

# DON'T LOSE IT, USE IT

## *Anger Management*



### **ANGER: A COMPLEX EMOTION**

One of the most common characteristics we share as humans is the capacity to experience emotions – the state of feeling psychic and physical reactions that create both a psychological and physiological transformation that prepares the body for a fight or flight reaction. Fight or flight reaction is designed to improve our chances for survival from what may be perceived as a threatening situation. Unfortunately, there are times when the emotion of fear can cause us to build up both a psychological and physiological reaction that can be visible as anger.

According to Webster's Dictionary, anger is an intense emotional state induced by displeasure. Anger also names the reaction but in itself conveys nothing about intensity or justification or manifestation of the emotional state.

### **Anger can be manifested as ire, rage, fury, indignation, or wrath:**

*IRE* more frequent in literary contexts, may suggest greater intensity than anger, often with an evident display of feeling <cheeks flushed dark with ire>.

*RAGE* suggests loss of self-control from violence of emotion <screaming with rage>.

*FURY* is overmastering destructive rage that can verge on madness <in her fury she accused everyone around her of betrayal>.

*INDIGNATION* stresses righteous anger at what one considers unfair, mean, or shameful <a refusal to listen that caused general indignation>.

*WRATH* is likely to suggest a desire or intent to revenge or punish <rose in his wrath and struck his tormentor to the floor>.



While anger is a complex emotion, it can be responsible among other things for helping us to feel a forced sense of control in a chaotic situation. An example of this is what happens when we are forced to focus our attention and energy on lifesaving maneuvering in traffic because of the carelessly inattentive and reckless driving behavior of another motorist. Anger may also give us a sense of power and strength, like when we are attacked verbally or physically by another and the fight response is triggered. It's at this time that we may believe that we need to exert equal force against that person in an effort to withstand an impending attack or when we believe that we're being manipulated, deceived, or forced to meet someone's unreasonable expectations. Anger in these situations plays paradoxical role in survival. On the one hand, anger promotes the same process for the psychological and physiological transformation that prepares the body for a fight or flight (i.e., survival) reaction. However, on the other hand anger can also work against our survival resulting in an emotional state that results in actions or behavior that can result in dangerous conflict, struggle, or illness.

## **UNDERSTANDING OUR REACTIONS**

Since unmanageable anger can work against survival and lead to destructive actions and harmful outcomes, understanding ways of creating controllable anger is an important step in learning how to develop effective anger management strategies. One factor that contributes to a person's anger response may be their early developmental exposure to anger reactions growing up with their family. Since we learn as children how to react socially based upon what we are taught and exposed to, we also learn how to resolve conflict via these observations and personal experiences. This means that it's important for those of us who were raised in dysfunctional households to recognize the difference between unhealthy and healthy expressions of anger. Therapy or counseling may be very appropriate venues for self-discovery concerning this issue. Professional support can facilitate a person becoming more skilled at developing better communication to support a more healthy exchange of ideas and feelings.

Another cause for the anger response may be ineffective management of excessive frustration, and anxiety. The buildup of anxiety and frustration may create a state of emotional exhaustion that can easily turn into a reason to be angry.

Finally, our thoughts can contribute to an anger reaction. Thoughts like "never" and "always" when talking about self or others can escalate a perception in ways that create an irrational justification of events, in this case over generalizing. An example may be to say that a friend never cared or to say that a family member always yells. While these events may occur with significant frequency, it may be difficult to prove that it never or



always occurs. Emotionally, it's easy for us to become invested in a belief. Unfortunately, when that investment becomes extreme it limits our ability to problem solve and escalates frustration, anxiety, and the emotional reaction of anger. Consequently, what is referred to as "cognitive restructuring" plays an important role in helping us create a more realistic thought process that minimizes the possibility of anger as a reaction. Cognitive restructuring simply means changing the way we think about a situation.

## **HOW TO CONTROL OUR ACTIONS**

Admitting that we are angry rather than denying and internalizing the feelings that may cause anger is very healthy. Once we're able to admit what we are feeling it's much easier to explore these feelings and to determine healthy strategies to effectively manage it and sensibly express it. When we choose to bury our feelings of anger with chemical substances, denial, evasion, and containment, the outcome may be filled with destructive consequences. Learning relaxation techniques to reduce feelings of frustration and anxiety can also contribute to effective anger management. Therefore, to avoid inappropriately displacing feelings of anger to self or an undeserving person it is important to learn effective anger management techniques and strategies; you might consider participating in a workshop specifically designed to help students manage their feelings of anger. The environment of college brings with it an array of new situations, relationships, and experiences, all of which will require patience, understanding, and the development of new coping skills. While you may experience an array of emotional feelings when things don't go as expected, losing your temper is not a solution to managing what may be an unfair, challenging, difficult experience. The trick of managing your anger is learning how to handle yourself in a positive way. To accomplish this, remember that screaming, yelling, breaking something, or fighting, while giving a temporary release, creates an array of problems and does not make us feel better long-term. Instead, try the practice of taking a deep breath, taking a walk alone or with a good friend to help calm yourself, or finding someone to talk with about your problems in order to help reduce feelings of anger.

Remember, anger is a necessary emotion that is designed to help us understand that something is going on in our life that we need to address. How we address what is going on is what anger management teaches us. In other words, we want to learn how to address anger and deal with it in the healthiest manner. This means talking about what is happening and not avoiding it so that we can get to the source of what may be upsetting to us.



## **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING ANGER**

- ***Schedule a time to talk with a counselor, family member, or friend you can trust.*** If not a counselor, this should preferably be someone who is not directly involved. They may be able to help you understand what is happening and how it is affecting your emotional well-being.
- ***Don't be afraid to express your feelings.*** This may mean recognizing that it is healthy for you to show your emotions even by having a good cry.
- ***Avoid internalizing or avoiding your feelings.*** To help here you may want to keep a confidential journal of events that take place in your life and your feelings associated with each happening.
- ***Express yourself aesthetically or artistically in art, poetry, music specifically addressing what is causing you to be angry.***
- ***Learn relaxation techniques.*** This may include learning yoga, tai'chi, or some other deep breathing/healthy form of relaxation.
- ***Create a special chair, place or location to relax.*** Use music or some other form of entertainment to help you get to an emotional place where you can feel good about yourself.
- ***Exercise, exercise, exercise.*** Learn the value of releasing toxic energy that may contribute to poor anger management.
- ***Meditate or practice deep breathing.***

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