

## Rages

### About rages

Rages are usually a result of unresolved anger. If anger is not expressed effectively and everything is kept inside it is often only a matter of time before we get so frustrated that we lose our temper. This is very much the same for children and young people, though they are sometimes more likely to lose their temper more quickly than adults do.

Rages can be expressed in many ways, and can include screaming, name calling, throwing things, punching the wall, as well as physical, mental and emotional abuse of others. These are not planned or calculated behaviours, but instead occur when anger builds up too much. After the rage the child/young person will often feel bad about what they have done and about losing their temper.

This is different from attention-seeking behaviours, which can sometimes be expressed in much the same ways, but is more deliberate. A rage occurs to vent anger and frustration, and not necessarily to get attention.

Everybody gets angry at times, and though we try not to, most of us have lost our temper at some point and felt bad about it afterwards. At the time when we are in a rage we don't think clearly or rationally, and are not fully in control of our actions. This is the same for children and young people.

### Things to think about

Rages occur when anger is bottled up for too long, and even seemingly unrelated things can trigger a rage. They are a result of frustrations and anger that have not been dealt with. Dealing with the anger calmly is often the best way to avoid and prevent rages from occurring. However, bear in mind that prolonged and extreme anger can be a result of past experiences, such as abuse.

Think about the following which may have led to the child getting angry which may lead to a rage:

- Is the child being bullied?
- Are they struggling at school?
- Are they unable to express themselves verbally? Rages often occur in children or young people who have difficulty in expressing their views or feelings about something in words.
- Are there any issues at home, e.g. are their parents very strict; is there any conflict between their parents?
- Have they recently experienced a loss or bereavement?

## Think about yourself

Because rages are often frightening, as the young person has lost control of their anger and can be destructive or even violent, this can lead to hostile reactions to the young person. On the other hand, fearing a young person's rage can lead us to appease their demands, resulting in them failing to find better ways to express their needs. Being able to understand and separate our own attitudes and reactions to a young person's rage can be very helpful for them to resolve their issues.

## What you can do

- Prevention is the best way of dealing with rages. To avoid rages, make sure you are supportive and help the child/young person express their anger in a calm and constructive way.
- Safety must come first. If there is a danger to the child or others as a result of the rage it may be necessary to remove them from the situation. This should always be done with the child/young person's safety in mind.
- Try to stay calm. If you shout back, you are only likely to make the situation worse, and only add fuel to the fire.
- If the child appears to be seeking attention, consider leaving them for a while or ignore the behaviour, but only if they are physically safe. Giving them what they want will only make the behaviour more likely to be repeated. For example, if you are in a supermarket and the child/young person wants sweets and starts screaming as a result, calmly let them know that this behaviour is not acceptable and do not give in and buy them the sweets.
- Sometimes using humour can help distract the young person and calm the temper, but be careful not to embarrass him/her or make them feel that you are not taking them seriously.
- Make sure that there are clear consequences to unwanted behaviours, but use punishments cautiously and fairly.
- Praise good behaviour, in a situation where the child/young person stayed calm and constructive in a stressful situation.
- When the child/young person is calm, try to help him/her come up with alternative ways of expressing their anger when they feel that they are about to lose their temper, such as physical exercise.
- Prevention is the best cure in this case, and in order to avoid rage it is most important to work on the underlying anger and issues causing this.
- Consider using a reward system such as a good behaviour chart.

### **When to contact a mental health specialist**

- When the anger occurs together with other worrying behaviours or psychological problems, e.g. anxiety, self-harming behaviours, etc.
- If your attempts to help have uncovered issues that you are inexperienced in dealing with, e.g. sexual abuse.

### **How to contact a mental health specialist**

You should get in touch with your local health centre or hospital to obtain a contact number for the appropriate children and young people's mental health specialists.

Remember - you can contact your local mental health specialists for a number of reasons, for example:

- For advice on how to make a referral about a named child.
- For advice about whether or not to make a referral (it is normal practice to seek this advice without naming the child in the first instance).
- For advice about what to do (once again there should be no necessity to name the child).

By not naming the child you are protecting their right to confidentiality. This method of seeking advice also has the advantage that you do not need to get anyone's consent in advance of your contact phone call.