



## Effectively Managing Anger

By

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Everyone gets angry, but not everyone manages their anger effectively. We have all witnessed occasions where someone has lost their composure because they were angry. Some people yell and scream while others withdraw and withhold. While these strategies may feel good at the time, they frequently are unproductive at best or can even become destructive and dangerous. Anger can be our ally if we learn to use it effectively. It can help us stand up against injustice or confront situations that we might normally avoid. If used inappropriately, however, anger can derail careers, destroy relationships, and ruin lives. As a result, learning to effectively manage anger can be an essential part of healthy living.

### Productive vs. Destructive Anger

Anger is a normal emotion that is neither good nor bad. The way anger is expressed, however, can either be productive or de-

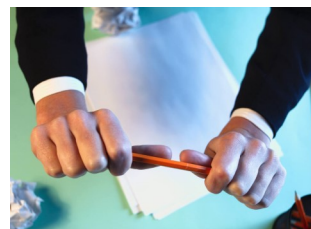
structive. Examples of destructive anger include yelling, physical confrontations, breaking objects, and intentionally creating harm by withholding or withdrawing. Many people express anger in these ways because they provide an immediate release from the intensity of the emotions. However, these strategies frequently drive others away and lead to unhealthy and unproductive relationships.

Constructive anger, on the other hand, creates useful changes and allows people to build meaningful relationships. A great example of constructive anger is demonstrated by Candy Lightner, the founder of Mother's Against Drunk Driving (MADD). After her 13-year-old daughter was hit by a drunk driver, she made a decision that she would "fight" to make this tragedy count for something positive in the future. MADD, which is now in its 29th year, is thus an example of how constructive anger can lead to positive changes that can benefit the lives of many people. While most of us will not create a national organization with

our anger, we can certainly learn to create productive healthy outcomes.

### Keep The End In Mind

To work toward a positive outcome when you are angry,



you have to keep in mind the outcome you are seeking and not let the anger override your goals. Breaking things or destroying property may temporarily feel good, but it simply becomes one more thing you have to repair or replace. If you want meaningful relationships, work to build the relationship rather than destroy it, especially when you are angry.

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### Manage Your Perceptions

A Stressor is anything that can cause a response in us either physically, mentally, or emotionally. Stressors are neither positive nor negative, good nor bad – they are neutral. It is our perception of the stressor that defines its meaning and thus the consequences of the stressor. For example, being informed that your in-laws are about to visit or that the Houston Texans just lost a game. For some, this can be a dreadful experience, for others this can bring excitement or joy. What we think about a situation and what our expectations are often determines how we feel and thus how we respond. By changing our attitude we can change the experience of the stressor.

## How to Manage Anger By Managing Expectations

A simple formula for the reduction of anger is:

$$X - Y = Z$$

X = # of Expectations

Y = # of Expectations Met

Z = Anger / Stress / Frustration

As the formula implies, anger is often directly related to expectations. If you want to manage your anger learn to manage your expectations. In fact, one of the keys to

successful relationships is learning to manage both your expectations and the expectations of others around you.

According to the formula, to change your experience of anger you can:

- 1) Adjust expectations to match the reality of the situation (lower expectations),
- 2) Communicate more effectively so that more expectations get met,

- 3) Live angry, or
- 4) Move on, by changing the environment, job, relationship or situation you are in.

Many people try to change situations that they have no control over, rather than adjusting their expectations and communicating more effectively. A guaranteed way of making yourself miserable is to try to change or control something you have no control over.



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## 20 Tools for Managing Anger

1. Learn to cool off
2. Manage your expectations
3. De-escalate early rather than letting the anger build
4. Learn to see both sides of the situation
5. Deal with old hurts and wounds
6. Develop empathy
7. Learn to laugh again
8. Communicate effectively
9. Seek first to understand before seeking to be understood
10. Manage your time more effectively
11. Be humble rather than arrogant
12. Learn to play again
13. Learn to use anger constructively rather than destructively
14. Exercise
15. Develop patience
16. Look for win-win (Find the common ground)
17. Quit trying to control those things that are out of your control
18. Let go of negative behavior
19. Let go of negative thinking
20. Be pro-active rather than re-active

## **Managing Anger in Relationships**

### **Seek Understanding**

The goal of an argument in a relationship should be to understand each other. It shouldn't be to win or make your point, but instead should be to have both people walk away from the conversation feeling understood and cared about. If you do an argument correctly, you should feel closer to your partner after the argument. Unfortunately, many people are more focused on "winning" the argument than understanding each other. This frequently occurs when the intensity of the anger becomes greater than the desire to seek meaningful solutions. As a result, couples need to develop successful strategies to decrease the intensity of the anger so they can listen to each other again.

### **Learn to Cool Off**

Learning to control your emotions rather than allowing your emotions to control you is an important skill to develop when managing anger. Instead of allowing your anger to build up until you "explode," it is more productive to disengage until you are able to think clearly and feel at the same time.

Once both people have "cooled off," then it is easier to re-engage in the discussion and reach resolution. Unfortunately many people want to "finish" the argument immediately, rather than allowing "time-outs" to occur. Frequently this results in one person pursuing and the other person running away until they feel cornered. Once this occurs the argument often becomes destructive.

Remember, in a relationship, you don't have to resolve everything "right now." It is appropriate to cool off and then re-engage when the anger has subsided.

### **Commit to Resolving the Issues**

It is also important to remember that calling "time-out" doesn't mean that you never have to talk about the issue again. Like all "time-outs," there should be a designated time to re-engage in the discussion. If you don't create a time to return to the discussion, the anger tends to re-emerge in later arguments. "Time-outs" only work if both people are committed to continuing the discussion until true understanding is reached.



### **Rules for Fair Fighting**

1. No cussing
2. No name calling
3. Stay focused on one issue at a time.
4. No yelling
5. No throwing
6. Look each other in the eye when talking.
7. Whoever calls time-out, should re-initiate the conversation within an agreed upon time frame.