

Anger Management: A Primer

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ABSTRACT

Anger is a normal, healthy emotion, neither good nor bad. It is an emotion that we all feel at times. It may be regarded as among the strongest felt of our emotions, born mainly out of frustration or inability to deal with situations rationally. It becomes a problem when you express it in a way that harms yourself or others. Anger management is about recognizing the signs of anger, and learning to maintain control during an angering situation by dealing with your anger in a responsible manner. Managing anger can help your body and brain respond to stress in healthy and productive ways. Failing to manage your anger can lead to a variety of problems. If you have identified that there is a problem with the way that anger is being expressed, then counseling or therapy that focuses on managing anger in an appropriate way you should seriously consider. This paper is a primer on anger management.

KEYWORDS: *anger, anger management*

INTRODUCTION

All human beings experience anger from time to time. Everybody expresses it. Anger is normal, usually healthy, human emotion. We all have our boiling point, when we cannot take it anymore. You may be mentally and morally disciplined, but you are not above losing your temper. It is normal to feel angry from time to time. Anger, rage, and losing temper are all issues we all experience at some point in their lives. Even our Lord Jesus Christ was angry. There is a difference between normal anger and problem anger. Normal anger is “everyday anger,” which is not non-threatening or marked by serious hostility or dangerous behavior. Anger becomes a problem when it leads to aggression or violence. Anger is mostly identified and underlying factor for any type of criminal act or violence.

We experience a wide range of emotions such as happiness, hope, pride, anger, anxiety, guilt and compassion. Positive emotions such as happiness and hope help us to have a better sense of ourselves and have more positive interactions with others. Negative emotions tend to build up inside of us and are stored rather than released. Like other emotions, anger is

accompanied by physiological and biological changes. Anger is one of the most important and influential emotions in human life. Anger is a part of stress. Couples who have better coping skills can regulate their anger and verbal aggression during times of stress. Those without good coping skills do not do as well [1].

It is how we respond to and express anger that can cause a problem. When anger gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems at work, in your marital personal relationship, and in your overall quality of life. Some people really are more “hotheaded” than others are; they get angry more easily than the average person does. People who are easily angered generally have a low tolerance for frustration, inconvenience, or annoyance. This may be hereditary. People who are easily angered come from families that are disruptive, chaotic, and not skilled at emotional communications. Angry people often feel that they are morally right, that any blocking or changing of their plans is an unbearable [2].

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WHAT IS ANGER?

Anger is an emotion, just like love and sadness. It is a normal, usually healthy, human emotion. It is an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage. Like any emotion, it is conveying a message, telling you that a situation is upsetting, or unjust, or threatening and it is accompanied by physiological and biological changes. When you are angry, your heart rate and blood pressure go up. Anger can be caused by many events. You could be angry at a specific person (such as a coworker, child or spouse) or event (a traffic jam, a canceled flight, loss of job, etc.), or your anger could be caused by worrying about your personal problems.

Anger is a complex human emotion and a frequent reaction to frustration and maltreatment. All individuals have confronted with angry situations in their lives. It is an adaptive response to threats that can inspire powerful feelings and behaviors. These feelings allow humans to fight and to defend themselves when attacked. When faced with survival, a certain amount of anger is healthy and necessary. People would be angry in various ways and by different causes. What can make someone angry, would not make others angry. Anger is a prevalent and frequent emotion that usually been experienced when friends, family members, or coworkers cannot meet one's expectations and demands [3]. Figure 1 shows a person who is really angry [4], while Figure 2 shows couples who get mad with each other [5].

Not all anger is misplaced. Anger is a natural, adaptive response to threats. While a certain amount of anger, is necessary to our survival, we cannot physically lash out at every person that annoys us. There are laws and social norms that limit on how far our anger can take us [2].

WHAT CAUSES ANGER?

What is the source of your anger or irritation? The causes of anger vary from person to person and from situation to situation. Problems and responsibilities can weigh on you and make you feel angry. **Anger can be a symptom of another underlying health problem**, such as depression, trauma, or chronic stress. There are numerous potential triggers for us to get angry. Anger can be caused by events or triggers, which may be external or internal. External triggers of anger could be things like [6]:

- Being disrespected by someone in public.
- Losing money (or spending too much).
- Getting stuck in traffic.
- Waiting in line.
- Difficult co-worker(s).
- Being accused of things you did do.

Internal triggers could be things like [6]:

- Not getting enough sleep.
- Feeling hungry (hence the term "hangry").
- Dehydration
- Personal issues were unrelated to the issue you're facing.
- Past trauma.
- The desire for sex.
- Negative emotions (such as anxiety or depression).
- Worrying about what other people think about you.

It is expedient to identify what these triggers are. Some of these triggers are shown in Figure 3 [7].

EFFECTS OF ANGER

Anger becomes a problem only when it gets out of control and harms you or people around you. It is unhealthy for many reasons, including mental and physical illnesses. The vicious cycle of anger is shown in Figure 4 [8]. Chronic anger that flares up all the time or spirals out of control can have the following serious consequences for you [9]:

- *Physical health:* Misdirected or unexpressed anger can lead to poor cardiovascular health and/or heart disease. Constantly operating at high levels of stress and anger makes you more susceptible to heart disease, diabetes, a weakened immune system, insomnia, and high blood pressure.
- *Mental health:* When anger is suppressed, it often has negative consequences. This type of anger may cause hypertension and depression. Chronic anger consumes huge amounts of mental energy, and clouds your thinking, making it harder to concentrate or enjoy life. It can also lead to stress, depression, and other mental health problems.
- *Career:* Constructive criticism, creative differences, and heated debate can be healthy. But lashing out only alienates your colleagues, supervisors, or clients and erodes their respect. If you blow up at your place of work, co-workers, supervisors, and customers may develop a negative impression of you. Your career may suffer as a result.
- *Relationships:* When anger is misdirected, it can lead to poor decision making processes and affect your work and close relationships. Anger can cause lasting scars in the people you love most and get in the way of friendships and work relationships. Explosive anger makes it hard for others to trust you, speak honestly, or feel comfortable—and is especially damaging to children.

- **Behavior:** Some people often turn to or increase maladaptive behaviors in order to cope with anger. Some of these may include tobacco use, alcohol use, physical violence, verbal abuse, yelling, excessive risk taking, social isolation, etc. These behaviors can have significant negative consequences, not only for the person engaging in them, but also those around them. Substance use and abuse are often associated with anger. Many substance abuse and mental health clients are victims of traumatic life events, which, in turn, lead to substance use, anger, and violence.

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR ANGER

Anger management is one of the main domains of psychology which deals with any individual which is frequently excited with internal and external activating provocations. Managing anger can be challenging depending on how we handle it. Anger can be suppressed, and then converted or redirected. The aim is to suppress your anger and convert it into more constructive behavior. Unexpressed anger can create other problems. It can lead to pathological expressions of anger, getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them head-on. The goal of anger management is to reduce your emotional feelings caused by anger. You may not be able to get rid of things or avoid the people that enrage you, but you can learn to control your reactions. To stay in control of your anger, use the following anger management tips [10]:

- **Identify the Cause:** Identify what makes you angry. You need to understand what makes you angry, the things that raise feelings inside you that either make you angry. Be aware of your anger warning signs. Take stock of the things that trigger your anger, such as long lines, traffic jams, nasty humors, tiredness, unkind criticism, etc.
- **Relax:** Simple relaxation tools, such as taking some deep breaths, can help calm down angry feelings. Breathe in, breathe out. You may walk away for a while. Physical activity can help reduce stress that can cause you to become angry. Get enough sleep. Count to 20 before saying anything.
- **Change the way you think:** Angry people tend to curse, swear, or speak in highly colorful terms that reflect their inner thoughts. Make a plan, and check your progress along the way. Resolve to give it your best, but also not to punish yourself if an answer does not come right away.
- **Practice patience:** Wait if you do not need to respond to a situation right away. You can take a little time and evaluate that situation. After giving yourself some minutes to compose yourself, then restart the conversation if needed.
- **Slow down:** The skill you need to develop is to keep your cool and not rise to provocation. Buying some time can be fundamental in limiting an angry response. When you are in a heated discussion, slow down and think through your responses. Do not say the first thing that comes into your head, but think carefully about what you want to say. At the same time, listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take your time before answering. If you have no time for yourself to relax, you will be prone to extreme irritation and anger.
- **Listen to Music:** Listening to music and singing are soothing anger management activities for adults as well as young adults. Music can alleviate anxiety and suffering while also improving mental wellness. Encourage your child to listen to pleasant music.
- **Forgive Others:** Keep in mind that everyone makes mistakes. Try understanding and forgiving yourself and others when frustration or anger happens. Be willing to forgive those who have offended you. Resolving conflict is impossible if you are unwilling to forgive. God does not forgive those who refuse to forgive their fellow humans.
- **Confide in Someone:** Build trust with friends, coworkers, and family. Talk to someone you trust. Nothing eases stress more effectively than chatting face-to-face with a friend or loved one. The person does not have to provide answers; they just need to be a good listener. Simply venting your anger at someone will only fuel your temper and reinforce your anger problem.
- **Be assertive:** One key strategy for managing anger is to learn to be assertive. Being assertive means expressing your point of view in a clear way, without becoming aggressive.
- **Consult an Expert:** If you feel that your anger is really out of control and it is impacting your relationships, you may consider counseling to learn how to handle it better. Counseling can help you understand what is causing your anger and how to handle it. A psychologist or other licensed mental health professional can help you change your thinking and your behavior. Persons with alcohol or drug dependence, bipolar, psychotic, and personality disorders need the help of mental health practitioners. Helping people with anger management issues is often correlated to better management of other associated

symptoms such as depression, anxiety, trauma, sleep issues, self-esteem, and attention deficits.

Anger management strategies for children are illustrated in Figure 5 [7].

BENEFITS

Anger can motivate us. When properly managed, anger can help us make the positive changes we seek in our lives. What are the benefits of anger management? Here are some of the benefits you stand to gain from anger management [11]:

- Helps you recognize your duties as a person.
- You can learn how to hold back your anger and control your words or actions.
- It helps you to be socially aware.
- Anger management helps you acquire new understanding.
- It will give you an overall higher level of happiness.
- Anger management can boost your confidence and self-esteem.
- It can give you a healthy lifestyle.

In addition to benefits of anger, there are costs to anger and aggression. The costs are slower and longer. You do not notice them right away, but over the long run they are huge. They can last the rest of your life.

CONCLUSION

Anger is a fundamental human emotion that is experienced by all people. It is a normal, healthy emotion and reaction that can take many forms. It is part of our life. No one chooses to be angry. Anger is a reaction that is built into your nervous system. Anger management does not try to stop you from feeling angry. Instead, it is about learning how to express anger appropriately, and in a suitable setting. Anger management is a skill that everyone can develop. You can learn the skill on your own, with the help of self-help books and materials online, or by working with a licensed therapist [12]. You have more control over your anger than you think.

Anger is not a condition, but a symptom that your life is unbalanced. The good news is that help is available for anger management. You can manage anger well at home, at work, and in your most intimate relationships. More information about anger management can be found in the books in [13-25].

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Figure 3 Some triggers of anger [7].

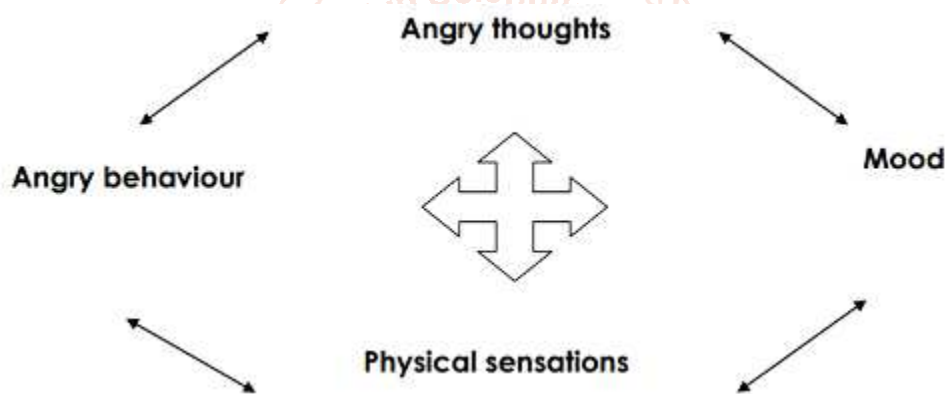


Figure 4 The vicious cycle of anger [8].

TEACHING KIDS ANGER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

by WholeHearted School Counseling

1. Walk away and cool down.
2. Take Steady Breaths and focus on exhaling slowly.
3. Count to 20 or more until you feel calmer.
4. Stretch or do yoga.
5. Use I-Statements ↳ say how you feel, what you need & how you want to be treated
6. Take a break and use a calming tool like a stress ball.
7. Exercise or play a sport.
8. Squeeze then relax your muscles.
9. Push against the wall or floor and then relax.
10. Scribble on paper or write about what's bugging you.

Figure 5 Anger management strategies for children [7].