

ANGER MANAGEMENT RESOURCE PACKET

UNDERSTANDING ANGER: CAUSE AND EFFECT

Anger is an emotional cue which reminds us what we like and what we don't like. Although many of us were taught as children to stifle our anger, it's, in fact, perfectly natural. Anger can have many causes, but its effects depend on your ability to manage it. Learn to understand anger, the effects of denial and blame-placing, and the positive results that can come from accepting your own anger.

CAUSES

You cut yourself shaving. You burned the toast. You can't find the keys. Now the car won't start and you'll be late for work. No one did these things to you. They just happened. If you ask others, you'll find that such "disasters" are quite common and that they make almost everyone angry. We feel anger when we sense we've lost control, or when we feel vulnerable or afraid. We all have these feelings sometimes, and some of us are more easily irritated and annoyed than others.

DENYING ANGER

Many times we want to deny that we're angry because we're not in the habit of admitting it, or anger doesn't seem rational to us, or we're embarrassed by our lack of control. All humans feel anger, whether it's expressed. Thus, by denying anger, you deny that you're human.

BLAME-PLACING

Sometimes we want to blame others for our anger, even if it seems unjust. Some people do this regularly as a habit. People generally don't like to be around blame-placers, because they never know if they're going to be next in line to be blamed for something.

ACCEPTING ANGER

By recognizing and accepting your own anger, you're on the road to controlling it and releasing it responsibly. Acknowledging what makes you angry, instead of denying anger or placing blame, leads to self-understanding. Once you can identify common situations, you can change them, deal with them responsibly or make a conscious choice to ignore them. You can then reap the benefits of what this emotion tells us.

Claremont distributes this information to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and personal matters.

For confidential help with anger management or other issues, call: 800-834-3773

or

visit www.claremonteap.com

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR ANGER

Think back to the last time you were angry, really angry. Did you fume silently, imagining revenge against the person who upset you? Or did you explode, sending everyone scurrying out of the room? Whatever your response to anger, your body reacted the same way: stress hormones surged, your heart rate and breathing speeded up, and your blood pressure rose.

This fight-or-flight response is automatic. It is the body's way of providing the strength to deal with dangerous situations. The problem is, the things that make us angry these days are rarely dangerous. Traffic jams, long lines and difficult coworkers require patience and good humor, not physical strength. Yet whenever your brain signals anger, your body reacts. And over time, all that heart-pounding turmoil can take a toll on your health in the form of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.

Anger can be a confusing emotion -- it's not easy to know how to handle it. Virginia Williams, Ph.D., coauthor of "Anger Kills" (HarperCollins, 1993) and president of Williams LifeSkills in Durham, N.C., offers advice on how to manage anger.

Channeling the force

It's impossible, of course, to never get angry. Anger is a normal, natural feeling. And despite its bad rap, anger can be a good thing. It can prompt us to speak out against unfairness or mistreatment. The trick is knowing how and when to effectively express this emotion.

"Anger can be our friend or our enemy. It depends on why we get angry and what we do with those feelings," says Dr. Williams. "When you're angry, it's important to look at the situation and decide whether or not you should take action. It's not effective to blow up at everything that makes you angry -- or to do the opposite and accept everything."

In the heat of the moment, how do you decide if your anger will help, hurt or do nothing for the situation? Dr. Williams suggests immediately asking yourself these four questions:

- Is this truly important to me?
- When I look at the facts, is my anger appropriate?
- Can I change this situation?
- Is it worth it to take action?

Four "yes" answers means you need to do some problem solving.

"Stay focused on what you want," advises Dr. Williams. "Do you want to blow up -- or do you want to change the situation?" A helpful approach is to use "I" statements to review the facts, explain how you feel, and make a specific request. For example, if a coworker failed to give you an important report, you might say something like this: "You promised that I would have the report Tuesday. It's two days late. I feel concerned because I don't have the information I need for my report. Would you please have your report to me by the end of the day?"

You can use this model to assertively express your feelings in many situations.

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When to chill out

If you answered no to any of the four questions above, then it's time to let your anger go. Here are some mellowing strategies.

- Think it through. "Stop for a moment," suggests Dr. Williams. "Ask yourself why you're letting this get to you." A few slow, deep breaths may also help you relax.
- Stop your thoughts. Silently tell yourself "Stop!" when you find yourself stewing. If you're alone, say it out loud. Repeat this often enough and your mind will obey.
- Distract yourself. Recall a pleasant memory -- a great vacation, a funny story, a loved one's smile. Or busy yourself with another activity, such as reading or gardening.
- Exercise. A brisk walk or any other exercise will lower your stress and make you feel stronger and healthier.
- Meditate. Dr. Williams calls this the most powerful strategy for helping to reduce anger. She recommends practicing every day for 10 minutes. Meditation allows you to take a mental time-out, so you can calm down.

To try meditation, find a quiet spot to sit. Focus your attention on slowly breathing in and out. As you breathe in, think of a relaxing word, such as "Calm" or "Peace." With practice, you can use this technique whenever you feel yourself getting angry.

Healthy habits to reduce stress

In addition to learning how to manage anger, the following healthy lifestyle changes can help reduce anger.

- Cut down or eliminate caffeine in your diet. If you smoke, work on quitting. Nicotine and caffeine can intensify stress and anger.
- Identify what triggers your anger and, if you can, avoid that situation or person.
- Find activities or hobbies that give you pleasure and participate in them often.
- See a counselor for confidential support through Claremont EAP.
- Reach out to friends and family. Explain that you're working on managing your anger, and ask for their support. Their encouragement will reinforce your efforts.

Anger report

Studies show that people who repeatedly become angry over everyday stresses are setting themselves up for health problems. Chronic anger increases your risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. And it's not just people who loudly express their hostility who are at risk. Bottling up or denying your anger can also cause heart disease and problems such as stomachaches, headaches, anxiety and depression. There is evidence that short-fused folks tend to calm themselves in unhealthy ways, such as overeating, smoking and drinking alcohol.

No excuse for abuse

If you or your spouse/partner resorts to hitting, shoving or slapping when expressing anger, you need extra help. "When anger reaches the point of abuse, that's a signal that there are other deep-seated problems that need to be addressed," says Dr. Williams.

Abusers -- and their victims -- need professional counseling. Claremont EAP, your doctor, a local social services agency or a religious organization can help you find a mental health professional or agency in your area. You can also visit the National Domestic Violence Hotline Web site at <http://www.ndvh.org/>.

HOW TO DEAL WITH ANGER AT WORK

Has anger ever caused trouble in your workplace? In a typical work setting, many people must cooperate to meet a deadline. They may work in close physical contact, perhaps without enough equipment or staff members to easily handle the workload. In such situations, anger can flare up from time to time. When people are angry they're more likely to forget safety precautions, cause or have accidents, make mistakes in their work, and not get as much done.

In order to deal with anger it helps to recognize it. Anger usually takes one of two forms:

- **Suppressed anger.** Because many people have been taught since childhood that it's not appropriate to show anger, a common response to anger is to deny or suppress it. The angry person may withdraw, giving others the silent treatment and refusing to talk about the problem. This kind of smoldering anger interferes with work and can raise the stress level for everyone. People with suppressed anger may find an indirect outlet for their feelings by gossiping about others or sabotaging a project. It's a mistake to try to ignore such anger in yourself or in others.
- **Explosive anger.** Some people deal with the discomfort of anger by blowing up or blaming others. Attention is focused on blaming and punishing, rather than on finding a solution. It's easy to react to these people with even more anger.

Getting to the Cause of Anger

Anger is a normal response to stress and can lead to positive results. The first step is to acknowledge the anger. By recognizing anger in yourself and others, you can begin to understand its cause and what to do about it. Give yourself some time to cool off, then be sure of the cause. Are you looking for someone to blame because you burned the toast or cut yourself shaving before work? Or do you have a legitimate gripe with a coworker, one that needs to be talked out.

Act Positively

Once you've cooled off, express your anger to the appropriate person and work with that person to solve the problem. Be sure to stick to the subject, addressing your own feelings rather than attacking the individual. Here are two possible responses to a coworker who was late to an important meeting: "You're never on time! Why can't you be more organized?" or "I'm angry. I missed a deadline because you were late. How can we keep this from happening again?" Which response do you think might get better results?

Sometimes there's nothing that you can do about the situation that's causing your anger. When this happens, talk about your feelings with a supervisor or trusted friend and decide how to deal with the situation. Even if you end up making a decision to live with it, you'll probably feel more in control, having made that decision consciously.

When Others Get Angry

When you see suppressed or explosive anger in another person, avoid reacting to that person's anger with more anger. Remember that listening carefully and acknowledging the person's feelings go a long way toward defusing their anger. This may be all the person needs to start dealing with the anger effectively.