



TECHNIQUES TO ADDRESS &amp; MANAGE YOUR ANGER

# Anger Management

## A Practical Guide

IN THIS ISSUE

## incorporate psychology

The purpose of this paper is to share some background and some common techniques that people find helpful when managing their anger.

Have you noticed that you have a shorter fuse lately and that you have been getting into some fights and confrontations? Have you always known that you have had a bit of a short fuse?

Feeling angry is actually quite normal and part of being a human being. It is a healthy emotion. When anger becomes chronic, entrenched or even quite explosive, or as some would say, our anger spirals out of control, it can have very real and serious consequences for our relationships, our mental health, our state of being and in fact our health

With insight and understanding about the actual reasons for your anger, more understanding about what anger actually is and some anger management tools and techniques,

you can be better at controlling your anger keep your temper from taking control of your life.

### So what is anger?

Anger is an emotion. It is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It is actually quite healthy to feel angry about something, like being wronged or treated badly. It may sound like a simple thing to say, but the feeling of anger isn't the problem, it is how we deal with it or what we do with it that is the problem. Anger becomes a real problem when it leads to us hurting ourselves, hurting others or putting ourselves in a risky situation.

Some people who have a temper and say that they feel as though they can't control it say that it is a part of them that almost has a mind of its own. This is not actually true, we have much more control over anger than we might assume. In fact this is true for all of the emotions that we experience. With anger in particular, if we can learn to express our



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emotions and how we are feeling without the consequences that we don't want; (hurting others or ourselves), you will not only feel much better, but there is a very high chance that you will end up getting what you need and want.

Getting on top of anger and emotions takes quite a bit of work and some practice. Once you start getting on top of it though, and the more practice you do, the easier it gets and the results will be achieved very quickly. It is also really worthwhile. Controlling your anger, rather than it controlling you, and express it appropriately, can help you build much better relationships, achieve your goals, and lead a healthier, more satisfying life.

## Q&A about Anger

**Question - I shouldn't "hold in" my anger. Is it healthier to vent and let it out?**

**Answer -** Anger is not something you have to "let out" in an aggressive way in order to avoid blowing up. In fact, outbursts and tirades only fuel the fire and reinforce your anger problem. While it's true that suppressing and ignoring anger is unhealthy, venting is no better.

**Question – I have been using anger, and being aggressive to get what I need done, or to get what I want. What happens if I don't get the respect and get things done the way I need them done?**

**Answer -** True power doesn't come from bullying others. People may be afraid of you, but they won't respect you if you can't control yourself or handle opposing viewpoints. Others will be more willing to listen to you and accommodate your needs if



you communicate in a respectful way.

**Question: Sometimes I feel as though I can't help myself. Is it true that anger isn't something you can control?**

**Answer -** You can't always control the situation you're in or how it makes you feel, but you can control how you express your anger. And you can express your anger without being verbally or physically abusive. Even if someone is pushing your buttons, you always have a choice about how to respond.

**Question – Isn't anger management about learning to suppress your anger?**

**Answer -** Anger is normal, and it will come out regardless of how hard you try to suppress it. Anger management is all about becoming aware of your underlying feelings and needs and developing healthier ways to manage upset. Never getting angry is not a good goal. Rather than trying to suppress your anger, the goal is to express it in constructive ways.

## Why should I do anything about my anger?

You might think that venting your anger is healthy, that it is justified and that perhaps others are just too sensitive. You might even think that showing just how angry you are will give you some respect, or that way people will really understand what things are like for you. The reality is, unchecked expression of anger is far more likely to damage your relationships than help your situation. Anger can also really affect your judgment and get in the way of success. It can really influence how people perceive you and the opinion they have of you.

### Unchecked expression of anger can hurt your career and employment prospects.

Constructive criticism, creative differences, and heated debate can be healthy. But lashing out only alienates your colleagues, supervisors, or clients and erodes their respect. What's more, a bad reputation can follow you wherever you go, making it harder and harder to get ahead.

### Out-of-control anger hurts your relationships with others.

It causes lasting scars in the people you love most and gets in the way of your friendships and work relationships. Chronic, intense anger makes it hard for others to trust you, speak honestly, or feel comfortable—they never know what is going to set you off or what you will do. Explosive anger is especially damaging to children.

### Out-of-control anger hurts your physical health.

Constantly operating at high levels of

stress and tension is bad for your health. Chronic anger makes you more susceptible to heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol levels, a weakened immune system, insomnia, and high blood pressure.

### Out-of-control anger hurts your mental health.

Chronic anger consumes huge amounts of mental energy and clouds your thinking, making it harder to concentrate, see the bigger picture, and enjoy life. It can also lead to stress, depression, and other mental health problems.

## Tip 1: Find out what is REALLY behind your anger

If you're struggling with out-of-control anger, you may be wondering why your fuse is so short. Anger problems often stem from what you've learned as a child. If you watched others in your family scream, hit each other, or throw things, you might think this is how anger is supposed to be expressed. Traumatic events and high levels of stress can make you more susceptible to anger as well.

Anger is often a cover-up for other feelings

In order to get your needs met and express your anger in appropriate ways, you need to be in touch with what you are really feeling. Are you truly angry? Or is your anger masking other feelings such as embarrassment, insecurity, hurt, shame, or vulnerability?

If your knee-jerk response in many situations is anger, it is very likely that your temper is covering up your true feelings and needs. This is especially likely if you grew up in a family where expressing feelings was strongly discouraged. As an adult, you may have a hard time acknowledging feelings other than anger.

### Clues that there's something more to your anger

- You have a hard time compromising. Is it hard for you to understand other people's points of view, and even harder to concede a point? If you grew up in a family where anger was out of control, you may remember how the angry person got his or her way by being the loudest and most demanding. Compromising might bring up scary feelings of failure and vulnerability.
- You have trouble expressing emotions other than anger. Do you pride yourself on being tough and in control, never letting your guard down? Do you feel that emotions like fear, guilt, or shame don't apply to you? Everyone has those emotions, and if you think you don't, you may be using anger as a cover for them.
- You view different opinions and viewpoints as a personal challenge to you. Do you believe that your way is always right and get angry when others disagree? If you have a strong need to be in control or a fragile ego, you may interpret other perspectives as a challenge to your authority, rather than simply a different way of looking at things.
- If you are uncomfortable with many emotions, disconnected, or stuck on an angry one-note response to everything, it might do you some good to get back in touch with your feelings. Emotional awareness is the key to self-understanding and success in life. Without the ability to recognize, manage, and deal with the full range of human emotions, you'll inevitably spin into confusion, isolation, and self-doubt.

### Tip 2: Be aware of your anger warning signs and triggers

You might actually feel as though you explode into anger without warning. This is not really the case. Actually there are plenty of warning signs in your body that you can

feel. Keep in mind, anger is a normal physical response. It allows us to access the "fight or flight" system of the body that has kept our species evolving for millions of years. In this 'fight or flight' mode, the angrier you get, the more your body goes into overdrive. Becoming aware of your own personal signs that your temper is starting to boil allows you to take steps to manage your anger before it gets out of control. An important step is to read what is going on for you.

#### Pay attention to the way anger feels in your body

- Tensing your shoulders
- Feeling clammy or flushed
- Knots in your stomach
- Clenching your hands or jaw
- Breathing faster
- Headaches
- Pacing or needing to walk around
- "Seeing red"
- Having trouble concentrating
- Pounding heart

#### Identify the negative thought patterns that trigger your temper

You may think that external things - the insensitive actions of other people, for example, or frustrating situations - are what cause your anger. In reality anger problems have less to do with what happens TO you than how YOU interpret and think about what happened.

Something happens and then how we think about that is actually what causes anger problems. The good news is though, we have control over how we think about things. Some typical maladaptive thinking patterns that trigger and fuel anger include:

- **Blaming.** When anything bad happens or something goes wrong, it's always someone else's fault. You blame others for the things that happen to you rather than taking responsibility for your own life.
- **Overgeneralizing.** This involves taking a specific situation and applying it to every related one. For example, "You ALWAYS interrupt me. You NEVER consider my needs". "EVERYONE disrespects me". "I NEVER get the credit I deserve."
- **Obsessing on "shoulds" and "musts."** This is when we are way too rigid about

our world. Having a rigid view of the way things should or must be and getting angry when reality doesn't line up with this vision.

- **Jumping to conclusions (mind-reading).** This is where we assume we "know" what someone else is thinking or feeling - that he or she intentionally upset you, ignored your wishes, or disrespected you.
- **'On the lookout'.** This is where we go looking for something to get us upset or to pick a fight about, usually while overlooking or dismissing anything positive. Letting these small irritations build and build until you reach the "final straw" and explode, often over something relatively minor.

#### Avoid people, places, and situations that bring out your worst

We are all going to face stressful events and challenges in life. These stressful events or challenges don't excuse anger, but understanding how these events affect you can help you take control of your environment and avoid unnecessary aggravation.

Take a look at your day to day routine and try to understand how things may trigger your frustration and anger. Look at activities, times of day, people, places, or situations. Maybe you get into a fight every time you go out for drinks with a certain group of friends. Or maybe the traffic on your daily commute drives you crazy. Then think about ways to avoid these triggers or view the situation differently so it doesn't make your blood boil.

### Tip 3: Learn ways to cool down

Once you know how to recognize the warning signs that your temper is rising and anticipate your triggers, you can act quickly to deal with your anger before it spins out of control. There are many techniques that can

help you cool down and keep your anger in check.

Quick tips for cooling down

**Focus on the physical sensations of anger.**

While it may seem counterintuitive, tuning into the way your body feels when you're angry often lessens the emotional intensity of your anger.

**Take some deep breaths.** Deep, slow breathing helps counteract rising tension. The key is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible into your lungs.

**Exercise.** A brisk walk around the block is a great idea. It releases pent-up energy so you can approach the situation with a cooler head.

**Use your senses.** Take advantage of the relaxing power of your sense of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste.

You might try listening to music or picturing yourself in a favorite place.

**Stretch or massage areas of tension.** Roll your shoulders if you are tensing them, for example, or gently massage your neck and scalp.

**Slowly count to ten.** Focus on the counting to let your rational mind catch up with your feelings. If you still feel out of control by the time you reach ten, start counting again.

Give yourself a reality check

When you start getting upset about something, take a moment to think about the situation. Ask yourself:

- How important is it in the grand scheme of things?
- Is it really worth getting angry about it?
- Is it worth ruining the rest of my day?
- Is my response appropriate to the situation?
- Is there anything I can do about it?
- Is taking action worth my time?

**Tip 4: Find healthier ways to express your anger**

If you've decided that the situation is worth getting angry about and there's something you can do to make it better, the key is to express your feelings in a healthy way. When communicated respectfully and channeled effectively, anger can be a tremendous source of energy and inspiration for change.

**Pinpoint what you're really angry about.** Have you ever gotten into an argument over something silly? Big fights often happen over something small, like a dish left out or being ten minutes late. But there's usually a bigger issue behind it. If you find your irritation and anger rapidly rising, ask yourself "What am I really angry about?" Identifying the real source of frustration will help you communicate your anger better, take constructive action, and work towards a resolution.

**Take five if things get too heated.** If your anger seems to be spiraling out of control, remove yourself from the situation for a few minutes or for as long as it takes you to cool down. A brisk walk, a trip to the gym, or a few minutes listening to some music should allow you to calm down, release pent up emotion, and then approach the situation with a cooler head.

**Always fight fair.** It's okay to be upset at someone, but if you don't fight fair, the relationship will quickly break down. Fighting fair allows you to express your own needs while still respecting others.

**Make the relationship your priority.** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.

**Focus on the present.** Once you are in the heat of arguing, it's easy to start throwing past grievances into the mix. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the present to solve the problem.

**Choose your battles.** Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy. If you pick your battles rather than fighting over every little thing, others will take you more seriously when you are upset.

**Be willing to forgive.** Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to

forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.

**Know when to let something go.** If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

Some Dynamics of Anger

- We become angrier when we are stressed and body resources are down.
- We are rarely ever angry for the reasons we think.
- We are often angry when we didn't get what we needed as a child.
- We often become angry when we see a trait in others we can't stand in ourselves.
- Underneath many current angers are old disappointments, traumas, and triggings.
- Sometimes we get angry because we were hurt as a child.
- We get angry when a current event brings up an old unresolved situation from the past.
- We often feel strong emotion when a situation has a similar content, words or energy that we have felt before.

When to seek help for anger management

If you are hurting yourself or hurting others, or even getting into trouble with the law, then you need to get professional help. There are many counsellors, psychologists and therapists, or even classes and programs for people with anger management problems. Talking to your GP can be the first step. Putting your hand up for help is the brave, courageous and strong thing to do, it not a sign of weakness. When you reach out for help you may find that you are not the only one facing this sort of issue.

Consider professional help if:

- You feel constantly frustrated and angry no matter what you try.
- Your temper causes problems at work

- Your temper or your anger is causing problems in your relationships.
- You avoid events and people because you feel like you can't control your temper.
- You have gotten in trouble with the law due to your anger.
- Your anger has ever led to physical violence.

### Therapy for anger problems

Therapy can be an effective way to explore the reasons behind your anger. If you don't know why you are getting angry, it's very hard to control your anger. Therapy provides an environment to learn more about your why you feel such anger and understand the triggers for you getting angry. Therapy can also be the place where you try out techniques to manage and express your anger.

### Group work

Anger management groups give you some exposure to other people grappling with the same or similar issues. You may also learn tips and techniques for managing your anger and hear other people's stories.

### If your loved one has an anger management problem

If someone you are close to has an anger problem, you probably feel like you're walking on eggshells all the time. Remember that you are not to blame for someone else's anger. There is never an excuse for physically or verbally abusive behaviour. You have a right to be treated with respect and to live without fear of an angry outburst or a violent rage.

### Some practical techniques to help you deal with someone else's anger problem

Here are some techniques that can help you respond. You don't control them or their anger.

- Set clear boundaries about what you will and will not tolerate.
- Wait for a time when you are both calm to talk to your loved one about the anger problem. Don't bring it up when either one of you is already angry.
- Remove yourself from the situation if your loved one does not calm down.
- Consider counselling or therapy for yourself if you are having a hard time standing up for yourself.
- Put your safety first. Trust your instincts. If you feel unsafe or threatened in any way, get away from your loved one and go somewhere safe.

### About the Author

The author is a registered Psychologist and has been practicing psychology for over two decades. Understanding and managing emotions is critical to living a fulfilled life. Neglecting to do so will have an impact on your work, career, relationships and your family life.

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