

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Anger Management



Do you have a problem with anger? Has your anger negatively affected your relationships, health, and success in school or jobs? Are you seeking to eliminate your anger and angry reactions?

If your response to any of the above questions is 'yes', the content on the following pages will be helpful to you as you seek to manage anger.

WHAT IS ANGER

Anger is a normal human emotion that we all experience. It varies in its intensity from a low level emotional response to intense and sometimes dangerous displays of fury and rage. Anger impacts us physiologically by causing our blood pressure to change and the release of hormones and other biochemical agents within the body. When we say we feel angry, we literally can feel it in our body. In fact, we might say that we feel anger all over. Has anyone ever told you that anger is written all over your face?

Now that we have established that anger is a normal emotion, causing reactions even in our physical bodies, let's examine more about anger. There is a distinction between feeling angry and expressing anger. As individuals, we may respond in a variety of ways to the anger we feel. The way we view anger and respond to anger can cause problems in our relationships, health, sense of self or normal routines. Anger can be expressed or suppressed. The goal of anger management is not to cease to be angry but to express anger in healthy ways that allow us to share our feelings without hurting others. The manner in which you respond to anger is very much tied to your life experiences and what you have learned through them. In order to help you understand the roots of your anger and your response to that anger, we will use the framework of anger past, present



and future. As you think about each of these periods, the clues to anger management will emerge.

ANGER IN THE PAST

From the time that you were born and during your early years, you experienced different life situations. As a young child you learned about how others respond to stressful life events by observing others around you and often reacting and responding in similar ways.

These are common life events linked to early experiences:

- Losses, for example, things or relationships that are taken away
- Trauma or bad things that happen
- Being disappointed or let down
- Inability to get needs met
- Frustrating experiences

As you got older you might have found yourself reacting and responding to life situations in similar ways to those from your early childhood. You may not have intentionally reacted or responded in a certain way, but it just seemed familiar.

As a student in college, you understand something about computers. All computers have hard drives that contain information that is imprinted upon that drive. The early experiences of your life are imprinted upon “your” hard drive and can affect how you react and respond when you are angry. Recognizing that our response to anger is often linked to early responses to anger is vital to breaking the patterns and rewriting what is on the “hard drive.”

If you have experienced a lifetime of reacting and responding to anger in ways that are destructive to you and those around you, you can change! Instead of the old familiar patterns of reaction and response to anger, new ones can be developed. People and circumstances that provoked long term anger can be released.

Rewriting the Anger of the Past

Identifying past patterns of anger involves thinking about your anger and how you respond to it. This is a process of cognitive restructuring, which seeks to intentionally change the way you think about stressful, anger provoking situations by changing your



thought process. It is designed to shift the way you think about and react to past and present life situations.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there similarities in the way in which I react and respond to anger with others in my family?
- Am I unhappy with my ability to manage my anger?
- Do I view my responses to anger as a problem?
- Can I identify specific experiences in the past that caused me to be angry and I continue be angry about these events?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, it may suggest that anger in the past may be having an impact on your current behavior. Our anger in the past is usually linked to life situations that provoked fear or other emotions that made us feel threatened. As you think about these kinds of life situations, realize that each event is in the past. You can't change the past, but you can change your reactions to those events in the past.

Solutions to Anger of the Past

- Recognize that your present anger may be tied to past sources of anger and responses to anger.
- Let go of long term anger from the past and choose to forgive recognizing that you cannot change the past, only your reaction to it.
- Learn the lesson that you can choose not to respond to difficult situations in the past with anger. It is your choice. Think about past events that provoked anger and see yourself responding in a different non angry manner.

ANGER IN THE PRESENT

Once you have intentionally detached from anger in the past reactions and responses, you are ready to address anger in the present. Imagine just today, you were in the college bookstore and after you waited in line to purchase books for an hour, the clerk closed her line just as you approached. You now have what we can call an "anger opportunity." How will you respond?



Anger in the present is about choice. We can choose to respond in a variety of different ways to an “anger opportunity.” Cognitive restructuring principles would suggest that you can think about the situation differently and/or we can think about responding in a different manner. How will we manage our anger opportunities?

Managing Anger Opportunities in the Present

We have stated that anger is a normal emotion. Each of us has many “anger opportunities” each day. The choices that we make based upon the way we think about the situation will determine the response.

Anger in the present is managed by:

- Thinking first about the “anger opportunity” without reacting.
- Choosing to respond in a non-angry manner. Pay attention to the tenor and tone of your voice. Use language that is not challenging or confronting. Manage your emotions by remembering to take some deep breaths before you speak.
- Use self-talk (tell yourself) by telling yourself “I release all anger and I choose to react in a non-angry manner.”
- There are some situations for which we must learn to simply walk away, exercising choice as a form of response. This tactic gives us control over the choices we make as we choose to release anger.

Anger in the present makes anger management a thoughtful and controlled process rather than a reactive out of control expression of rage.

ANGER IN THE FUTURE

Determine today, how you will react to future anger. Stressful life events will continue to occur. We will have more “anger opportunities in our lives.” What will you do about it? The solution is in preparing for the future!

The following areas are vital to preparing for the future and managing anger:

- ***What do you think about yourself? Change your self-talk, the things you think about yourself.*** You are not an angry, out of control person. You are not a person



who has problems with managing your anger. You are in control of your reaction and response to anger. You choose to respond to anger in ways that are not destructive or harmful to others. You can also choose to simply walk away, releasing anger. These are the self-talk messages that support anger management.

- ***What do you think about the life situations or “anger opportunities” that you face on a daily basis?*** With an ongoing reality of facing future “anger opportunities,” we can choose to view these situations as simply life events, not angry life events. As such angry reactions and responses are not warranted, develop alternative ways of thinking, defining and reacting to anger.
- ***Some research suggests that highly angry people are also very self-focused.*** They find more angry opportunities because they react to “things not going their way.” As preparation for anger in the future, begin to think about the needs of others and not so much of “you.” Focus less on your own emotions but become sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.
- ***Learn to avoid some environments, circumstances or people that you find anger provoking, if you have difficulty managing your anger.*** Continue to practice the techniques and skills with the expectation that as you grow in anger management, these circumstances will not overwhelm you in the future.
- ***Prepare for anger in the future by learning relaxation techniques now.*** Think about people are say angry things to you while you are visualizing a relaxing symbol in your life, such as a scene on a beach. Teach yourself relaxation responses as you drive and face angry aggressive drivers.
 - Practice deep breathing exercises with the breath pushing from the belly.
 - Choose a phrase such as “let it go” or “cool out” and repeat it while you are relaxing or deep breathing. When faced with an “angry opportunity” tries substituting this phrase to bring calm and a different reaction.
 - Learn to use visual imagery. See yourself doing something relaxing and train your mind to see this image on demand.

Some people will need counseling services to manage their anger. This simply means that some assistance in learning special techniques and strategies for anger management will be useful. You should not be ashamed to ask for help, and specific approaches used by many university counseling centers include counseling or special groups on the topic of anger management.



Remember, you can manage your anger using the anger in the past, present and future approach.

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Resources

Cullen, Murry, & Robert Freeman-Longo. Men & Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger for a Much Better Life. Retrieved from the Web June 3, 2005.
<http://www.menstuff.org/books/byissue/feelings-anger.html> Safer Society Press, 1996.

A man's anger does not have to be out of control. This book will help you understand your anger. And, by using exercises and worksheets at the end of each chapter, you will learn to effectively reverse destructive behavior patterns to prevent such disastrous consequences as damage to relationships, self-loathing, destruction of property, loss of job, and the potential for injury to yourself or others.

Deffenbacher, J.L. (2004), Anger-management programs: issues and suggestions: A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Behavioral Health Management, v24, p36(4).

Anger and aggressive behavior is quite common in today's society, and as a result, a number of programs and interventions are available to address this problem. This article provides an in-depth discussion and suggests a series of guidelines for providing suitable anger management programs for those in need. Individuals' needs differ and therefore, programs should be carefully planned to address those needs.

Fiore, Tony, M.D. (2005). How to Control Your Anger: Retreat and Think Things Over.
www.conflict911.com

The approach discussed in this article, "retreat and think things over", can be useful in all walks of life. When you find yourself at the point of exploding about a conflict, you should walk away from the situation and allow your body a chance to cool down as well as your mind a chance to think things over before you say or do something irrational.



Once you reach the point of no return you should notice several signs which will tell you that you need to get away from the situation. These signs include: feeling overwhelmed, raising your voice, heart racing, muscles tightening, and you can't think straight. When you get to this point, that is when you need to distance yourself. And, although you might like to, you can't tell the other party to do the same. You must do this on your own and return with a clearer mind with the goal of resolving the conflict in mind. By this time, the other party should be calmer as well.

Garber, Kathy. Anger is a fact of life, but it doesn't have to be your whole life. Web May 9, 2005
http://www.angermanagementonline.com/articles/022003_3.html Anger Management On-Line, (February, 2003).

The emotion of anger has been around forever and that is not likely to change; but your reaction to anger can change. The idea that you cannot control your anger or your behavior is a myth. You are in complete control of your daily life activities and your actions at all times. Many adults have problems with angry feelings because we are not taught how to handle the emotion of anger as children. As children, most of us were not welcome to experience or express anger. You have an obligation to learn how to manage your anger.

Kelly, K. (2004). You have a problem with my temper? So did I, until I began using it as a tool. FSB, v14, p32.

Directly from a person with extreme anger management problems, this article describes a person who identified with his behavioral issues and how he affected others. After a realization that an attitude and behavior adjustment was necessary, this writer sought professional help, which provided him simple techniques to prevent the normal aggressive reactions he once had. In addition, this person learned the idea of "strategic anger" and how it can be useful in some situations.

Leopold, A.K. (2004), Taming your temper: Is anger getting the best of you? Get over it. Health 2, a Weekly Reader publication, v31, p20(2).



This article describes the “powerful emotion” of anger and discusses a number of physical reactions that are caused by it. Studies show that anger can be quite harmful to one's health, likely to cause problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and obesity. Although anger is not necessarily a wrong emotion, more positive and beneficial responses exist. Before anger sets in, people must learn to take a brief moment to calm themselves down.

Lynch, K. (2000), Anger management: Gaining control of anger. School Library Journal, v4 6, p205.

This article references a set of books that explain the subject of anger management as it relates to young adults. The reading identifies a number risks involved with this type of conflict, informs the reader of ways that the problems can be resolved or dealt with, and provides a series of examples of matters based on factual stories and information.

Potter-Efron, Ron. Angry All the Time: An emergency guide to anger control. Retrieved from the Web June 3, 2005. <http://www.menstuff.org/books/byissue/feelings-anger.html> New Harbinger Publications, 1994.

Very anger people live in a trap. They lose control. Things are said and damage is done that later creates deep regret. Friends, lovers, and jobs are lost. And it just keeps happening. This book has real help and real answers. If you're an angry person, You can make immediate changes by learning to: Identify the causes of anger. Stop making excuses for anger. Avoid violence, blaming and threats. Stay calm for 24 hours, and then another 24 hours. Change anger provoking thoughts one day at a time.

Seligman, D. (2003) It's all the rage. Forbes, v172, p89.

This article describes the extent of growth of anger management therapy in today's society and examines the various reasons behind why the subject has become so acknowledged in recent times. Although growth is evident within this field, it seems that the therapy involved with pathological anger is not taken seriously by clinicians and researchers. Various related practitioner concerns are discussed.

