

Anger & Anger Management: Explore Your Anger to Gain Control

Anger is natural, but it can be destructive when expressed inappropriately. Gauge your anger level and identify your unhealthy expressions of anger.

Do you slam down the phone when faced with endless computerized voice prompts? Have you gotten into a shouting match with a stranger over a parking space at the mall? Ever put your fist through the wall after an argument with your spouse?

This is not anger management at its finest but more anger mis-management. Although anger is a natural emotion, it may be getting the best of you. Instead of expressing your anger in a healthy and assertive way, you may be expressing it in a hostile, aggressive manner — a manner that could lead to violence and a slew of unwanted personal and professional consequences.

Here are some points to consider when assessing whether you express your anger in a healthy or unhealthy manner, and how to get a better grasp of anger management.

Understand Your Anger

Anger itself isn't bad. Expressed appropriately, anger can be healthy. It can help protect you from dangerous situations, energize you to resolve problems or lead to socio-cultural reforms, for instance.

Sure, everyday frustrations, impatience and resentment can all cause your temper to flare. For many people, these are fleeting moments. They're able to take these situations in stride and quickly return to a sense of calm without exploding.

But if your blood boils after minor irritations — such as losing that coveted parking space — or if you're constantly seething, you may need to improve how you're managing anger. Anger that's out of control can be destructive, leading to problems in your relationships, at work, in your enjoyment of life and with your health. You could even be arrested or face other legal problems.

Determine Your Anger Level

So, just how angry are you? This chart is a barometer of sorts. Although it doesn't score your anger, you can use it as a tool to raise your self-awareness about your level of anger.

To use the chart, see if the words on the left describe your behavior or thoughts over the past week. Check the ones that apply to your anger.

GAUGE YOUR ANGER

Words	Put a Check After the Word if it Applies to You
Angry	
Bitter	
Rebellious	
Spiteful	
Deceived	
Oppositional	
Annoyed	
Furious	
Resentful	
Bad-Tempered	
Ready to Fight	
Yelling	
Frustrated	
Disappointed	
Raging	

If you have several check marks (more than four), your anger level is on the high side. Try using anger management tips for several weeks to see if you can more effectively control your anger. You may also want to consult an anger management professional to help you learn to handle anger in a healthier way and to better understand what's behind your anger.

You can repeat this exercise over time to see if your ability to manage your anger improves.

Examine Your Anger Patterns

Why do you tend to fly off the handle more than others seem to? Anger responses can become habitual. That is, you may respond automatically to a situation that makes you angry, with little pause to think about your reactions. The intensity of your anger may even catch you by surprise.

How do you express your anger? Consider these questions to assess your anger responses:

Do you express anger in a way that overwhelms you and others?

Do you get angry more often than most people you know?

Do you get angrier than is necessary?

Do you use threatening language or gestures?

Do you get angry enough to hit, throw or kick things, people or animals?

Do you seethe for hours?

Do you hide angry feelings from others or try to suppress your feelings?

Do you use alcohol or drugs to calm your rage?

Do you experience physical reactions such as muscle tension or a racing heart when you get angry?

Does expressing your anger usually leave you feeling better about yourself and the person who angered you?

Identify the ways you express anger to help you determine if you need to change how you respond to upsetting situations. You may react too aggressively or even too passively. In either case, you can learn new methods to replace old, unhealthy habits. If your level of anger is high or you tend to express anger in an unhealthy way, make plans to deal with your anger.

Aim for Constructive Expressions of Your Anger

Anger management is not about stopping you from expressing your anger entirely. It's OK to feel angry. In fact, trying to suppress or deny your anger can lead to a host of physical complaints, such as headaches, depression, stress, and sleeping or eating difficulties. It can also lead you to erupt into violent behavior if your anger has been simmering without an outlet.

The key, though, is to express your anger in an assertive, controlled way. Managing anger effectively can benefit you and those around you. Your health may improve, you'll feel better about yourself, and strained relationships may heal when you control your anger.

Adapted From Mayo Clinic Website: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/anger-management/MH00073>