



TIP SHEET



Understanding Anger Management

What is Anger?

Anger is a normal and healthy emotion. We all experience anger at various times during the course of our lives. However, anger is subjectively experienced as a "bad" feeling, and indeed it can be very uncomfortable.

Sometimes we feel justified in our anger, and indeed we may be. Anger that is appropriate (that is, realistic given the situation and to the degree it is felt) is normal and serves as a call to action (e.g., motivation to address the situation that is making you angry). However, anger that is inappropriate (out of proportion, extreme, explosive, or experienced as "out of control") is likely to be a real problem for both you and others.

Anger is probably the most poorly handled emotion in our society. From time to time, all of us experience this powerful feeling. Some of the most common causes of anger include: hurt; frustration; annoyance; harassment; disappointment; and threats.

Anger can be our friend or enemy; it depends on the way in which we choose to express it. Knowing how to recognize and express it appropriately can help us to reach our goals, solve problems, handle emergencies, and protect our health. A failure to recognize and understand one's anger can lead to a variety of personal difficulties.

Some experts believe that suppressed anger is an underlying cause of both anxiety and depression. Anger that is not expressed can disrupt relationships, affect thinking and behaviour patterns, and create a variety of physical problems, such as high blood pressure, heart problems, headaches, skin disorders, and digestive problems. What's even worse is the correlation between the dangers of uncontrolled anger and crime, emotional and physical abuse, and other violent behaviour.

Anger Responses

Anger can be displayed in different ways. Some unhelpful ways of expressing our anger include:

Passive expressions of anger

For example:

- *Secretive* (e.g., silent treatment, rumour spreading)
- *Manipulative* (e.g., using emotional blackmail, withholding money or resources)
- *Self-sacrificing* (e.g., being overly helpful, quietly making long-suffering sighs but refusing help)
- *Dispassionate* (e.g., giving the 'cold shoulder treatment', not responding to other's anger)
- *Evasive* (e.g., avoiding conflict and frustration)

Aggressive expressions of anger

For example:

- *Threatening* (e.g., frightening people by saying how you could harm them, body language)
- *Hurtful* (e.g., using physical violence, verbal abuse)
- *Destructive* (e.g., harming objects, drinking too much)
- *Revengeful* (e.g., refusing to forgive and forget, bringing up hurtful memories from the past)

Our goal is to learn to express our anger in a more positive and helpful way:

Assertive expressions of anger

For example:

- *Direct* (e.g., expressing anger directly at the people concerned, making behaviour (including body language) honest and visible, not "beating about the bush")
- *Honourable* (e.g., taking responsibility for actions and feelings)
- *Focused* (e.g., sticking to the issue of concern, not bringing up irrelevant material from the past)
- *Passionate* (e.g., initiating change, being motivated)
- *Forgiving* (e.g., demonstrating a willingness to hear other people's anger and grievances)



How did I become so angry?

We arrive in the world with a unique biological make-up predisposing us to think, feel and behave in certain broadly defined ways. Through our very individual experience of life, particularly during our impressionable childhood years, this basic potential personality is continually developed, shaped and re-shaped. It is during this period that our anger patterns are also shaped. There are three main ways in which our anger patterns are moulded during our childhood:

Our experience of our own anger

For example, whether we were encouraged to express it, or were prevented from showing such feelings

Our experience of being on the receiving end of anger

We were particularly shaped by the anger expressions of people who had power over us

Our contact with influential role models

The way we saw others dealing with 'negative' feelings

Anger, as such, is predominantly a learnt behaviour. Anger responses are simply a habit that we can learn how to change.



How Can a Psychologist Help?

A psychologist can help you to learn how to successfully and effectively manage your anger. Cognitive-behavioural therapy is highly successful in helping people to learn how to manage their anger and to use more effective, successful ways of interacting. Understanding how the patterns developed and finding alternative ways of reacting are key in breaking these patterns that are ultimately self-defeating.



What Can I Do?

- ✓ Acknowledge any problems in coping with anger.
- ✓ Seek the support of important people in your life in coping with your feelings and in changing your behaviour patterns.
- ✓ Keep an anger log. It will help you to identify when and where you are having aggressive thoughts, so that when you find yourself in these situations, you can utilize such techniques as deep breathing, positive self-talk, or thought stopping, which can help you interrupt the anger cycle.

- ✓ Put yourself in the other person's shoes. This will help you gain a different perspective. Keep in mind that we are all humans, subject to making mistakes.
- ✓ Learn how to laugh at yourself and see humour in situations.
- ✓ Learn how to relax. Although you may have heard that expressing anger is better than keeping it in, remember that frequent outbursts of anger are often counter-productive and may alienate others.
- ✓ Good listening skills improve communication and can facilitate trusting feelings between people. This trust can help you deal with potentially hostile emotions; reducing and possibly eliminating them.
- ✓ Learn how to assert yourself. This is a constructive alternative to aggression. When you find yourself angry at another person, try to explain to them what is bothering you about their behaviour and why. It takes more words and work to be assertive than it does to let your anger show, but the rewards are worth it.
- ✓ Do the Opposite. Think about it.... Have you ever felt sad and happy at the same time? Or stressed and relaxed? The body is just not capable of experiencing two incongruent feelings at exactly the same time. Therefore, next time you start to feel angry, do exactly the opposite to your anger responses and feel cool, calm and in control.

For example:

Yelling?	Speak softly
Tensing up?	Relax your muscles
Frowning?	Smile!
Attacking?	Disengage
Judging?	Empathize

FOR FURTHER HELP: If you have any questions or need further help contact your GP or the number detailed below. Psychologists employed by Queensland Psychology Centre have at least six years of education and training to equip them to provide a professional and timely service to you in the area of anger management.