

Managing Anger

Sometimes we are right to feel anger, for example if an injustice has been done. In this case expression of our anger can be healthy provided it is done in a controlled and measured way. What I am talking about here, by contrast, is when our anger is out of all proportion to the event that triggered it...those occasions when we raise our voices in anger inappropriately, and wind up feeling bad about ourselves and possibly hurting others. As Aristotle stated: "Anybody can become angry – that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not easy".

Anger is a normal human emotion, but one which needs to be controlled. Uncontrolled outbursts can add stress in our life and make us feel negative about ourselves. One important strategy in managing anger is to notice when it begins to rise, because if we catch it *early* it is less likely to escalate. It may be helpful to think in terms of an anger thermometer, and to gauge how 'hot' your anger has become; look for tell-tale signs like tense muscles, a clenched jaw, and heated thoughts and feelings. Once you know your early warning signs you should be able to do something about it; techniques include counting to ten, walking away from the situation, and focusing on un-tensing your muscles. These can help buy you time in which your thoughts can clear, and in which you can arrive at rational decisions. Use cooling statements too, such as 'calm down' or 'take it easy'.

It can also be helpful to learn what kinds of things trigger your anger, and these can vary from one person to the next. Sometimes it is not the situation itself that makes us angry, but the way we interpret it. For example, did that person deliberately ignore us or cut us up, or did they simply not see us? The more negative your thoughts are, the more likely you are to become angry, but you can try replacing them with more positive, cooling thoughts. Sometimes people view things in a very different way than we do, and this can give rise to misunderstandings, so no matter how hard this may be, try to understand where the other person is coming from. This can help us to avoid feelings of hurt and resentment, and we may need to drop unrealistic expectations of others. Good communication where we really listen, and take into account the other person's point of view, may help prevent us from becoming angry in the first place.

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