be an attempt to avoid severe negative parental reactions associated with expectations the child feels she cannot meet, abuse, comparison or competition with siblings, or other family factors.

INTELLECTUAL Children with limited intellectual abilities may cheat because they know that they cannot do as well as other children without extra “help.” In their minds, the only way to succeed is to cheat.

LINGUISTIC See *Academic*.

MEDICAL Children with medical problems may miss a great deal of school. Excessive absence can create real anxiety and tension when it comes to turning in assignments, keeping up in class, or taking quizzes and tests. Students thus affected may feel that the only way to succeed is to cheat.

PERCEPTUAL See *Academic*.

PSYCHOLOGICAL Cheating can be the result of high anxiety or a pathological aspect of a child’s personality. The latter possibility is more serious and may require professional intervention. It means that the child cannot differentiate between cheating and honesty and truly believes that what she is doing is acceptable even though reality presents a different picture. In other cases, children may cheat impulsively, not considering consequences, and may feel guilt afterward.

SOCIAL Children may cheat to gain status and acceptance with a peer group.

What to Do

- First, obtain complete information about the situation to avoid making false accusations.
- If you believe that a child has cheated, speak to her privately to avoid embarrassing her. If you address the matter in front of anyone—child or adult—you increase the chances of the child's lying to you because she will not want to be publicly humiliated.
- If you are reasonably sure that cheating has taken place, do not use entrapment. In other words, do not try to trick the student into admitting what she has done.
- Be diplomatic, clear, and direct in confronting the child with what you know to be the facts. Speak calmly but be firm to show the child that you are serious.
- After explaining your point of view, ask the child if she wants to rethink what was done. Don't put her on the spot if there is no immediate response. Say, "We will talk about this again some time today when you are ready, but we will definitely talk about it today."
- If the child admits to cheating, say that you appreciate her honesty, and then tell her what the consequences will be. The consequences should be appropriate and predetermined.
- If the child does not admit to cheating, you must act on the overwhelming evidence. Tell the child that the evidence indicates that she has indeed cheated and has violated class rules, then administer the consequences.

Problems with Sharing

Why Students May Exhibit This Behavior

ACADEMIC Some children are academically competitive and will not share homework, materials, or anything else that could help a classmate do well.

ENVIRONMENTAL In some homes, sharing is not practiced. Children get whatever they want when they want it and are not obligated to share. Children who do not learn to share at home may not know how to do so in school.

INTELLECTUAL Children with limited intelligence may simply not grasp the importance of sharing, whether in school or in future life.

PERCEPTUAL Children with perceptual problems may tend to be on the defensive. Their insecurity about the way they see the world may make them reluctant to open up to others, and an unwillingness to share may be the result.

PSYCHOLOGICAL There are numerous psychological reasons why children may not want to share. Some children may be very self-centered with tendencies towards narcissism. Other children may not want to share because of low self-esteem and insecurity. For still others, the notion of sharing anything (e.g., food) can provoke severe anxiety if they have tendencies toward obsessive-compulsiveness.

SOCIAL Some children have difficulty sharing simply because they do not understand social norms and rules.

What to Do

- At the beginning of the school year, conduct a lesson on the importance of sharing and the kinds of sharing behavior expected of all children in the classroom.

- Create assignments that involve sharing. Get the children involved with one another so that sharing becomes a natural part of the day.
- If a child has trouble sharing, speak privately with him about the reasons. Why does he need to keep everything to himself? His answer may be indicative of a deeper problem than you suspected.
- When children work in groups, let this child be a group leader. Allow him to assign group responsibilities and designate materials that need to be shared.
- Seat the child near a classmate who is unselfish and who will model sharing behavior.
- Verbally praise the child when you notice that he is sharing appropriately.
- Do not be critical of the child when you first talk with him. He may actually not know how to share and may need to be taught. Explain that you are only trying to help him do well and avoid future problems.
- Ask the parents whether the child has problems sharing at home. Explain to them that you want to work toward consistency at home and at school.
- Tell the child that if his reluctance to share does not change, he will not be allowed to bring anything from home that he is not willing to share with others.
- Share with the child whenever possible to provide a good model.
- Sometimes, children are reluctant to share because they fear that shared items will not be returned. Assure the child that this is not the case. Then, when you notice him sharing with a classmate, be sure that he gets back whatever he shared.