

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Managing Anger

“Anybody can become angry - that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.” - Aristotle

What is Anger?

Anger is a natural emotion. It occurs as a defensive response to a perceived attack or threat to our well-being. In addition to psychological changes, like any emotion, anger is accompanied by physiological changes. When you get angry your adrenaline flows, your heart rate increases, and your blood pressure escalates.

Sometimes just our perception of a situation causes anger to ignite and sometimes the threat may be real. Whatever the case, anger isn't the problem. The problem with anger is that many of us don't learn to manage anger effectively. In fact, one out of five Americans has an anger management problem. Domestic abuse, road rage, workplace violence, divorce, and addictions are a few of the external examples of the results of poor anger management. Moreover, anger can lead to physical problems when not properly managed. Long-term anger has been linked to chronic headaches, sleep disorders, digestive problems, high-blood pressure, and even heart attacks. When you learn how to manage anger, it can move you towards positive change instead of disaster.

The Sequence of Anger

Anger is usually “triggered” by an occurrence, like stubbing your toe on an inanimate object or by something that someone says.

Next, you think something like “what did I do to deserve that”. However, at this point, emotion takes over your mind and the “pain” of the situation leads you to believe the answer to your question is “Nothing. I didn't deserve that at all!”

Feelings of hurt and betrayal further try to override logic and you're ready to act on your anger by either suppressing it or expressing it.

Suppressing your anger may lead you to believe you have it under control. However, suppressing anger doesn't solve your problem and is a dangerous type of anger management. Suppressed anger stays with you over time and can lead to mental health problems like depression, and physical problems like “stress” headaches and high blood pressure. Additionally, continually suppressing your anger can curtail your ability to act in the face of a real threat to your well-being.

Anger needs to be expressed. Yet, aggressive displays of anger can result in violent eruptions that further hurt you socially, mentally, and physically.

The goal of anger management is to help you find healthy ways to express your anger and resolve the problems that ignite it. The first step in anger management is learning to define the problem and face it head on!

Anger Management Tips

1. **Breathe Deep.** Anger often begins when we feel weaker than we really are. Molehills loom like mountains. Taking a few deep breaths calms you, makes you feel stronger both mentally and physically, and can cut those mountains down to size!
2. **Count to ten....slowly.** Sounds simple, but counting to ten is an anger management tip that has worked for centuries! The Roman poet Horace (65 – 8 BCE) said, “When angry, count ten before you speak; if very angry, one hundred.” Counting to ten (or one hundred) helps you to step back from the situation, buys time for you to examine the problem and decide on an effective, rational way to express your anger.
3. **Give yourself a break.** It’s easier to think when you’re calm than when you’re agitated. Leave the room, take a walk, ‘whistle a happy tune’. Then come back to the problem, examine it, and solve it.
4. **Look for the sweet spot.** Learn to act and not react. Although every cloud doesn’t have a silver lining, when life hands you a lemon, you can make lemonade and when you get angry, you can find a positive way to express it!
5. **Visualize a relaxing experience.** Close your eyes, and travel there in your mind. Make it your stress-free oasis. Finding your center and your purpose can help you find solutions!
6. **Vocalize.** Sit down and say these words out loud: “I am angry because...” and then finish the sentence. Listen to your answer and ask why and why and why until you get to the real issue.
7. **Walk away.** Walking away from an angry situation is sometimes the only way to keep things from getting out of control or violent. Leave the house and take a walk around the block, or take a break at work and step outside for a few minutes. Be sure to communicate with anyone you might be in a confrontation with: you are not leaving the problem, just clearing your head.
8. **Exercise!** Daily exercise allows you to work out your stress. When you have less stress you will feel angry less often. It will also make you feel healthier!
9. **Find a safe spot.** Yelling at friends or family members, slamming doors, and breaking crockery doesn’t solve any problem and frequently escalates angry situations between people. Yet, sometimes you just need to vent. Finding a safe spot to act out your anger can relieve the majority of your stress, calming you enough to solve the real problem at hand. Go to a basement room alone and scream your head off! Throw a tennis ball at the garage wall. Buy a punching bag.

Some people disagree with the idea of venting however, and believe it supports and propagates rage. As with everything in this life, you must decide for yourself.

Questions to ponder when you are angry:

1. "Will the object of my anger matter ten years from now?" Chances are you will see things from a calmer perspective.
2. "What is the worst consequence of the object of my anger?" If you are just cut off while driving or in the store, you can build up unhealthy stress or even cause an accident by ‘flying off the handle’. Some things are better left to process in a quieter way.
3. "Did that person do this to me on purpose?" In many cases, you will see that they were just careless or in a rush, and really did not mean you any harm.
4. "Do I ever do this same thing that is making me angry?" In those situations, do you get angry at yourself?

The negative collateral consequences of anger:

- Anger impedes our ability to be happy.
- Anger sends family relationships off-course.
- Anger reduces our social skills.
- Anger leads to increased stress (ironic, since stress often increases anger).
- Anger makes it harder to process information. We make more mistakes when we are angry.

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