

Controlling Anger Before It Controls You

What is Anger?

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. We've all felt anger; perhaps as a fleeting annoyance or as a full-fledged rage. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems: problems at work, in your personal relationships and in the overall quality of your life. It can make you feel as though you're at the mercy of an unpredictable and powerful emotion.

Signs and Causes of Anger

Like other emotions, anger is accompanied by physiological and biological changes. When you feel angry, your heart rate and blood pressure go up, as does the level of your energy hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline. Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person (such as a family member or professor) or at an event (such as a traffic jam or a canceled flight), or your anger could be caused by worrying or brooding about personal problems. Also, memories of traumatic or enraging events can trigger angry feelings.

Problems Caused By Unexpressed Anger

Unexpressed anger can create other problems. It can lead to pathological expressions of anger, such as passive-aggressive behavior (getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them head-on) or a personality that seems perpetually cynical and hostile. People who are constantly putting others down, criticizing everything and making cynical comments haven't learned how to constructively express their anger. Not surprisingly, they aren't likely to have many successful relationships.

Express Your Angry Feelings in a Positive Way

You can't get rid of, or avoid, the things or the people that enrage you, nor can you change them, but you can learn to control your emotions. The three main approaches are expressing, suppressing and calming.

1. **Expressing** your angry feelings in an assertive -- not aggressive -- manner is the healthiest way to express anger. To do this, you have to learn how to make clear what your needs are, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding. It means being respectful of yourself and others.
2. **Suppressing** anger and redirecting it. This happens when you hold in your anger, stop thinking about it and focus on something positive. The aim is to inhibit or suppress your anger and convert it into constructive behavior. The danger in this type of response is that if it isn't allowed outward expression, your anger can turn inward - on yourself. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure or depression.
3. **Calming** yourself down inside. This means not just controlling your outward behavior but also controlling your internal responses, taking steps to lower your heart rate, calm yourself

down and let the feelings subside.

Do You Need Counseling?

If you feel that your anger is really out of control and it is having an impact on both your relationships and important parts of your life, you might consider counseling on how to handle it better. A mental health professional can work with you in developing a range of techniques for changing your thinking and your behavior.

Some information provided by the National Mental Health Association.