

Anger is a confusing emotion. It can swell up inside us so quickly and sweep us away sometimes before we even know what caused it. Or it can feel like a slow burn that builds until we blow. And sometimes, when out of control, our anger can hurt or destroy the relationships with those we love most—our partner, our children, or our families.

Anger is neither *good* nor *bad*; we all get angry at times. In fact, it's usually a response to deeper, more intense feelings. It's part of our body's survival mechanism that helps to protect us. However, when anger becomes the main emotion we feel in situations, even when it is not justified, we need to examine whether or not it has become our "default" reaction.<sup>2</sup>

## Getting Behind Your Anger

Anger is a feeling often used to cover up more intense or scary feelings. If you can identify what really causes your anger, then you can work on resolving it.

Think about when you get angry. Can you figure out what the underlying emotion is? To help identify this, look at the situation leading up to your anger and then ask yourself these few simple questions:

- **What was the feeling before I felt angry?** If we look back at those times that our emotions got the better of us, we can often see a moment right before the anger where we felt hurt, defensive, taken back, sad, surprised, or any number of feelings.
- **What is the feeling under that feeling?** Many people share their feelings in ways that hide what is underneath. Saying, "I feel disrespected" or "I feel unheard" are real things I feel are happening, but they are hiding the *deeper* feeling.
- **Why do I feel this way?** You'll need to look deeply at your fears and past to figure out how they are connected to your feelings. Staying angry creates bitterness. Try to determine what the "big thing" is that you're *defending*. Ask yourself why you are willing to get angry in order to understand it.<sup>2</sup>
- **What is the truth?** Emotions bend what we see. It is okay to feel your *feelings*, but taking a moment and looking at the situation objectively can, many times, help you avoid angry outbursts or hurtful actions.

## Anger Management Strategies

**Breathe.** Deep, slow breaths cause your brain to release chemicals that help you calm down.<sup>3</sup>

**Lean into truth.** Accept responsibility. You are responsible for the things you tell yourself. Correcting mistakes or apologizing helps both parties to pull down their defenses and communicate.

**Walk away.** You don't have to fix the problem in the moment. You can return later, after you're calm, to discuss the situation that upset you. Or if the situation isn't one that you can resolve, then walking away simply keeps you from blowing up and raging.

**Act calmly.** Making yourself respond in a calm manner and voice allows communication to happen and keeps discussion going in a healthy way.

**Learn your triggers.** Taking control by taking great care of yourself and limiting those things that you know make you vulnerable is a kind thing to do for yourself and others.

**Keep an anger journal.** In your log or journal, note the date, time of day, a brief explanation of what triggered the anger (if known), and how you resolved it. Then, write down how you could prevent this from happening again.

**Stop yourself from venting.** Many people feel like getting something off their chest will make them feel better or less angry, but research has shown that venting usually has the opposite effect.<sup>7,8</sup>

**Be the example.** Your children watch and learn from you. Be aware of the example you set for your children.

Anger doesn't have to get in the way of living a happy, healthy life. Remember, anger is neither good nor bad; we all blow up at times. If you're experiencing anger that is out of control, then begin by asking why. Anger often masks painful or difficult feelings until we feel safe enough to deal with them. Look at the situations in your life that cause your angry reactions and figure out why they make you mad. Ask yourself where those feelings really come from, why are you feeling them, and what is the truth behind them.

Work on resolving underlying issues either by yourself or with a medical provider and use anger management strategies to help manage your reactions. With some effort, you can control your reactions to things and improve your relationships with those you love and care about.

Resources include:

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