

what is anger?



Normal Anger

Anger is a normal human emotion. Everyone feels annoyed, frustrated, irritated, or even very angry from time to time. Anger can be expressed by shouting, yelling, or swearing, but in extreme cases it can escalate into physical aggression towards objects (eg. smashing things) or people (self or others). In some cases, anger might look much more subtle, more of a brooding, silent anger, or withdrawal.

In a controlled manner, some anger can be helpful, motivating us to make positive changes or take constructive action about something we feel is important. But when anger is very intense, or very frequent, then it can be harmful in many ways.

What Causes Anger?

Anger is often connected to some type of frustration—either things didn't turn out the way you planned, you didn't get something you wanted, or other people don't act the way you would like. Often poor communication and misunderstandings can trigger angry situations.

Anger usually goes hand-in-hand with other feelings too, such as sadness, shame, hurt, guilt, or fear. Many times people find it hard to express these feelings, so just the anger comes out.



Perhaps the anger is triggered by a particular situation, such as being caught in a traffic jam, or being treated rudely by someone else, or banging your thumb with a hammer while trying to hang a picture-hook.

Other times there is no obvious trigger—some people are more prone to anger than others. Sometimes men and women handle anger differently, but not always.

Problems Associated With Anger

Uncontrolled anger can cause problems in a wide range of areas of your life. It may cause conflicts with family, friends, or colleagues, and in extreme situations it can lead to problems with the law.

But some of the other problem effects of anger may be harder to spot. Often people who have a problem with anger feel guilty or disappointed with their behaviour, or suffer from low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression.



There are also physical side-effects of extreme or frequent anger, such as high blood pressure, and heart disease. Some studies suggest that angry people tend to drink more alcohol, which is associated with a wide range of health problems.

Do I Have a Problem with Anger?

Perhaps you have already identified that anger is a problem for you, or someone else has mentioned it to you. But if you are not sure whether anger is a problem for you, consider the following questions:

- Do you feel angry, irritated, or tense a lot of the time?
- Do you seem to get angry more easily or more often than others around you?
- Do you use alcohol or drugs to manage your anger?
- Do you sometimes become so angry that you break things, damage property, or become violent?
- Does it sometimes feel like your anger gets out of proportion to the situation that set you off?
- Is your anger leading to problems with relationships, such as with family, friends, or at work?
- Have you noticed that others close to you sometimes feel intimidated or frightened of you?
- Have others (family, friends, colleagues, health professionals) mentioned that anger might be a problem for you?
- Do you find that it takes you a long time to 'cool off' after you have become angry or irritated?
- Have you ended up in trouble with the law as a result of your anger, for example getting into fights?
- Do you find yourself worrying a lot about your anger, perhaps feeling anxious or depressed about it at times?
- Do you tend to take your frustration out on loved ones or people less powerful than you, rather than dealing with the situation that triggered your anger?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, it may be that anger is a problem for you. It may be that addressing your anger can allow you to live a much more positive and rewarding life.

How Can I Manage Anger Better?

You may have heard about 'anger management' and wondered what it involves. Anger management can be addressed in groups or through individual therapy, and there are also a lot of self-help resources available.

Anger management is not just about counting to ten before you respond (although that is often a good idea). It is about helping you to better understand why you get angry, what sets it off and what are the early warning signs, and about learning a variety of strategies for managing those feelings more constructively.

You may wish to read through our 'Anger Coping Strategies' handout for more information about this.

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