

# ANGER

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We tend to think about anger as a negative emotion, but anger can actually be helpful. It can energize us and motivate us to overcome obstacles, solve problems, and achieve goals. However, if we fail to deal with our anger constructively, it can propel us into inappropriate, aggressive action, creating additional problems for us. Prolonged anger can result in health problems and increased accidents. It is important that you understand and address your anger.

## What happens when you get angry?

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When you are angry, your body undergoes a stress reaction. Your heart beats faster to pump increased oxygen, adrenaline, and sugar into your bloodstream. Your breathing becomes more rapid, your blood pressure rises, and your muscles tense. Your body is energized for action. In looking for way to release tension, you might shout, slam things, or pound your fist. You might take action to resolve a problem, or you might try to hold your anger in. However, if you do not find a way to release your tension, your anger may build to a level that is dangerous and difficult to control. Cognitively, your thoughts about others may become irrational and you may generate negative self- statements. These negative thoughts usually serve to increase your anger.

## What causes you to get angry?

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There are many types of circumstances that can cause a person to become angry. Perhaps the most common source of anger is frustration. Frustration occurs when you are blocked from doing what you want to do or from going where you want to go. It is a feeling of helplessness and loss of control.

Another primary cause of anger is disappointment. You are disappointed when situations, events, or people, including yourself, do not meet the expectations you have for them.

Threat to our sense of security is also a major cause of anger. Situations that threaten your security--like doing poorly on an exam, losing your wallet, or encountering a problem you're not prepared to deal with--can leave you feeling vulnerable and angry.

The common thread that runs through all of these situations is fear. These situations all result in the experience of fear. Anger is an emotion of fear. It is a defensive response to the feelings of helplessness and vulnerability that fear produces. While fear is a passive emotion with energy directed inward, anger is an aggressive emotion that allows you to direct energy outwards.

Sometimes there are more subtle causes of your anger. Some people get angry because they fear being powerless or being taken advantage of; some believe that being aggressive is an effective way to get their way; many have not learned to deal with conflict assertively; some use anger to displace their feelings of guilt; and some people get angry because they overreact or misinterpret a situation.

## Handling your anger

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Everyone experiences anger. The ability to express negative feelings in a constructive manner is essential to positive physical and mental health. Listed below are steps you can take to express and handle your anger effectively.

- **Recognize your anger**

Admit to yourself that you are angry. Know how you when you get angry. What are the signs?

- **Calm down**

The old adage of "take a deep breath and count to ten" really works. Tell yourself that you can deal with the situation more effectively if you are calm. Decide not to act on the situation until you have calmed down.

- **Use a sounding board**

If there is a neutral person you can talk to about why you are angry, it may help you to determine if you are interpreting the situation accurately.

- **Identify your fears**

What fears has the source of your anger caused?

- **Reappraise the situation**

Give yourself a chance to see if the situation that caused your anger is bad as you first thought.

- **Don't avoid the issue**

Don't allow anger to build up and interfere with later situations or circumstances. After you have reappraised the situation decide to confront it or let it go.

- **Examine your options**

Identify the different ways you might respond to the situation and the potential outcomes that might result.

- **Decide how you will respond**

Determine the response that will result in the most positive outcomes for you and others over the long run.

- **Respond assertively rather than aggressively**

Express yourself firmly without making insulting remarks or trying to put someone on the defensive. Work to resolve the problem rather than to win.

- **Avoid displacing your anger**

Because the energy of anger wants to be released, there is a tendency to displace anger onto people who are not the source of your anger. This will only make things worse. If you are angry with a business, agency, office or department, ask to talk with someone in charge to express your anger. Avoid displacing your anger onto an unsuspecting clerk.

- **Use humor, physical exercise or other enjoyable activities to release pent-up anger**

Sometimes you experience minor irritations or problems that cannot be resolved, or the timing is not right to confront the source of your anger. Finding constructive ways to release your tension can help you to move on or to deal more effectively with the source of your anger when the time is right.

- **Seek help**

If you have difficulty handling your anger in a constructive and effective manner, talk with a friend or a counselor in the Counseling Center.

**If you would like to talk about any of these issues, call the Counseling Center at (336) 316-2163.**

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