

A BETTER WAY TO MANAGE YOUR ANGER

Unlike anxiety and depression, medicine has discovered no pill for treating anger. Yet among the negative emotions it is the most destructive, since anger can explode into abusive, violent behaviour. When someone is sent to anger management class, the results tend to be disappointing. Sometimes, in fact, letting the dragon out of its cave only makes the person's anger worse. There needs to be a better way.

The first step, when looking at your own anger, is to see how far it has gotten. There are stages of anger and even practical uses for it, so we can't talk about anger as if it is one thing. The following scale gives a rough idea of which kinds of anger are manageable and which aren't.

Manageable anger:

- You are a complainer and faultfinder.
- You use anger to intimidate people and get your way.
- You feel angry with yourself and your own shortcomings.
- You look out on a world filled with bad actors, where your anger seems to be justified.
- You use anger to stoke yourself in competitive situations--it's your motivator.

Unmanageable anger:

- Your anger is abusive and hurts people around you.
- You regularly feel road rage.
- Your anger overwhelms you and takes over from your rational mind.
- You are accustomed to crossing the line into physical violence.
- You feel enraged inside and don't know what to do about it.

Unmanageable anger is the kind that disturbs society and indicates mental disturbance beyond the scope of self-help, even well-intentioned help from friends and family. Professional intervention is required, with only guarded hope of success. The only optimistic side is that there are people with deep anger issues who seem to grow out of the more violent side of the problem. In any case, your focus should be on manageable anger, which is open to improvement using your own efforts.

The first step is wanting to get rid of your anger, and for many people, especially males, this isn't an easy step. Various subcultures pride themselves on being angry; it is seen as a sign that you are masculine, tough, competitive, and a fighter. This is all a form of outside conditioning, however. You will be motivated to deal with your anger once you wake up and see that it hurts you and the people around you. If you are tagged as an angry person, even at the low level of being seen as a complainer and fault-finder, you will be shut out of productive possibilities and potentially positive interactions. Being angry always comes with a price, so look around and see what price you are paying. The best way to assess the issue is to ask co-workers, friends, and family to give you their honest opinion.

The second step is to stop projecting your anger. Anger is quick to blame and criticise, and since there is always something that deserves criticism, the cycle of anger fuels itself. Therefore, you have handed over your power and control to it. By taking responsibility for anger as your own issue, irrespective of anything around you, you will be regaining the power and control you lost--this can be a good inducement to change.

The third step is to closely examine your excuses for being angry and 'fessing up to them. For most people, the two chief excuses are 1. "They deserve it when I get angry," where "they" are all the people you feel righteous about putting down, and 2. "I'm just an angry person." The first excuse is generally based on feeling bigger than other people because you can criticise them and get angry over their faults. The way past this excuse is to realise that you are responsible only for your life and no one else's. The second excuse is a blanket denial, beneath which the person feels helpless to change. The way past this excuse is to say, "I've been an angry person too long. I have the power to be different if I want to."

The fourth step is to catch yourself early enough in the anger cycle that you can nip it in the bud. Instead of letting your anger take over and only later feeling bad about it, a better tactic is to immediately leave the situation that is making you angry, finding a place where you can be alone, and letting off steam by yourself until you calm down again. Having calmed down, take a moment to notice how good it feels; reinforce the habit of being calm as a pleasurable state. This helps defuse the illusion that getting angry feels good (another common excuse).

If you can't walk away from a situation that angers you, don't bottle up your feelings, which will only build up inner pressure. Tell yourself that you will let out your anger as soon as it is feasible. Delay works, because the angry part of yourself gains reassurance that it won't be pushed down or ignored.

With these steps anger can be managed and changed by anyone who is motivated to change. Undertaking anger self-management indicates that you want to regain a sense of power, control, and self-esteem. These are valuable rewards that no amount of self-righteous anger can replace.

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