

# Anger management

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## Helpful & unhelpful anger

Just because you are angry does not necessarily mean you have a problem. Most people have been angered at times in their lives. It is after all part of the natural response that helps our survival and helps us to protect others. Here are some examples of when anger is helpful and healthy.

- It gives us the courage to defend ourselves or those we love.
- It motivates us to improve the world by inspiring social action and justice.
- It confirms our individuality, especially when we are children.
- It warns others not to take advantage of us.

The person who is not able to admit any anger risks depression, low self-esteem and victimisation!

Frequent or excessive anger is not useful; in fact, it is likely to have a negative effect on your health, to spoil your relationships with others and to limit your life experiences and ability to achieve happiness. Here is a guide which asks if you have any of the following symptoms of excessive unhealthy anger?

- A pattern of repeating the same angry words or deeds in particular situations.
- An inclination to shout at people or to use violent words.
- A tendency to brood or fantasise about angry scenes with people.
- An inability to deal with difficult situations without becoming angry.
- A temptation or recourse to violence, possibly resulting in trouble with the law.
- A reliance on getting angry to make you feel better.
- Substituting getting angry about a problem for solving or learning to live with that problem.
- Anger-linked health problems such as hypertension or digestive trouble.
- Being recognised as an angry person and so teased, appeased or feared by others.
- Having a strong prejudice against strangers because of their race, gender etc.
- Avoiding situations because you fear your temper.

## Explaining anger

There is no simple explanation why some people are angrier than others; some of it might depend on our character or our early experiences. However, the following contributory factors definitely act to maintain the situation.

**Habit** - anger can become an automatic response to certain situations - and this habit can be reinforced by others if they have become used to us getting angry.

**Fear** - anger can be felt as a response to situations that we fear will overwhelm us if we do not go on the offensive.

**Shame** - anger can spring from the feeling that we have to fight to preserve our dignity and sense of self-worth.

**Loss** - anger commonly accompanies the sadness which goes with a bereavement or severe set-back.

**Lack of assertiveness** - if you cannot speak up for yourself and get some of your own way by negotiation you may find yourself exploding instead.

**Low frustration tolerance** - when you go on the attack to deal with situations that most people would just put up with.

**Response to past trauma** - if you have been badly hurt in the past you may understandably be reacting over-aggressively towards anything that seems threatening in the present

**As a symptom of psychological or physical conditions** - conditions that involve constant pain, changed hormone level or mental disturbance may trigger anger.

## What can I do about managing my anger?

There are three steps to anger management:

1. Understand the payoffs and the triggers.
2. Learn to calm yourself down in crisis situations.
3. Learn strategies to prevent anger arising in future.

## 1. Understanding the payoffs and the triggers

Undoubtedly you will get some short-term benefits from your anger. Most of these can be gained more effectively by other means such as assertion. However, in the short-term you may have to experience some discomfort as you lose some of the immediate gains of anger such as:

- I feel so much better afterwards.
- It makes people listen.
- I feel more like myself when I am angry.
- If I didn't get angry about things, I'd just cry all the time.
- When I show my anger then people know where they stand and that's good.
- Anger stops me being afraid.
- If I don't show my anger, then people will think I am a wimp.

Probably even as you read this you will begin to see that some of these things can be achieved by other healthier means.

Now decide what particular situations trigger your anger so that you can practise staying calm when they next arise.

## 2. Calming yourself down in crisis situations

The appropriate response depends on the situation - e.g. whether you get angry when alone or when in dispute with another.

### Substitute activities

- Describe the room to yourself around you in purely neutral terms.
- Look at things, not people.
- Think of things you have to do today.
- Count to 10 (it does work!).

### Avoidance

- Repeat what the other person has said and ask for time to consider.
- Leave if you think you might otherwise lose your temper or be violent.

### Change brain rhythms

- Play music to yourself and listen closely; if you don't have access to music, listen to it inside your head.
- Take exercise of some form.

### Relaxation

- Alter your breathing, breathe in for a count of 4, hold for 7 then out for a count of 8.
- Tense and relax muscles; tensing each in turn, holding for 5 seconds then releasing.
- Massage yourself particularly on your stomach and chest.
- Change postures and roll shoulders.

## Imagery

- Imagine a relaxing scene.
- Imagine laughing at yourself and the situation later.
- Imagine neutral scenes, especially ones with people in them.

### 3. Learning Strategies to prevent Anger arising in the Future

- Decide whether your anger is healthy or unhealthy (see above).
- Avoid stimulants such as alcohol or other drugs if you are working on a long-term solution.
- Read about the subject.
- Ask others who get less angry than you how they do it and try their ideas.
- Develop a generally more relaxed lifestyle and try to manage stress better.
- Challenge your angry thoughts.
- Beware of disguised anger such as in sarcasm or cruel jokes.
- Learn to assert yourself, maybe even go on an Assertion Skills course.
- Consider the past origins of your anger.
- Share your concern with a Counsellor.
- Seek out specific Therapy for Anger with referral to a Clinical Psychologist or Psychotherapist who targets this trouble - This may be available through your GP.

## Other help and Useful contacts

**Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity team**: 01509 228338

[studentwellbeing@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:studentwellbeing@lboro.ac.uk)

To book an appointment with any of our services within Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity (including the Counselling Team, Mental Health Support Team and the Wellbeing Advisers), please complete [the referral form](#).

- **Everyman Project**: 0207 263 8884  
A support service for men who want to stop behaving violently.
- **The British Association for Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy**.
- **The British Association for Counselling**.
- **NHS - Anger management tips** - Helpful hints on anger.

## Further reading

- Windy Dryden "Overcoming Anger" Sheldon Press. 1996 - Possibly the most comprehensive and readable of the selection.
- Ron & Pat Potter-Effron "Letting Go of Anger" New Harbinger 1995.
- Ron Potter-Effron "Angry All the Time" New Harbinger 1994.
- Carol Tavris "Anger: the Misunderstood Emotion" Touchstone. NY. 1989.
- Harriet Lerner "The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships" Harper Collins 1997.
- Lorraine Bilodeau "The Anger Workbook" Compcare Publications. 1992.