



Managing Your Anger

Everybody feels angry sometimes. Anger is a natural emotional reaction. It can be useful in motivating us to take positive action, or can destructively fly out of control, causing harm to ourselves and others. If your anger is triggered frequently, or in situations where it isn't warranted, then you might have a problem with anger management. Learning to recognize and express anger in a healthy way can make a big difference in your life.

Hello, my name is Stephen Miller. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and an Instructor of Anger Management classes at Kaiser Permanente. I invite you to join me for a few minutes as we take a look at the causes and costs of anger, and what you can do to control it.

When you become angry, your body instinctively prepares for “fight-or-flight” as a response to perceived threat or danger.

Adrenaline is released into your bloodstream, your heart pumps faster, and your muscles tense.

To illustrate this, let's take a common scenario that sparks anger, or even rage. Picture this, you're driving on the freeway with your family when someone starts tailgating you, then passes and suddenly cuts you off.

Your “fight-or-flight” response takes hold. Adrenaline shoots through your body, and you quickly go from feeling fear...to irritation...to rage.

You grip the steering wheel and yell, “That ###!% @##! What does he think he is? What is he doing? I'm going to...” and you speed down the freeway, further endangering yourself and your family, and others on the road.

We learn how to express anger by watching the people around us as we grow up. These angry behaviors may become habits, even if they are destructive, in part because they have short-term pay-offs.

Pay-offs can include the temporary satisfaction of revenge, a quick release of built-up tension and stress, and an unrealistic sense of power and control.

Possibly the most important payoff is that angry outbursts can distract and defend you from uncomfortable feelings hidden below the surface of your anger. These may include the pain of feeling hurt, sadness, fear, helplessness, frustration, or shame.

In our scenario, our driver on the freeway may be feeling fearful for the safety of himself and his family, and helpless to control the situation. His anger is in part a cover-up!

Unfortunately, the short-term “payoffs” of angry outbursts are often eventually overshadowed by long-term consequences.

And the survival mechanism of a fight-or-flight reaction which is continually stimulated can backfire, causing serious negative physical and mental health consequences. Let's take a look at some of the many costs of anger.

Physical health consequences include high blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks, digestive disorders, headaches and a host of other medical problems.

Mental health consequences can include substance abuse, anxiety and depression.

Angry confrontations can have the effect of pushing people away, and can jeopardize relationships with family, friends and people at work, causing isolation and loneliness.

Anger can cost you in terms of how you feel about yourself as well.

In the heat of the moment, you may say or do things that perhaps are not part of your sense of ethics or moral code.

You may later have regrets, and feel embarrassed or ashamed.

Furthermore, anger can impact your pocketbook. Monetary costs might include legal fees, repairing things that you have broken, or even your job.

And finally, anger resulting in violence and abuse can lead to injuries to yourself and others, and even land you in jail! Ultimately, aggression can literally become a matter of life or death.

Knowing what is at stake makes it clear how important it is to manage anger. This can be a balancing act: "venting" anger can fuel it - rather than cause it to go away.

Likewise, suppressing anger and keeping it from coming to the surface is not a healthy alternative; it may then smolder and eventually cause health problems like the ones I mentioned earlier, or explode and blow-up in our face.

Some people attempt to suppress their anger by using drugs and alcohol, but this too, often has negative consequences.

Anger is inevitable -- many situations provoke it, but there are ways to keep it in check.

First and foremost, if you notice yourself getting extremely hot under the collar, a "time-out" or cooling-off period can get you away from the provocative situation, and give you the distance you need to calm yourself down and avoid an explosion.

Anger can be understood as being ignited by a combination of stress and thoughts that trigger anger.

Therefore, an important step towards getting your anger under control is to reduce the high levels of stress in your life. For many people, the most successful and easiest technique for managing stress is to take slow, deep breaths when anger rises. This simple practice can make all the difference in the world. Other effective tools for reducing stress include: exercising; talking with a trusted friend; being assertive; and maintaining a sense of humor.

Stress alone however, is not enough to ignite fiery anger. It is often what we *think* about a situation that causes us to become angry.

The thoughts that set-off or “trigger” anger may be unconscious, and may not be accurate. These trigger thoughts are often based on interpretations or assumptions about a situation or a person’s intentions. They can lead us to feeling victimized and blame others.

Statements like: “He made me mad,” may “justify” our anger, but they also give away our power. We make *ourselves* “mad” with our trigger thoughts.

When we change our trigger thoughts, we take back control of our anger.

This involves however, becoming aware of what our trigger thoughts are, examining them, and consciously choosing to replace them with more calming, constructive and rational thinking.

For example, our freeway driver could take a deep breath, and say to himself, “That was scary! I’ll move over and get out of his way, and keep my family safe.

In the Kaiser Permanente Anger Management classes, we offer many tools and techniques to help people control their anger.

At the end of this presentation, we will offer you a list of resources including the Kaiser Permanente website and others where you can learn more about the topic of Anger Management, and find out how to contact your local Health Education or Wellness Center. Sometimes inappropriate anger is because of a psychiatric disorder, if you think this may be true for you feel free to contact your local Kaiser Permanente Psychiatry or Mental Health Clinic.

Thank you for spending your time with me.

Remember, you are not alone in dealing with the complex emotion of anger.

You can learn how to recognize your anger before it gets out of control, how to intervene to reduce its costs, and how to choose healthy and constructive ways to express yourself and your needs. Anger management skills can keep you safe and in the driver’s seat.

RESOURCES

Websites and Hotlines:

Kaiser Permanente,
<http://www.members.kp.org>

The American Psychological Association
www.APA.org

When Anger Hurts
By Matthew McKay and Peter Rogers
New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
2nd Edition, 2003

The Anger Control Workbook
By Matthew McKay and Peter Rogers
New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
2000

Credits, Multimedia

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