



Dealing with Anger

Most of us get angry fairly often even though it is hard on our bodies and hard on relationships. Why do people get angry? Maybe we don't know what else to do. Maybe we think it is effective. Maybe it is a habit.

The fact is that **being angry is bad for our bodies**. Anger actually damages our hearts. In addition, when we are angry with others, it usually does not motivate healthy change in the people with whom we are angry. Think about it from the receiver's perspective: When someone is mad at us, do we feel trusting and motivated to do better? No. We are less likely to trust or feel close to the person who has gotten angry at us. And we often don't feel like doing what they want.

Fortunately **there are very good ways of dealing with anger**. Each of us can find ways that work for us. For example, reasoning with ourselves is one way of dealing with anger: "Cars break down. This car has a lot of miles and it was time to expect some problems."

We can distract ourselves. When someone has done something that makes us mad, we can choose to think about something else. We can come back to the concern later when we have had time to settle down and learn more about the situation. We can delay conversations where anger and irritation might get in the way of listening to and understanding the other person.

We can meditate, pray, or do deliberate relaxing. The traditional practice of counting to 10 can be useful if we use the time to breathe deeply and relax. (Counting to 10 will not do any good if we use the time to plot revenge!)

We can make a joke. Imagine the driver who cut in front of you as your grandma. The person may not look like your grandma but imagine the person with a wig and false teeth and a 57 Buick.

It helps to try to understand other people rather than get mad at them. For example, if a normally friendly co-worker does not seem friendly one day, we might suspect that the co-worker is having a bad day. We should not assume that he or she is mad at us.

We can let people know our needs. If you have a friend who tracks mud into your house, you can say, "I am trying to keep my floors clean. I wonder if you would help me. When you come to visit, would you scrape your shoes or take them off before you come in?" Many annoyances can be avoided when people know our needs. But there are also some differences that have to be tolerated.

We can do things to prevent anger. It helps to get enough rest. It helps to have friends. Some people find having a pet to be relaxing. We can be involved in hobbies or service. Anything that helps us be more peaceful can help us avoid anger.

Sometimes we don't notice as our irritation grows into anger. It is a good idea to **notice when you start to get angry** and take action before the anger grows. We can soothe ourselves.

Of course it does no good to bottle-up our anger. It is healthy to forgive, relax, forget, invite, reflect, and understand. We can learn ways to avoid and deal with anger so that we will be peaceful more of the time.

Applications:

Are there issues or situations that commonly make you mad? List them:

What can you do in those situations that will help you manage your anger?

Most of us have anger habits. It may take a lot of practice to replace anger with more helpful responses. We should give ourselves credit for any progress we make and learn from our mistakes.

Do you apologize when you hurt other people with your anger?

Are some of the things that make you angry, petty things that you can learn to ignore or laugh about?

Even when we have legitimate concerns, we can find ways to share them that don't include anger. What concerns do you have that need to be shared? How can you share them in a way that will be taken seriously but will not damage relationships? For example, can you say, "I feel very upset about (describe the situation). Can you suggest some solutions?"

Recommended reading:

Redford and Virginia Williams have written an excellent book about anger, "Anger Kills." The book reports important discoveries about anger and provides strategies for controlling anger.