

ANGER MANAGEMENT

Learning to Control that Out of Control Emotion



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INTRODUCTION

“Anyone can become angry - that is so easy. But to become angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not so easy.” - Aristotle

You’ve probably been in this situation more than once: you’re in your car on the highway and you’re enjoying the ride, the fresh air sweeping past your face, and the exhilarating sensation of speed. But then the pleasant feelings come to an end as traffic slows to a crawl, then a complete halt. You wait for a while, thinking that traffic will probably speed up soon, but it doesn’t.

What the...?

You tap your fingers on the steering wheel impatiently as seconds, then minutes tick by. Soon, someone (maybe it’s you) blows his horn stridently and eventually pretty much everyone is doing the same thing. Within an hour, you are leaning out your window, punching your fist in the air and yelling at no one, anyone, just so you can show how disgusted you are over this development. You are angry.

Everyone gets angry, you know that. Ah, but perhaps no one you know gets angry like you do. So you have to ask yourself, what can I do about it?

This book aims to help you find out just what you can do about anger – whether it be yours, a spouse’s, or a friend’s. It especially targets adults such as parents who may be caring for a family member (say, their teenager) who has problems controlling his or her anger. Though this book does not claim to have all the answers, it does attempt to be as comprehensive a resource on anger management as possible. So read on and may you be enlightened as to ways you can deal with problems with anger.

CHAPTER ONE: BEFORE MOVING FURTHER, DEFINITION OF ANGER

When we say we are angry, what does it mean? What is anger?

Psychologist Charles Spielberger, PhD, (a specialist in the study of anger) defines anger as an emotional state which ranges from mild irritation to extreme rage. If you were following the case I cited above, you can see the way this state progresses into full-blown road rage. It would be nice, if by blowing our top, it would end there. But it doesn't.

How many families have had to endure the after-effects of road rage, when the family breadwinner comes home ill-tempered and ready to lambast the first person who speaks to him? Perhaps you are that breadwinner or have a family member who is prone to such outbursts – at any rate, you will agree that it is highly unpleasant no matter who does it. You wish you could do away with it.

According to Carol and Richard Eustice, anger can fall into three categories: rage, resentment, and indignation.

Brutal and out of control Anger is classified as rage. As an external expression of the emotion, rage may produce a tangible and violent outburst. Road rage falls into this category.

When you feel anger against someone or something but do not express it, the anger is deemed to be resentment. This type of anger makes the angry person uncomfortable as the anger is suppressed yet not extinguished. This may end up harming the angry person physiologically and psychologically.

An acceptable kind of anger which is considered both controlled and positive is called indignation. With this type of anger, the angry person calmly expresses disappointment with the situation or person, but does not resort to angry outbursts nor does this person suppress the anger.

These 3 kinds of anger – rage, resentment, and indignation – may be experienced individually or in combination, depending on the circumstances present. When you understand what each kind of anger is, you may be able to better manage those situations that cause such feelings.

What are the Effects of Anger?

Most of the time, it is normal (even healthy) to experience this emotion. However, when you allow anger to take control of you, it becomes a destructive force which may eventually produce problems for you in your social life, at work, and for your quality of life.

If you find that you are becoming a person who is chronically angry, you will notice that people will tend to avoid you more. You become an unpleasant force to deal with and perhaps eventually no one will want to interact with you anymore.

But it is not all your fault – the types of feelings you have are often influenced by how people relate to you, not just by how you relate to others. As it says in this love song, “Love is a two-way street.” Well, so is anger, if you really think about it. If someone gets angry with you, your natural response is to become defensive. However, you have a choice as to how to express that kind of anger.

When you get angry, you will find yourself experiencing a range of physiological and biological changes. Your heart rate and blood pressure will increase. Your energy hormones (adrenaline and noradrenaline) will also shoot up. Your muscles become tense. You become short of breath and may get heart palpitations. Your senses are heightened (though sometimes they are dulled). Often, there is yelling; vigorous and larger-than-life body movement; and stiffness of posture.

In some people there may be constipation and even impotence. Other physical signs of anger are: contraction of pupils; higher levels of physical strength; quicker and more powerful speech and motion.

Psychological signs of anger are: sleeplessness, apathy, anxiety, depression, malaise, condemnation and judgmentalism of others, self-loathing, low self-esteem, insecurity, jealousy, envy, resentment or bitterness, passive-aggressive behavior, silence, irritation, and criticism. On the emotional side, when we become angry, we suffer afterwards from the feeling that we are guilty, failures, depressed, very agitated, and severely enraged. Some might attempt suicide. And of course, we know now that there is a direct link between people who are chronically angry and the onset of hypertension and heart disease in such people.

What Causes Anger?

Events which occur either within or outside ourselves may trigger an outburst of anger. In our example above, the anger we and others may have experienced was caused by an external event – a traffic jam. An internal trigger of anger could be a personal problem which we find hard to resolve. Or perhaps you were brooding over past events which had caused you to become angry before. External and internal events may occur in combination, thus making it harder to control our anger.

According to the cognitive behavior theory, anger may also be partly caused by behavior taught by other people, genetic predilections, and the absence of the capacity to solve problems. There are two factors at play here: people who tend towards anger may have an irrational view of reality (meaning, they think the world has to see things their way) and a low level of frustration (meaning, they either have to get what they want or nothing at all).

Angry people more often than not believe their response was caused by a person or event – it is rare for them to acknowledge that they became angry due to their irrational view of reality. This means that angry people perceive the world a certain way, with definite expectations of reality. When the reality of the real world kicks in and it does not match their perception and expectations, then they resort to anger.

When Do We Need to Be Angry?