

# Why Angry Young People Make Great Carers

Anger and kindness are inextricably linked

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I've had things thrown at me. I've opened the front door to find excrement on my doorstep. I've been sworn at countless times and been on the receiving end of young people's anger in a whole variety of less obvious ways. Other professionals and parents will have had similar and sometimes worse experiences. Yet it's not young people's anger that bothers me. Of course I've been scared; of course I've minded the unfairness and of course I've wished that I could wave a magic wand and be more popular. But as I've said to young people coming into my therapy room breathing fire, recounting their stories of injury and insult, furious with the world for being so unfair, *the reason we get angry is because we care.*

I'm not for one moment suggesting that angry young people should be allowed to ride roughshod over other people. I was once interviewed for a job in a prison and was asked a question I'd never thought about before, "Do you actually believe in prisons?" I spluttered before saying that, yes, I do believe in prisons. I believe that unfortunately there has to be a bottom line, a way of protecting people from each other and from themselves. I might have views about what we might do with people once they're in prison but I believe that rules are rules and that good rules have to be enforced.

So what young people do with their anger sometimes gets them into trouble and sometimes their behaviour has to be punished. But anger as an emotion doesn't bother me. I like angry young people. I like young people who care enough to be angry because in my experience these young people usually also have the capacity to be immensely kind.

Over the years, I've recruited and trained dozens of teams of young people to work with younger children. Getting them to apply for the job in the first place is easy. Most applicants are confident, sensitive all-rounders, happy to add yet another positive achievement to their burgeoning CVs. But there's always one applicant who's different. He or she will be the young person I'm advised never to accept onto my team under any circumstances. "He's proved that he's the very last person we should be trusting with responsibility for other people!" warn my colleagues. Or, "She's an appalling role-model!" advises the lobby group in the staffroom. "She can't even look after herself, never mind other people!"

And yet with structured support and training, these mistrusted young people almost always turn out to be stars, amazing the doubters in the staffroom by putting aside their own turmoil to support younger children with compassion and with kindness. Indeed, their kindness is partly *informed* by their turmoil. They know what it's like to feel picked on, to feel alone, to feel ashamed, to feel hopeless. Somewhere inside them they've resolved not to let it happen to other people. And because they've been so angry themselves, filled with hatred and fury at the injustices inflicted on them, they're desperate to make amends, to show the world that they're not such bad people really.

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Increasingly I think that being kind to other people is the only thing that really matters. Put on this earth for no obvious reason, we can either be cruel to each other or we can be kind. We get angry because we care, and given the right kind of support, can channel our anger into kindness.