

Anger Management

Tips and Techniques for Getting Anger Under Control



Anger is a normal, healthy emotion. But it's unhealthy when it flares up all the time or spirals out of control. Chronic, explosive anger has serious consequences for your relationships, your health, and your state of mind. The good news is that getting anger under control is easier than you think. With insight about the real reasons for your anger and these anger management tools, you can learn to keep your temper from hijacking your life.

Why is anger something you need to control but not crush?

The emotion of anger is neither good nor bad. Like any emotion, it's conveying a message, telling you that a situation is upsetting, or unjust, or threatening. If your kneejerk reaction to anger is to explode, however, that message never has a chance to be conveyed. So, while it's perfectly normal to feel angry when you've been mistreated or wronged, anger becomes a problem when you express it in a way that harms yourself or others.

If you have a hot temper, you may feel like it's out of your hands and there's little you can do to tame the beast. But you have more control over your anger than you think. You *can* learn to express your emotions without hurting others.

Myths and facts about anger

Myth: I shouldn't "hold in" my anger. It's healthy to vent and let it out.

Fact: While it's true that suppressing and ignoring anger is unhealthy, venting is no better. Anger is not something you have to "let out" in an aggressive way in order to avoid blowing up. In fact, outbursts and tirades only fuel the fire and reinforce your anger problem.

Myths and facts about anger

Myth: Anger, aggression, and intimidation help me earn respect and get what I want.

Fact: Respect doesn't come from bullying others. People may be afraid of you, but they won't respect you if you can't control yourself or handle opposing viewpoints. Others will be more willing to listen to you and accommodate your needs if you communicate in a respectful way.

Myth: I can't help myself. Anger isn't something you can control.

Fact: You can't always control the situation you're in or how it makes you feel, but you can control how you express your anger. And you can communicate your feelings without being verbally or physically abusive. Even if someone is pushing your buttons, you always have a choice about how to respond.

How anger management can help you

You might think that venting your anger is healthy, that the people around you are too sensitive, that your anger is justified, or that you need to show your fury to get respect. But the truth is that anger is much more likely to damage your relationships, impair your judgment, get in the way of success, and have a negative impact on the way people see you. That's where anger management comes in.

The goal of anger management

Many people think that anger management is about learning to suppress your anger. But never getting angry is not a healthy goal. Anger is normal, and it will come out regardless of how hard you try to tamp it down. The true goal of anger management isn't to suppress feelings of anger, but rather to understand the message behind the emotion and express it in a healthy way without losing control. When you do, you'll not only feel better, you'll also be more likely to get your needs met, be better able to manage conflict in your life, and strengthen your relationships.

Mastering the art of anger management takes work, but the more you practice, the easier it will get. And the payoff is huge. Learning to control your anger and express it appropriately will help you build better relationships, achieve your goals, and lead a healthier, more satisfying life.

The consequences of out-of-control anger

- **Out-of-control anger hurts your physical health.** Constantly operating at high levels of stress and anger makes you more susceptible to heart disease, diabetes, a weakened immune system, insomnia, and high blood pressure.
- **Out-of-control anger hurts your mental health.** Chronic anger consumes huge

amounts of mental energy, and clouds your thinking, making it harder to concentrate or enjoy life. It can also lead to stress, depression, and other mental health problems.

- **Out-of-control anger hurts your career.** Constructive criticism, creative differences, and heated debate can be healthy. But lashing out only alienates your colleagues, supervisors, or clients and erodes their respect.
- **Out-of-control anger hurts your relationships with others.** It causes lasting scars in the people you love most and gets in the way of friendships and work relationships. Explosive anger makes it hard for others to trust you, speak honestly, or feel comfortable—and is especially damaging to children.

Tip 1: Explore what's really behind your anger

Anger problems often stem from what you've learned as a child. If you watched others in your family scream, hit each other, or throw things, you might think this is how anger is supposed to be expressed. Traumatic events and high levels of stress can make you more susceptible to anger as well.

Anger is often a cover-up for other feelings

In order to express your anger in appropriate ways, you need to be in touch with what you are really feeling. Is your anger masking other feelings such as embarrassment, insecurity, hurt, shame, or vulnerability?

If your knee-jerk response in many situations is anger, it's likely that your temper is covering up your true feelings. This is especially likely if you grew up in a family where expressing feelings was strongly discouraged. As an adult, you may have a hard time acknowledging feelings other than anger. Anger can also be a symptom of underlying health problems, such as depression, trauma, or chronic stress.

Clues that there's more to your anger than meets the eye

You have a hard time compromising. Is it hard for you to understand other people's points of view, and even harder to concede a point? If you grew up in a family where anger was out of control, you may remember how the angry person got his or her way by being the loudest and most demanding. Compromising might bring up scary feelings of failure and vulnerability.

You have trouble expressing emotions other than anger. Do you pride yourself on being tough and in control? Do you feel that emotions like fear, guilt, or shame don't apply to you? Everyone has those emotions so you may be using anger as a cover for them.

You view different opinions as a personal challenge. Do you believe that your way is always right and get angry when others disagree? If you have a strong need to be in control or a fragile ego, you may interpret other perspectives as a challenge to your authority, rather than simply a different way of looking at things.

Reconnect with your emotions to manage anger

If you are uncomfortable with different emotions, disconnected, or stuck on an angry one-note response to situations, it's important to get back in touch with your feelings.

HelpGuide's Emotional Intelligence Toolkit can help you recognize and manage the full range of emotions, even the painful ones you may have been covering up with anger.

[Learn more.](#)

Tip 2: Be aware of your anger warning signs and triggers

While you might feel that you just explode into anger without warning, in fact, there are physical warning signs in your body. Anger is a normal physical response. It fuels the "fight or flight" system of the body, and the angrier you get, the more your body goes into overdrive. Becoming aware of your own personal signs that your temper is starting to boil allows you to take steps to manage your anger before it gets out of control.

Pay attention to the way anger feels in your body

- Knots in your stomach
- Clenching your hands or jaw
- Feeling clammy or flushed
- Breathing faster
- Headaches

- Pacing or needing to walk around
- "Seeing red"
- Having trouble concentrating
- Pounding heart
- Tensing your shoulders

Identify the negative thought patterns that trigger your temper

You may think that external factors—the insensitive actions of other people, for example, or frustrating situations—are causing your anger. But anger problems have less to do with what happens to you than how you interpret and think about what happened. Common negative thinking patterns that trigger and fuel anger include:

- **Overgeneralizing.** For example, “You ALWAYS interrupt me. You NEVER consider my needs. EVERYONE disrespects me. I NEVER get the credit I deserve.”
- **Obsessing over “shoulds” and “musts.”** Having a rigid view of the way a situation should or must go and getting angry when reality doesn’t line up with this vision.
- **Mind reading and jumping to conclusions.** Assuming you “know” what someone else is thinking or feeling—that he or she intentionally upset you, ignored your wishes, or disrespected you.
- **Collecting straws.** Looking for things to get upset about, usually while overlooking or blowing past anything positive. Letting these small irritations build and build until you reach the “final straw” and explode, often over something relatively minor.
- **Blaming.** When anything bad happens or something goes wrong, it’s always someone else’s fault. You blame others for your problems rather than taking responsibility for your own life.

Avoid people, places, and situations that bring out your worst

Stressful events don’t excuse anger, but understanding how these events affect you can help you take control of your environment and avoid unnecessary aggravation. Look at your regular routine and try to identify activities, times of day, people, places, or situations that trigger irritable or angry feelings. Maybe you get into a fight every time you go out for drinks with a certain group of friends. Or maybe the traffic on your daily commute drives you crazy. Then think about ways to avoid these triggers or view the situation differently so it doesn’t make your blood boil.

Tip 3: Learn ways to cool down

Once you know how to recognize the warning signs that your temper is rising and anticipate your triggers, you can act quickly to deal with your anger before it spins out of control. There are many techniques that can help you cool down and keep your anger in check.

Quick tips for cooling down

Focus on the physical sensations of anger. While it may seem counterintuitive, tuning into the way your body feels when you’re angry often lessens the emotional intensity of your anger.

Take some deep breaths. Deep, slow breathing helps counteract rising tension. The key is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible into your lungs.

Exercise. A brisk walk around the block is a great idea. It releases pent-up energy so you can approach the situation with a cooler head.

Use your senses. Take advantage of the relaxing power of your sense of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste. You might try listening to music or picturing yourself in a favorite place.

Stretch or massage areas of tension. Roll your shoulders if you are tensing them, for example, or gently massage your neck and scalp.

Slowly count to ten. Focus on the counting to let your rational mind catch up with your feelings. If you still feel out of control by the time you reach ten, start counting again.

Give yourself a reality check

When you start getting upset about something, take a moment to think about the situation. Ask yourself:

- How important is it in the grand scheme of things?
- Is it really worth getting angry about it?
- Is it worth ruining the rest of my day?
- Is my response appropriate to the situation?
- Is there anything I can do about it?
- Is taking action worth my time?

Tip 4: Find healthier ways to express your anger

If you've decided that the situation is worth getting angry about and there's something you can do to make it better, the key is to express your feelings in a healthy way. When communicated respectfully and channeled effectively, anger can be a tremendous source of energy and inspiration for change.

Pinpoint what you're really angry about. Have you ever gotten into an argument over something silly? Big fights often happen over something small, like a dish left out or being ten minutes late. But there's usually a bigger issue behind it. If you find your irritation and anger rapidly rising, ask yourself, "What am I really angry about?" Identifying the real source of frustration will help you communicate your anger better, take constructive action, and work towards a resolution.

Take five if things get too heated. If your anger starts to spiral out of control, remove

yourself from the situation for a few minutes or for as long as it takes you to cool down. A brisk walk, a trip to the gym, or a few minutes listening to some music should allow you to calm down, release pent up emotion, and then approach the situation with a cooler head.

Always fight fair. It's OK to be upset at someone, but if you don't fight fair, the relationship will quickly break down. Fighting fair allows you to express your own needs while still respecting others.

Make the relationship your priority. Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Respect the other person and his or her viewpoint.

Focus on the present. Once you are in the heat of arguing, it's easy to start throwing past grievances into the mix. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the present to solve the problem.

Choose your battles. Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worth your time and energy. If you pick your battles rather than fighting over every little thing, others will take you more seriously when you are upset.

Be willing to forgive. Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.

Know when to let something go. If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

Developing your conflict resolution skills

The way you respond to differences and disagreements at home and at work can create hostility and irreparable rifts, or it can build safety and trust. Learning how to resolve conflict in a positive way will help you strengthen your relationships. See: [Conflict Resolution Skills](#).

Tip 5: Know when to seek professional help

If your anger is still spiraling out of control, despite putting the previous anger management techniques into practice, or if you're getting into trouble with the law or hurting others, you need more help. There are many therapists, classes, and programs for people with anger management problems. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. You'll often find others in the same shoes, and getting direct feedback on techniques for controlling anger can be

tremendously helpful.

Therapy for anger problems. Therapy can be a great way to explore the reasons behind your anger. If you don't know why you are getting angry, it's very hard to control. Therapy provides a safe environment to learn more about your reasons and identify triggers for your anger. It's also a safe place to practice new skills for expressing your anger.

Anger management classes or groups. Anger management classes or groups allow you to see others coping with the same struggles. You will also learn tips and techniques for managing your anger and hear other people's stories. For domestic violence issues, traditional anger management is usually not recommended. There are special classes that break down the control issues that are at the heart of domestic violence.

Consider professional help for anger management if:

- You feel constantly frustrated and angry no matter what you try.
- Your temper causes problems at work or in your relationships.
- You avoid new events and people because you feel like you can't control your temper.
- You have gotten in trouble with the law due to your anger.
- Your anger has ever led you to physical violence.

If your loved one has an anger management problem

If your loved one has an anger problem, you probably feel like you're walking on eggshells all the time. But always remember that you are not to blame for your loved one's anger. There is never an excuse for physically or verbally abusive behavior. You have a right to be treated with respect and live without fear of an angry outburst or a violent rage.

Five tips for dealing with a loved one's anger management problem

While you can't control another person's anger, you can control how you respond to it:

1. Set clear boundaries about what you will and will not tolerate.
2. Wait for a time when you are both calm to talk to your loved one about the anger problem. Don't bring it up when either of you is already angry.
3. Remove yourself from the situation if your loved one does not calm down.
4. Consider counseling or therapy if you are having a hard time standing up for yourself.
5. Put your safety first. If you feel unsafe or threatened in any way, get away from your loved one.

Anger isn't the real problem in abusive relationships

Despite what many believe, [domestic violence and abuse](#) does not happen due to the abuser's loss of control over his temper, but a deliberate choice to control you. If you are in an abusive relationship, know that couples counseling is not recommended—and your partner needs specialized treatment, not regular anger management classes.

Recommended reading

[Controlling Anger Before it Controls You](#) - Origins of excessive anger, tips on coping, and when to seek more help. (American Psychological Association)

[What Your Anger May Be Hiding](#) - Reasons behind excessive anger. (Psychology Today)

[Anger management](#) - Types of treatment available. (Mayo Clinic)

[Anger and Trauma](#) - How anger should be treated when it's a symptom of PTSD. (National Center for PTSD)

[When You Love an Angry Person](#) - Tips on fighting fair, ways to approach a loved one, and when to seek more help. (Get Your Angries Out)

Authors: Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., and Melinda Smith, M.A. Last updated: October 2018.