

“Anger is a normal and healthy emotion,

but kids’ inability to manage their emotions can lead to heartbreaking long-term outcomes. If we can help our children learn how to handle their anger, then we can save our kids, our schools and our communities from the painful impact of aggression.”

Dr. John Irvine, PhD

About the Author

Dr. John Irvine, PhD, is one of Australia’s most renowned child psychologists. As a pioneer in his field, he has been read, viewed or heard throughout the nation. At the age of 18, he started teaching in a one-teacher school and continued teaching for many years before becoming a child psychologist. He is the founding director and currently a consultant at the R.E.A.D. Clinic, one of the largest psychology clinics in New South Wales. Dr. John has written several books including *Helping Young Worriers Beat The WorryBug*, *Thriving at School* and *A Handbook for Happy Families*, which now has four accompanying DVDs. Dr. John is a much sought after speaker who has been featured in various newspapers and on current affairs and TV news segments. For more information, visit Drjohnshappyfamilies.com.au.

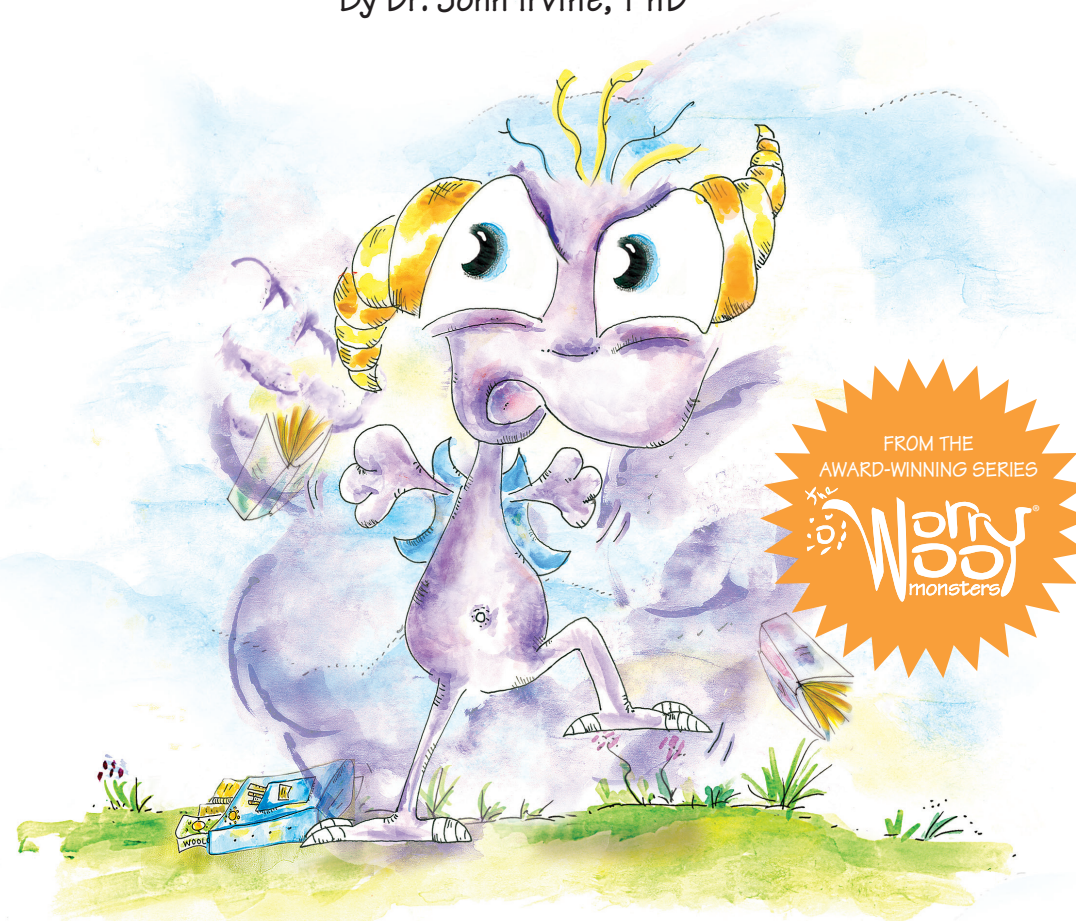
About the Illustrator

Andi Green is the creator of The WorryWoo Monsters series, an award-winning line of children’s books and plush dolls dedicated to emotions. Created to help build confidence, each WorryWoo story concludes with an uplifting message that provides the perfect opportunity for parents, teachers and caregivers to openly discuss topics that don’t have easy answers. Her work has received several accolades, including a featured spot on NBC’s “TODAY,” a Mom’s Best Award and a Creative Child Book of the Year Award. The WorryWoos can be found worldwide in boutique, gift and educational outlets. For more information, visit WorryWoos.com.

HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN MANAGE FRUSTRATION & ANGER

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND
EDUCATORS TO HELP THEIR LITTLE TWITCHES!

By Dr. John Irvine, PhD



Illustrated by Andi Green

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MONSTERS IN MY HEAD

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Recently, I met with a group of moms whose kids all seemed to have some form of anger management issue. We had just read Andi Green's book *The Very Frustrated Monster* and were having a bit of a chuckle. You'd have to laugh—or you'd cry—about all the dilemmas Twitch, the main character, faced that upset him so much! Every parent was in agreement, nodding and saying how much Twitch was like her own child who had one or all of the following characteristics:

- Has difficulty staying calm
- Is easily angered
- Has difficulty getting over anger
- Says that no-one understands him
- Claims that no-one listens to her
- Feels he can't control his emotions



What they discussed was not that unusual; however, after that exchange, things became quite interesting! It came out that, while all the kids resembled Twitch in some ways, they still demonstrated an array of differences. Within that one twitchy character, the moms identified many variations.

One very chatty parent said her Twitch never stopped, never listened, got over-excited, and exploded in anger.

Another chimed in that her child wasn't hyperactive but would have a meltdown if he didn't get his way.

One fashionably dressed lady said her child was nothing like the above two but was so competitive that any failure would cause a volcanic eruption.

One exasperated mom wondered why her Twitch was an absolute "angel" outdoors and at school, but an angry, defiant "devil" at home.

One said that her son was so self-centered that everything had to be his way or the highway; she said his meltdowns were horrific!

Finally, a more quiet and retiring mom said her daughter was down on herself, super self-critical, and always angry, because she felt that she "wasn't good enough."

As the stories were shared, the parents came to realize that, although their Twitches might demonstrate some of the same frustrations and anger, we had actually identified at least six different profiles! This book evolved as I tried to help families cope with their little Twitches. Although we can't do much about the frustration that triggers each reaction, we can learn to manage the angry feelings behind each aggressive response and in turn defuse what could become an unsettling situation.



SO, WHICH TWITCH IS MY TWITCH?

I'd like you to rate your child, whom I'll call "Twitch," on the symptoms listed below for each of the six types. On the line provided next to a descriptive phrase, place a 0—if the descriptor is never true, 1—if sometimes true, and a 2—always true.

Once you have completed this task, you may notice that the answers are scattered with 1s and 2s. That's OK, but you may also find that maybe one or more of the sections have all 2s! If that's the case, then that defines your biggest area(s) of challenge.

Now, I know we could give formal psychological labels to each type, but labels aren't the point of this book. However, if you are concerned about your child's profile and want a formal diagnosis, then visit a well-respected local clinical child psychologist.

Now, let's look at the separate profiles:



1. HYPER REACTIVE TWITCH (HT) _____

- Demands that his needs be met NOW
- Is extremely active and reactive, noisy and always on the go
- Never listens to reason
- Is emotionally volatile and overreacts BIG TIME



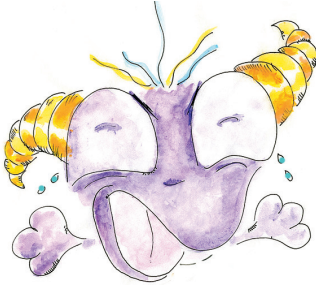
2. IRRITABLE TWITCH (IT) _____

- Is very critical of her own mistakes
- Says she is not good at anything
- Is chronically irritable, cries easily, and scowls constantly
- Throws long and intense temper tantrums



3. VOLCANIC TWITCH (VT) _____

- Is very competitive
- Explodes if emotionally “overloaded”
- Becomes devastated if defeated in a game or found to have made a mistake
- Sets unreasonably high performance goals



4. ENTITLED TWITCH (ET) _____

- Must have things his way
- Is unreasonably demanding of others
- Has a meltdown if he’s told no
- Constantly battles against boundaries



5. SELF-FOCUSED/BLINKERED TWITCH (ST) _____

- Is distressed by any changes
- Sees things as either black or white; will not compromise
- Can only see things from her viewpoint, like a blinkered horse that can only see in one direction
- Always blames someone else when something goes wrong



6. OPPOSITIONAL TWITCH (OT) _____

- Is selectively defiant (e.g., great kid at school or with grandparents, but angry and defiant at home in general or specifically when interacting with one particular parent)
- As a general pattern, responds to domestic requests with opposition and anger
- Doesn’t care about punishment or consequences
- Argues with a specific adult or adults (typically one or both parents)

Top 10 Domestic Environment Triggers for Twitch's Behavior

1. The parents are at war (whether they're separated or living together).
2. Friends or other family members are modelling angry and aggressive interactions.
3. Parents have a chaotic parenting style; their management style is unpredictable and inconsistent.
4. There is a favored sibling or a sibling with a disability and/or chronic illness.
5. The children have a poor eating regimen, including low water intake or eating/drinking lots of sugars, starches, junk food, processed food, etc.
6. The kids spend excessive amounts of time (more than 2 hours per day) on screen time—iPhones, Video Games, iPads, iPods, TV, etc.
7. The family lifestyle is too hectic; parents are too busy to connect.
8. The parent(s) is too self-absorbed or preoccupied with his or her own needs to notice the overload warning signs in the child.
9. The parents manage the children's behavior by yelling or by physical punishment.
10. There are some bullying, cyber bullying, and/or peer problems at school that impact the child's behavior at home.



3. Reading the Signals Activity

Ages 3–6 years

Recommend for: HT, IT, VT, ET, ST, OT



Directions:

Steps 1

Trace around a coin on a sheet of paper to create six circles or use the prepared ones below. Draw a different feeling on each face: happy, sad, surprised, afraid, disgusted, and angry.

Step 2

Ask your Twitch to make up his own facial expressions to show each of those feelings. Maybe you have to guess which feeling he is trying to show. Alternatively, you can make your own facial expressions for all six, and your child has to guess which ones you're showing.

Step 3

Chat about what sort of things make him feel like the emotion you're referring to (i.e., what makes him feel happy, angry, sad, afraid, etc.).



happy



sad



surprised



afraid



disgusted



angry

Step 4

Return to the book *The Very Frustrated Monster* and see if your child can identify those things that made Twitch feel angry, frustrated, or sad.

Step 5

Next, shift the focus away from those negative emotions and see if he can identify positive feelings (e.g., happy, calm, brave, surprised, friendly).

Step 6

Then, try to pinpoint things in your child's life that bring on those good feelings.

Step 7

Combining the above steps, see which of those things he would like to do to help him feel better when he's feeling hurt, frustrated, angry, or afraid. Feel free to add a few ideas, such as doing his breathing exercise (mentioned below), walking away from a situation, or telling his mom or the caregiver how he's feeling. Other options to help him feel better could include having some safe outlet to get rid of the frustration, such as beating up a pillow, jumping on a trampoline, bouncing a ball, playing with the dog, going on a swing, or just playing with water.

Step 8

By way of follow-up, in the evening, see if your child can recall times when he started to feel bad or the Put-Down Bug attacked. Did he manage to beat it; how did he do it?

AN ALTERNATIVE BUT LESS THREATENING APPROACH FOR "SELF-FOCUSED" Twitch (ST)

Some kids often find it easier to learn about emotional management via on-screen activities, rather than face-to-face confrontations with people. Non-human or machine characters, such as Thomas the Tank Engine or The WorryWoos Monsters, offer less threatening alternatives for emotional learning for ST children. One little boy I was dealing with was obsessed with Thomas, so his mom knitted and stuffed a Thomas for him. Young Paul would carry it around with him to feel safe and secure; when he got upset, he would just hug Thomas to help himself calm down.

A Cambridge University program has capitalized very effectively on this style using Transporters (www.TheTransporters.com). Faces on the machines, rather than on people, reflect the emotions, and the ST-style child often seems to learn more about feelings this way. Certainly, the Cambridge program is claiming big gains through this approach.

For more information on Dr. John Irvine and
Helping Young Children Manage Frustration and Anger visit WorryWoos.com