

ANGER MANAGEMENT

Anger is a completely normal human emotion that can range from a minor irritation to fury and rage. It is healthy to be angry in many instances, however when anger gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to serious problems.

What is Anger?

According to Charles Spielberger, PhD, anger is "an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage." Anger can be caused by internalized thoughts and/or by external events (triggers): often these thoughts and events feed on one another and can be exaggerated. Since anger is an emotion, it is accompanied by physiological and biological changes such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, adrenaline, and noradrenaline.

For many in early recovery from addiction, anger is hiding within. The following is a checklist of indications if you may have some unexpressed hidden anger:

- Procrastination in the completion of imposed tasks
- Habitual lateness
- An affinity for sadistic or ironic humor
- Conversational sarcasm, cynicism, or flippancy
- Frequent heavy sighs
- An attitude of "grin and bear it"
- Over-politeness or constant cheerfulness
- Frequent disturbing or frightening dreams
- Very controlled monotone speaking voice
- Insomnia
- Loss of interest in healthy things that you used to be enthusiastic about
- Boredom and/or apathy
- Slowing down of movements
- Getting tired more easily than usual
- Getting irritated by trifles
- Clenched jaws and/or teeth grinding when sleeping
- Facial tics, spasmodic foot movements, habitual fist-clenching taking place unintentionally
- Chronically stiff neck or sore shoulder muscles
- Chronic depression

Healthy Anger

The instinctive, natural way to express anger is to respond aggressively in order to fight and to defend ourselves when we are attacked. A certain amount of anger, therefore, is necessary to our survival. Dr. Reneau Peurifoy suggests that there are three determinants for assessing if anger is helpful or unhelpful:

1. Determine if the anger was a response to a real threat to your well-being;
2. Consider if the level of anger was proportionate to the actual threat, and;
3. Determine if the actions inspired by the anger effectively reduced the threat with the least amount of harm to yourself and others.

Because we live in a society of social norms, laws, and common sense, which prevents us from lashing out at every person or situation that irritates and/or annoys us, we must control our expression of anger. It is a misconception that “letting it all hang out” or “telling the whole truth” in angry situations is healthy; it is usually destructive. To control our expressions of anger we use a combination of conscious and unconscious processes in order to express, suppress, and calm ourselves when angry feelings arise.

Expression of Anger

The healthiest way of dealing with anger is expression. This is accomplished by expressing your angry feelings in an assertive, but **not** aggressive, manner. By learning how to express what your needs are, and how to get them met, you will be able to assert yourself without hurting others. Use caution and be respectful of yourself and others as being assertive does not mean being pushy or demanding.

Suppression of Anger

Anger can be suppressed, and then converted or redirected. This is accomplished by holding in your anger, and discontinuing thinking about it by focusing on something positive. The danger in suppression is that if you do not allow yourself outward expression, your anger can turn inward and be personalized. When anger turns inward it can manifest itself in pathological behaviors such as passive-aggressive behavior or excessively cynical and hostile behaviors.

Calming Anger

Calming down your anger means actively controlling your outward behavior and actively controlling your internal thoughts. This is accomplished by counting to 10 (or 110 if necessary), and postponing the anger long enough to cognitively process the irrational reactions. Or, deep breathing, listening to soothing music, taking a hot bath, etc will also help calm the body and mind. Another excellent too is visualizing a pleasant memory or a pleasant thought.

More Help to Control Anger

Cognitive Restructuring

Changing the way you think about things is a very effective method of reducing anger responses since you will not get angry to begin with. Try replacing angry and exaggerated thoughts with more rational ones. For instance, instead of telling yourself, "oh, it's awful, it's terrible, everything's ruined," tell yourself, "it's frustrating, and it's understandable that I'm upset about it, but it's not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix it anyhow." Eliminate words like "never" or "always" when talking about yourself or someone else. Remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything, and that it will not make you feel any better (and may actually make you feel worse).

Problem Solving

Sometimes, our anger and frustration is caused by tangible and unavoidable problems in our lives. Therefore, focusing on how to handle and face the problem is the best course of action. This can seem somewhat counterintuitive, as most would rather immediately try to find a solution to the problem. The fact is, that making a plan of action that incorporates measures and a support system is the best way to alleviate frustration and anger with problem situations. The solution to the problem will come if we make a plan.

Better Communication

When angry, people tend to jump to conclusions and act on those incorrect conclusions as if they were reality. The first thing to do if you are in a heated discussion is slow down and think through your responses. Be sure to communicate your message clearly and directly, and ask for feedback from the other party to make sure they are hearing what you are trying to say. Be sure to listen intently, don't think about what you are going to say next, instead listen to the other person closely. When they are done, feedback what you heard them say, and then respond. This type of communication will usually dissipate anger in a matter of moments.

Change Your Environment

Sometimes our immediate surroundings give us cause for irritation and fury, leading us to feel trapped in the situation. If you find yourself in this state of mind, simply change your environment. Go outside, take a walk, move to another room, take a break, etc.

Timing

If you tend to get angry in the evening, after a long day at work, perhaps you are just tired. Try to discuss issues in the morning that may cause anger. Perhaps you are very intent in your work at the office and get frustrated when people interrupt you. Try closing your door when you know you will be doing intent work.



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Avoidance

If you have a situation or environment that makes you furious every time you encounter it, try to avoid it. Perhaps it is the mess that your spouse makes in kitchen when preparing dinner; simply do not go in the kitchen during dinner preparation. Keep yourself calm if you can.

Alternatives

If the same routine always gets you agitated, try another routine. If traffic is bad every morning on your way to work, try another route, go to work earlier or later, or take a train, bus, or bicycle. The point is to allow your thinking to expand and try alternatives that may not be annoying.

Incompatibility

Try doing something incompatible with angry emotions when you become angry. Kiss your spouse, play with the dog, and hug your loved ones: these types of activities make it difficult to stay angry.