

When Anger Causes Problems

All of us get angry. It is a normal and healthy human emotion. Anger tells us something is wrong, and we need to fix it. Anger can give us energy and motivation to right a wrong, solve a problem and find a solution. Anger can also be a destructive force that hurts relationships, ruins health and shatters peace of mind. When anger is habitual, uncontrolled and chronic, it can destroy the love in our homes.

While we may have legitimate reasons for feeling angry, how we handle this strong emotion will determine whether we have a positive or negative outcome. Learning to handle anger in positive ways is a life-long challenge for most of us. These three strategies are key in managing anger positively:

- * Recognize Early Warning Signs of Anger
- * Use Calming Techniques
- * Solve the Problem

Early Warning Signs

Losing your temper is like climbing a ladder. With each rung, you get farther from having your feet on the ground, and are more likely to have a dangerous accident. When anger escalates out of control, you and others do things you later regret.

You may not remember what you said or did while in a rage, but the people around you always will. If you recognize early signs of anger while you are still on the ground, you can avoid escalating your anger and climbing the anger ladder. Typical warning signs of anger include:

- * Tense muscles
- * Gritting teeth
- * Flushed face
- * Clenched hands
- * Raised voice

Calm Down

It's time to slow down when you recognize your Something made you angry and if you don't address the problem, you will continue to get angry. You can count to ten all day, but if no changes are made, you will still be mad. But please, remember we make ourselves angry. It

first early warning sign. If you have already climbed to the top of the anger ladder, it is too late. Take three deep breaths. This will help your body relax. Your mother was right—counting to ten really helps. Sometimes you need to count to 20. Avoid expressing your anger aloud. This will usually make you angrier. Instead say things to yourself like:

- * Calm down and think!
- * Don't jump in the gutter.
- * Take a chill pill!
- * Don't lose it!
- * I'm not going to lose my temper.
- * Is this really so important? Will it matter next year?

These are examples of de-escalating thoughts that can reduce anger. Escalating thoughts however, make us angrier. Most of us recognize them. They include thoughts like, "She did this on purpose to make me mad!" or, "He never helps--he always expects me to do it!" or "Stupid so-and-so." Most of us have favorite escalating thoughts. Sometimes, we even say them aloud! This is bound to escalate an argument and now two people teeter on top of the anger ladder. If you can keep quiet, you won't say something hurtful you will later regret.

Another important way to calm anger is physical exercise. Take a brisk walk. Clean house. Pull weeds. When we get angry, our bodies produce energy we can put to good use. Other people calm down by listening to soothing music, taking a bath or meditating.

Prevention is the most important anger management tool. It is easier not to allow anger to get out of control, than to pull it back once it is unleashed and causing damage.

Solve the Problem

isn't really the boss, or the wife or the husband or the kids. We are in control of how we handle our anger, and no one else can do it for us.

Solve the problem, or at least change the way you look at the problem. When you are calm, say what is on your mind in a polite, respectful and direct way. "I don't like it when you mess up the kitchen. Please put the dishes in the dishwasher."

Tell how you feel. Others will show more understanding for us if we share our feelings about why we are angry. "I was really frightened when you didn't come home on time."

Avoid putdowns. Try not to accuse others, or place blame. It will escalate an argument.

Show respect. Even if you are mad, do not shame or ridicule others. Insults will not solve problems or gain cooperation. "I understand how you might feel, even though I don't agree with you."

Stop controlling. Other people will not always do things the way we think they should. We should not expect everyone to do what we want. Concentrate on controlling your own behavior instead of others.

Forgive. Drop resentments. Do it for yourself. It will take time, but it will ease anger.

For more information on anger:

"Angry All the Time" by Ron Potter-Effron (1994)
New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Oakland Ca.

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