



Managing Anger

Recognizing Anger

Question: Which of these statements show anger?

- I can't stand it when you chew your food like that.
- It drives me crazy when you tell me what to do.
- Now everything is completely ruined!
- That guy's looking at me. He must be looking for trouble. Fine, I'll give him some.
- She insulted me. I can't let her get away with that.

Answer: all of them could be.

Anger is not always apparent, so it is important to recognize when you're angry and to deal with it.

Dealing with Anger

Working through the things that make you angry takes practice. To manage anger more effectively, follow these steps:

1. Tune in to your body

Become more sharply aware of the physical signs of tension so you can stop the anger before it develops any further. Some body signals that indicate increasing anger are:

- tensing of muscles
- faster breathing
- a change in voice tone/volume
- sweating/feeling flush
- heart/head pounding

2. Calm Down

Many people think it's better to blow up or become enraged at others and "get the anger out." This is a harmful myth. Explosive outbursts of rage (loud arguing and fighting) do not release anger. They, in fact, make us more likely to become angrier or to "escalate."

Being able to stay in control when we notice ourselves getting angry is a powerful skill. Some common techniques people use to calm themselves are breathing deeply to relax, counting backwards, and visualizing a soothing scene.

3. Use Self-talk to See Things Differently

Learn to use a different kind of self-talk, the kind that will change your perspective. The exact same situation will produce different emotions if you change your interpretation and decide not to overreact. Some examples of anger-reducing self-talk are:

- Hold on now, I may not LIKE this, but I CAN stand it.
- Stop it! This won't drive me crazy—unless I LET it.
- Yeah, I'd LOVE to punch him...but I won't. Why should I cause myself trouble because of him?
- True, things aren't going how I planned, but getting enraged won't help. How can I still get something good out of this?
- Relax, I'm not sure what he's looking at, but it could be any number of things.

4. Consider and choose the best behavior options.

After you calm down (and can think more clearly), remind yourself that you have CHOICES of actions. Think about possible consequences, weigh the risks versus the gains, and choose a behavior that will work best for YOU in both the short and long term.

- Delay action or walk away. If you think you might get verbally or physically abusive, leave the situation and take time to cool down.
- Let it go and consider it a lesson learned.
- Seek help. Ask someone you respect to help you think things through. This gives you a different viewpoint and/or more information.
- Be assertive. Express yourself in a direct way that is respectful, yet clear about how you feel, ("disrespected," "angry," etc.) and about what you would like the other person to do differently. Be cautious about such directness if the person has power over you (e.g. a professor), and you think he or she may not be able to handle your comments.
- Release anger indirectly. (Choose this if you think direct expression of your anger will be ineffective, destructive, or dangerous.)
 - Do some vigorous physical exercise.
 - Write your angry thoughts and feelings in a letter, but don't send it.
 - Talk about how angry you are with a supportive friend.
 - Do something silly like draw an ugly picture of the person and throw rotten grapes at it.
- Plan how you can change. Once you accept that you can't change others, you can gain enormous power by changing yourself. (Others may decide to change themselves as a direct result of the changes you made, but this will be their decision, not yours.)

Changing yourself means making decisions and taking action to prevent the situation from happening again—whether or NOT the other person changes. Some examples of ways you can change yourself are:

- I will never again loan my car to other people. That way I won't get angry at their lack of responsibility.
- From now on, I will walk out of the room/house the moment he raises his voice or calls me a name I don't like. I don't have to let this happen again.
- She isn't reliable so I'll also invite others; that way the evening won't be ruined by her not showing up.

If you've tried these techniques, and you are still experiencing difficulties, talk to a counselor.