

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Putting Anger in its Place: Strategies for Understanding and Managing Anger

We all feel angry sometimes and most of us have at some time or another lost our tempers—which is really just another way of saying that we have lost control of our anger. If this happens on a frequent basis or is affecting your relationships and/or performance at work, it's time to take action.

Out-of-control anger will ultimately have negative affects not only on the people around you, but can also affect your health. In looking at the idea that anger may be a cause for concern in your life, you're taking an important first step on the road to better relationships.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Anger management begins with identifying the problem and possible causes, and then working on strategies to help express legitimate anger appropriately and manage unhealthy anger. For many, this includes anger that we may unknowingly be directing at ourselves. You don't have to struggle alone—there are many resources to help you. Here are some tips to get you started:

Dealing with Anger Constructively

Dealing with anger well involves communicating how you feel honestly and in a way that will not intentionally hurt the other person. This can include:

Develop a "time out" contract with yourself. Try the following as a useful strategy to get in touch with—and get beyond—your experience of anger:

1. **List the physical symptoms** you have when anger builds.
2. **List "hot thoughts"** you usually have such as, "I can't let him get away with this."
3. **Call time out with yourself.**
4. **Try deep breathing**—breathe in through your nose for eight seconds, and out through your mouth for sixteen seconds. Repeat several times.
5. **Change your thoughts**. "I'll show him!" becomes "What will best help me right now?" "He always does this to me," becomes "I'm the only one who can make a fool out of me."

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Be assertive. Although anger often has adverse consequences, anger can also be useful. There are times when it energizes us, causes us to take more action, and leads us to our being more assertive. Being assertive does not mean being a bully or being mean. Being assertive means expressing feelings and beliefs in helpful and honest ways.

If you decide to resolve a situation by talking it out, you may find the following guidelines useful:

- **Be prepared.** Consider rehearsing what you are going to say.
- **Choose a time.** Engage in discussion when you and the other person are feeling your best.
- **Consider having a third person present.** This can help keep everyone calm, and let everyone feel heard.
- **Describe your situation in a clear and objective way.** Bear in mind that "I" statements tend to be heard better than "you" statements and accusations. Don’t put your feelings on the other person’s shoulders; own your feelings.
- **Avoid judgment.** Do your best not to use words like "should" and "ought" and "must." These words only create barriers.
- **Stick to the point and be brief.** Try to avoid dumping all at once.
- **Let the other person know you are listening.** Nod, make friendly eye-contact or otherwise acknowledge that you’re hearing what they mean.
- **Use tact and humour.** Wherever possible, these are always helpful.
- **Be realistic in your expectations of a solution.** Not every issue can be resolved overnight.

Manage your anger. If it is not in your best interest to be assertive in a particular situation, the following tips may be helpful:

There are no stock solutions that can stop people from getting angry. And yet, with a little help and a good measure of determination, in time, anyone can learn to handle their anger constructively.

When There isn't a Happy Ending …

There are times that even when we use a positive approach that we may not get the results that we would like. Our efforts cannot always resolve a situation or restore a relationship. Although this may be disappointing, speaking our real feelings can give us the peace of mind that comes from acting true to our self and doing all that we could.

Getting Help with Letting Go

Anger is such a complex emotion that it really is very hard for anyone to deal with it alone. Sometimes just talking with someone can clear up a problem situation.

A professional will listen, and if you want, work with you to create a personal "game plan," then practice it with you. Your new game plan can help you develop new, more positive approaches to dealing with anger. Letting go of anger is a process. When we work through anger, our goal is to find other interpretations or conclusions so that our feelings of anger will have less of a hold on us.

- If you think you are going to lose your temper, withdraw from a volatile situation. Simply excuse yourself and ask if the discussion can be continued later. Take a break and go out for a walk or have a coffee. In other words, take time out to regain your composure.

- Deal with mild annoyances before they get out of hand. Unpleasant situations in the workplace are often caused by poor communication or misunderstanding. Ask for clarification to make sure that you have interpreted the person's remarks correctly. Remember that communication is a two-way process.

- Vent your anger. Get rid of those negative emotions through physical exercise. Rather than yelling at your spouse or children after an unpleasant day at work, try a game of tennis or handball or an activity or exercise that you enjoy and find helpful.

- Writing about the incident in a calm and cool manner will also help you to vent your anger. Moreover, it can help you to understand and evaluate the situation.