

Your Child's Anger: Reactive or Proactive?

How does your child behave when he or she is angry? Is there an unnerving calmness that makes you wonder what to expect or is there an intense overreaction that can't be ignored?

The child who responds to anger by stomping around and crying hysterically is a little easier to identify than the child who smirks and calculates a methodical plan to get even with the source of his anger. These two dramatically different responses to anger can be labeled as "reactive" and "proactive."

A REACTIVE child responds to anger by throwing what most people would refer to as a tantrum. Arms may flail, feet may stomp, and tears may flow. Screaming and crying are usually a given. Actions are impulsive and emotions typically run high. A reactive pre-teen can seemingly transform into a toddler in less time than it takes to roll your eyes.

A PROACTIVE child responds in a subtle, less noticeable manner. His mind begins to plot revenge against the person who has dared to "cross" him. He is calm and collected on the outside, but manipulative and deliberate on the inside. A proactive child is quite skilled at hiding his angry feelings behind an impassive expression.

Here are some other identifiers typically associated with these types of children:

Reactive: "red-faced," out-of-control, immature, loud, demanding, and short-tempered

Proactive: calculating, manipulative, "charming," passive-aggressive, and arrogant

So how can parents effectively respond to each of these styles?

Here are some tips:

The REACTIVE Child:	The PROACTIVE Child:
<p>Avoid giving-in to the tantrum or outburst. Your child probably does this because it has worked in the past.</p> <p>Remain calm. Escalating your own behavior will only cause the child to escalate his.</p> <p>Teach the child coping-skills to deal with difficult emotions. Have him practice them when he is calm and use them when he is not.</p> <p>Prompt the child to take deep breaths. This will help the child to calm down.</p> <p>Remind the child that the tantrum will not change the outcome.</p>	<p>Avoid power-struggles. These children love them.</p> <p>Remain calm. These children often act the way they do to get a reaction from you. Don't give it to them.</p> <p>Be firm. Maintain your authority as a parent and follow through with consequences.</p> <p>Identify and confront behaviors that are considered passive-aggressive and/or manipulative.</p> <p>Find ways to teach appropriate values, especially empathy.</p>

Notice that not all children will fit into one of these categories. These are merely opposite ends of the same continuum and most children will fit somewhere in between.