



Anger...

Anger is a normal process that has allowed humans to evolve and adapt. It isn't a bad thing in itself, but problems occur if it isn't managed in the right way.

Understanding anger

Anger is a mixture of both emotional and physical changes. A big surge of energy goes through your body as chemicals, such as adrenaline, are released.

Once the cause of the anger is resolved, you may still have to deal with the physical effects – all that energy has to go somewhere. This can be taken out on another person, such as a partner, or an object – by punching a wall, for example. This last option can lead down the road to self-harm.

The other alternative is to suppress the energy until the next time you're angry. This may mean you release so much pent-up emotion that you overreact to the situation.

On the other hand, just letting your anger go in an uncontrolled fashion can lead to a move from verbal aggression to physical abuse.

Recognising why you get angry

It's important to be aware of the positive feelings you get from anger as well as the negative ones, and finding ways of concentrating on the positives ones.

Each person's positives are different, so there will be different solutions for everyone, but some strategies might include:

- Trying a non-contact competitive sport

- Learning relaxation or meditation
- Going running

Any of these may help to vent your frustration and burn off any feelings you're bottling up.

Dealing with flashpoints

However, this still leaves the problem of dealing differently with those situations that make you angry. This takes practice. The first thing to do is list the situations that make you angry. Note down exactly what it is about them that makes you angry – it may be the immediate situation, or it could be that it represents a build-up of issues you haven't resolved.

Now ask yourself four questions about your interpretation of these situations:

- What evidence is there to show this is accurate?
- Is there another equally believable interpretation of what's going on here?
- What action can I take to have some control of the situation?
- If my best friend were in this situation, what advice would I give to them?

This won't dispel the anger for every situation, but when you're angry it can be difficult to assess a situation accurately. If a situation arises unexpectedly and you feel your temper rising, walk away and complete this exercise if you can.

How to deal with anger

Relaxation

Simple relaxation tools, such as deep breathing and relaxing imagery, can help calm down angry feelings. There are books and courses that can teach you relaxation techniques. Ask your Atrium counsellor for recommended reading. If you are involved in a relationship where both partners are hot-tempered, it might be a good idea for both of you to learn these techniques.

Change the way you think

Angry people tend to curse, swear, or speak in highly colourful terms that reflect their inner thoughts. When you're angry, your thinking can get very exaggerated and overly dramatic. Try replacing these thoughts with more rational ones. For instance, instead of telling yourself, "Oh, it's awful, it's terrible, everything's ruined," tell yourself, "It's frustrating, and it's understandable that I'm upset about it, but it's not the end of the world."

Remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything, that it won't make you feel better (and may actually make you feel worse).

Problem Solving

Sometimes, our anger and frustration are caused by very real and inescapable problems in our lives. Not all anger is misplaced, and often it's a healthy, natural response to these difficulties. There is also a cultural belief that every problem has a solution, and it adds to our frustration to find out that this isn't always the case. The best attitude to bring to such a situation, then, is not

to focus on finding the solution, but rather on how you handle and face the problem.

Make a plan, and check your progress along the way. Resolve to give it your best, but also not to punish yourself if an answer doesn't come right away.

Better Communication

Angry people tend to jump to – and act on – conclusions, and some of those conclusions can be very inaccurate. If you're in a heated discussion, don't say the first thing that comes into your head. Slow down and think carefully about what you want to say. At the same time, listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take your time before answering.

It's natural to get defensive when you're criticised, but don't fight back. Instead, listen to what's underlying the words. It may take a lot of patient questioning on your part, and it may require some breathing space, but don't let your anger – or another's – let a discussion spin out of control. Keeping your cool can keep the situation from becoming a disastrous one.

Counselling

If you feel that your anger is really out of control, if it is having an impact on your relationships and on important parts of your life, you might consider counselling to learn how to handle it better. Atrium counsellors can work with you in developing a range of techniques for changing your thinking and your behaviour.

For more help or information, visit your GP or contact:

Atrium Clinic and Therapy Centre
13 Weston Road, Southend
01702 342 256
www.atriumclinic.co.uk

For more background reading:

Mental Health Foundation
020 780 31101
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

All enquiries are dealt with compassionately, efficiently and in the strictest confidence.

A GP referral is not essential for self-funding patients

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