Eight Tips for Managing Anger

Expressed appropriately, anger is a healthy emotion. However, many people handle anger by either suppressing it too much or expressing it in a hostile manner. If you grew up in a family where it wasn’t “nice” to get angry or where anger was used to control other family members, any sign of antagonism is likely to make you apprehensive. You may fear losing control if you get angry, so it becomes difficult to express anger constructively. This dangerous pattern can lead to such health problems as headaches, hypertension, gastrointestinal issues, anxiety or depression. Expressing anger explosively is at the opposite end of the spectrum. Blowing up or blaming others is counter-productive in finding a solution to the problem.

Expressing yourself in an assertive, but non-aggressive, manner is the healthiest approach to handling anger. Learning to state your concerns and needs clearly and directly, without hurting others or exerting power over them, should be your goal. Uncontrolled anger is a learned behavior which needs to be changed. For help in this area, consult an EAP counselor for assistance. Meanwhile, the following tips should help.

- **Take a “time out.”** Although it sounds simplistic, counting to ten or removing yourself from the room goes a long way toward restoring peace. Calm yourself by deep breathing and positive self-statements.
- **Use relaxation techniques.** Breathe deeply and rhythmically while relaxing your muscles, one group at a time, and visualizing a pleasant scene.
- **Repeat calming self-statements.** Reiterate helpful phrases to yourself such as: “Stay calm,” “I am annoyed, but I can handle this,” or “I do not have to let this bother me.”
- **Get some aerobic exercise.** Go for a quick walk or bike ride. Shoot baskets or lift weights.
- **Use humor to release tension.** Think of a funny joke or story. Imagine yourself or the person you are angry with in a silly situation.
- **Keep an anger log.** Identify the kinds of situations that trigger anger and record your reactions.
- **Talk with a sympathetic friend, spouse, health care provider or therapist.** Being able to share your frustrations can help to defuse anger. Actually saying, “I am furious” or “I’m so mad I could….” will help. Don’t expect your listener to solve the problem, but consider yourself lucky to have someone who lets you vent.
- **Forgive the other person.** Recognize that it’s unrealistic to expect everyone to behave exactly as you wish. Visualize releasing the anger and feeling calm.

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