

Anger Management and Control

Anger is a completely natural human emotion. We all feel anger at something or someone. But when anger gets out of control and turns into destructive behavior, it can lead to problems at work, school, in personal relationships and in the quality of life for the individual and those around him/her.

Anger can be triggered by a number of things. A person may become angry at a specific person (such as a co-worker) or at an event (like a traffic jam). Sometimes even memories of traumatic events can raise feelings of anger. Physiological and biological changes accompany anger. When anger is triggered, the face flushes and heart rate and blood pressure both increase.

We can't avoid feeling angry at things, but learning how to express anger in healthy and acceptable ways is important. Burying feelings of anger can result in passive-aggressive behavior (getting back at people indirectly rather than confronting them head on). It can also lead to a perpetually cynical or hostile personality. Many individuals who don't outwardly show their anger can appear to be constantly withdrawn, sulking or bitter. It can also lead to depression.

Anger cannot just go away, but individuals can learn to express, manage and control their feelings and emotions. The three main approaches are **expressing, suppressing and calming**.

Expressing

To express feelings of anger, the thought process needs to shift from aggressive behavior to assertive behavior. There is a difference and it starts with learning how to make clear what your needs are and how to obtain them without hurting others. Being assertive does not mean being pushy or demanding. It means being respectful of yourself and others.

Suppressing

To suppress anger is to take a moment to hold it in, stop thinking about the issue at hand and focus on something positive. The goal is to suppress your anger and convert it into constructive behavior rather than destructive behavior. After a "cooling off" period, then the issue that caused the anger can be **expressed** clearly, thoughtfully and respectfully. The point is to get to an emotionally level time when the issue can be brought up and a talking (not yelling) conversation can take place. Don't turn all the anger inward and brush it away. This is not healthy, nor productive. Wait until you have control of your emotions and then proceed.

Calming

When feelings of anger are building, it's important to focus on calming yourself down inside. This means not only controlling outward behavior, but also controlling inward responses. Breathe slowly in order to lower your heart rate. Focus on a peaceful object in nature or count to 10, 20 or 30! Learn to be aware of what is happening to you physically when you are angry.

TIPS FOR CONTROLLING ANGER

Relaxation Techniques

- Breathe deeply
- Slowly repeat a word or phrase such as "relax" or "take it easy". Take deep breaths in between.
- Visualize a relaxing experience.
- Try non-strenuous, yoga-like exercises to relax your mind and calm you

Change the Way You Think

- Replace your angry thoughts with more rational ones. Instead of telling yourself “Oh it’s awful, it’s terrible”, tell yourself “It’s frustrating and I’m upset, but it’s not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix this problem anyhow”.
- Be careful when using words like “never” or “always”. Nothing is “never” or “always”.
- Logic defeats anger. Remind yourself that the world is not out to get you and that you are only experiencing a rough spot in your life. This will help you gain a more balanced perspective on the situation.

DO YOU- OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW - NEED COUNSELING?

If you believe that anger is out of control and affecting relationships in either yourself or someone you care about, you should consider seeking counseling with a qualified, licensed therapist. The therapist can work with all involved to develop a variety of techniques for changing thinking and behavior patterns. With counseling, a highly angry person can move closer to a middle range of anger in 8 to 10 weeks.

Remember, you cannot eliminate anger. Life will always be filled with frustration, pain, loss and the unpredictable actions of others. You cannot change that. But you can change the way you let such events affect you.

If you would like help or have questions about anger management, please call Lutheran Counseling and Family Services of Wisconsin at 414-536-8333 or 1-800-291-4513.