

# 9044 - Keeping Anger at Bay

Anger is a natural, usually healthy human emotion that we have all experience at one time or another. However, when anger gets out of control and turns destructive it can greatly affect the quality of your life. Unchecked anger can lead to problems at work, in personal relationships and with health. The good news is that anger is something that can be controlled and can be a useful emotion that motivates you to make positive changes. Read on to find out ways to deal with anger productively.

## EXPRESSING ANGER

1. **Expressing** anger is the healthiest way to deal with anger. It is important to express anger in an assertive manner rather than in an aggressive way. Being assertive involves making clear what your needs are, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive does not mean being pushy or demanding; rather it means being respectful of yourself and others.
2. **Suppressing** anger happens when anger is held in and the focus is on something positive rather than the negative circumstance. The aim is to inhibit or suppress the anger and convert it into more constructive behaviour. The danger in this type of response is that if it isn't allowed outward expression, the anger can be internalized. *Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure, or depression.* Unexpressed anger can also lead to passive-aggressive behaviour (getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them about it) or a personality that seems negative and hostile.

## Physical Effects of Anger

Anger triggers the body's 'fight or flight' response.

The adrenal glands flood the body with stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol.

The brain shunts blood away from the gut and towards the muscles, in preparation for physical exertion.

Heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and body temperature increase.

The constant flood of stress chemicals and associated metabolic changes that accompany recurrent unmanaged anger can eventually cause harm to many different systems of the body.

**Some of the short and long term health problems that have been linked to unmanaged anger include:**

- Headache
- Stroke
- Heart Attack
- Digestion problems, such as abdominal pain
- Skin problems, such as eczema
- Insomnia
- Increased anxiety
- Depression
- High blood pressure

# Anger Management Strategies

## RELAX

Simple relaxation tools, such as deep breathing and relaxing imagery, can help calm down angry feelings. *Try some of these easy to do relaxation techniques:*

- Breathe deeply, from your diaphragm. Picture your breath coming up from your "gut."
- Slowly repeat a calm word or phrase such as "relax," "take it easy." Repeat it to yourself while breathing deeply.
- Close your eyes and smile for one minute. This may seem silly, but the physical act of smiling will release chemicals in the brain and endorphins that will energize you and instantly put you in a better mood.
- Use imagery; visualize a relaxing experience, from either your memory or your imagination.
- Non-strenuous, slow yoga-like exercises can relax your muscles and make you feel much calmer.

## RESTRUCTURE THE WAY YOU THINK

- *Think Positive:* You hold the key to your thoughts, and your thoughts are what determine your mood. When you are facing a situation that is making you angry, try to shift your thoughts to something positive and a solution to your problem will come easier to you. It is important to remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything and will not make you feel better.
- *Be careful of the tone you think and speak in.* Watch out for curse words and words like "never" or "always" when talking about yourself or someone else. "This computer NEVER works" or "you're ALWAYS forgetting things" are an over exaggeration and they only serve to make you feel that your anger is justified and that there's no way to solve the problem.
- *In a moment of anger try to think logically.* Remind yourself that the world is "not out to get you", you're just experiencing a rough spot in daily life and it will soon pass. Try this each time you feel anger is getting the best of you and you will gain positive insights.

## INCREASE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When infused with anger people tend to jump to conclusions that may be very inaccurate. Here are some things you can do to communicate more effectively in tough situations:

- Slow down and think through your responses. Don't say the first thing that pops in your head
- Listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take your time before answering
- Be aware of where your anger is coming from. What is the underlying issue? Is it really as bad as it seems? Take some time to analyze the situation before reacting.

## LAUGH AT LIFE

- Try to find the humour in your situation and make light of it if possible. If you can learn to laugh at yourself, you can begin to let go of anger.

## CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- Sometimes it's our immediate surroundings that give us cause for irritation and fury. Problems and responsibilities can weigh on you and make you feel angry at the "trap" you seem to have fallen into and all the people and things that form that trap. Give yourself a break. Make sure you have some "personal time" scheduled for times of the day that you know are particularly stressful.