

WELLNESS TIPS

MANAGING ANGER CONSTRUCTIVELY

Anger, which can range from mild irritation to feelings of rage, is a normal emotion that we all experience. It is valuable in helping us recognize situations that are not desirable or acceptable. How someone expresses and acts on their anger can be constructive or problematic. When the response is direct and respectful, it can lead to problem resolution without hurting relationships. Outbursts and unrestrained venting can be damaging to relationships, as can passive aggressive expressions of anger. A pattern of suppressing anger can contribute to health problems.

Although you may not be able to control the situation you find yourself in, it is possible to control how you respond and express anger. Because anger is a normal emotion, the goal isn't to eliminate it but to express it in a way that is respectful of your needs and those of others.

INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR ANGER

Consider what's behind your anger. Anger can be a cover for other emotions which are not as easily recognized or expressed, such as embarrassment, feeling inadequate, anxiety, or feelings of vulnerability or hurt. It can also be a sign of a health problem such as substance abuse, depression, or a neurological condition.

Begin to recognize your early signs of anger. What physical sensations do you experience? This helps you tune in that you are becoming angry, giving you time to decide how to react to the situation. Is your stomach in knots? Are you beginning to clench your jaw?

In what kinds of situations do you become angry or overreact to seemingly minor situations? Identify possible triggers to your anger. This will allow you to adjust your environment to decrease predicted stressors or change how you think about a situation. For example, are you more irritable if you haven't eaten for several hours or short on sleep?

Is using anger how you may have learned to respond to difficult situations?

CHANGE HOW YOU RESPOND WHEN ANGRY

Take your time to respond to the situation. For example, taking several deep breaths or counting to 10 (or combining the two by alternating) can help you to decide the best way to respond.

If more time is needed before addressing or you need a break during an argument, consider taking a time-out or a walk. But first inform the other person of your intentions (to regroup and become calmer) and when you will return, so they won't assume you are avoiding or walking out.

Techniques for de-escalating anger include:

- Relaxation breathing techniques
- Progressive muscle relaxation exercises
- Mindfulness techniques
- Engaging in exercise or physical activity
- Activities to distract your attention
- Playing music
- Journal writing can be helpful in working through angry emotions and thoughts.

Talk with someone who is not involved to receive input and an outside perspective on the situation.

CONSTRUCTIVELY EXPRESS ANGER

Focus on finding a solution rather than focusing on your anger. Although there may be an impulse to aggressively express your anger, assertive communication focused on meeting your needs while respecting the other person is more likely to result in a mutually acceptable solution or compromise. Convey your message in a calm, clear, and direct manner. Take ownership of your perspective and choices for how you are expressing yourself by using "I" statements and describing the situation from your perspective. Avoid blaming the other person, who is not responsible for your responses. Avoid name-calling.

State what you would like to happen. What is your desired outcome? Is there an acceptable compromise?

Tune in to your thoughts to see if they are escalating your anger. This can occur with all-or-nothing and overgeneralizing types of thinking ("You always...", "you never...") These types of comments aren't accurate and contribute to the other person's feelings of defensiveness.

Avoid using sarcasm or harsh humor.

Pay attention to timing when you bring up an issue to discuss. For example, not shortly before bedtime or before a big test.

While it can take some time to make changes, it is well worth the effort, as anger not acknowledged or expressed in aggressive ways can damage personal and work relationships.

Consider seeking counseling if your anger seems out of control and is interfering with your goals or is damaging your relationships.

American Psychological Association. "Controlling Anger Before It Controls You." 2005.

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Healthline. "How to Control Anger: 25 Tips to Help you Stay Calm." Kimberly Holland. 2019.

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Mayo Clinic. "Anger Management: 10 Tips to Tame Your Temper." February 29, 2020.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/anger-management/art-20045434>

Medical News Today. "How Can I Control My Anger?" Adam Feldman. December 19, 2018.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/162035>

The MSCC Website has a section with past Wellness Tips. The Relaxation Exercises Tips lists several YouTube sites for relaxation exercises.

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Stay well and stay healthy!

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