



Anger Management: Tips for Teens

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Although the word “anger” tends to bring up negative thoughts and images, anger itself is not unhealthy. It is actually a normal emotion that everyone experiences. In a threatening situation, anger can allow us to defend ourselves, which means that some amount of anger is necessary for survival. But without the ability to control anger, we can get into difficult and even harmful situations. Uncontrolled anger can lead to impulsive acts, long-term negative feelings, even physical confrontations that can result in injury. Because of all this, it’s important that you learn early how to identify angry feelings and how to manage them.

IDENTIFYING ANGER

Anger can be caused by external or internal events. You can become angry because someone wrongly accused you of something you didn’t do (external). You can also become angry just thinking about an event or by worrying about a problem (internal). Anger has several parts that you should learn to identify:

- *Psychological.* This is how you *feel* when you are angry. It can include sadness, disappointment, or frustration.
- *Physiological.* Your *body responds* to anger in different ways, such as tense muscles, an increase in heart rate, or an increase in blood pressure. You may feel your face flush or feel warm.
- *Cognitive.* This is what you *think* as you experience anger. Your thoughts can be rational or irrational. On one hand, you could recognize that you are angry and realize it is acceptable to be frustrated (rational). On the other hand, you may think that everyone is out to get you and things never go your way (irrational).

RESPONDING TO ANGER

There is a difference between feeling anger and how you choose to react to anger. How you respond to anger is a learned behavior. It could be learned from parents, family, friends, community, and what you see on television, in movies, or in video games. There are two main ways to deal with anger—express it or suppress it. Out-of-control expressions of anger and keeping anger inside (suppressing it) are both unhelpful ways to deal with anger. Both may do more harm than good.

Expressing Anger

The first way to manage anger is to express it. There are many ways to express anger, and this can range from reasonable, rational discussions to out-of-control violence. Anger that is out of control can be destructive and could cause problems with relationships, at school and at home. Out-of-control anger can also lead to trouble with the law.

Suppressing Anger

The second way to deal with anger is to suppress it, or try to keep your feelings inside or ignore them. Keeping anger inside can be as big a problem as out-of-control expressions. It might lead to expressions of anger that you aren’t even aware of, such as passive-aggressive behavior (which is getting back at people indirectly without telling them why) or having a hostile manner. Suppressing anger can also lead to health problems, such as headaches, stress, depression, or high blood pressure.

Communicating Anger Appropriately

The best way to deal with anger is to express it in an assertive, but not aggressive, way. This means that you communicate your anger in a calm, controlled way that states your needs clearly and directly without hurting or offending any other person.

ANGER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Anger may be a problem for you. When you are angry, do you act in ways that feel out of control or frightening to yourself or to others? There are three general steps that you can take to better manage your anger.

Step 1: Understand Your Anger

The first step to controlling your anger is to understand it. Anger responses can become a habit, and you may be responding automatically without even thinking much about it. Step back and look at your anger. Try to answer the following questions:

Do you have certain triggers that tend to make you angry? Try to identify your triggers (like being asked to do a chore at home) so that you can be aware of them and prepare yourself to deal with them when they occur.

What are cues that you are feeling angry? These can be warning signs you have become angry and your anger may escalate. You could have several types of cues:

1. *Physical cues* include tightness in your chest, increase in heart rate, or muscle tension.
2. *Behavioral cues* include actions you show when you are angry, such as clenching fists, pacing, or raising your voice.
3. *Emotional cues* involve other feelings that may happen before or while you are angry. These feelings could include fear, humiliation, insecurity, jealousy, or guilt.
4. *Cognitive cues* are the thoughts that occur in response to the event. These may be thoughts about the way you think things should happen. For example, you may think that life must be fair, that people must like you, and that things must happen for a reason.

How do you express your anger? Do you respond too aggressively (like yelling) or too passively (like giving the silent treatment)? It may be time to learn new ways to deal with anger that are more helpful and healthy.

Step 2. Identify Helpful Strategies

The second step is to select strategies that can help to manage anger. These should include strategies to help prevent angry feelings and as well as those to use when you feel angry.

Prevention. Preventative strategies could include changing beliefs about the way things work, or “disputing your *musts*.” Do you believe that everything *must* always happen a certain way? It may not be reasonable to think that something *must* always happen, so develop a plan for coping when things don’t happen in the way you hoped or expected. Preventative strategies could also include developing an exercise plan or some way to relax your body and release energy on a regular basis.

Immediate anger management strategies. There are several things you can do as soon as you recognize angry feelings:

- *Time-out.* Leave a situation if you feel your anger is rising out of control. This could include physically leaving a room or leaving a conversation.
- *Delay your response.* Count to 10 before you respond in a situation where you might become angry.
- *Take part in a physical activity.* Go for a brisk walk or run to release some energy in a positive way.
- *Calm yourself down.* Practice deep breathing or visualization to soothe yourself.

Step 3: Follow-up Strategies for Long-Term Anger Management

Once you have taken immediate steps to control your anger, the next steps are:

- Think carefully before you talk to people about the situation so that you don’t say anything you might regret. You could even write a script and rehearse it so that you stick to the facts.
- Express your anger in a healthy way so that you are not left thinking about it. In a controlled manner that doesn’t hurt anyone, talk to the person who angered you. If you are not able to talk to the person that caused your anger, talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend, or teacher.
- Work with the person who angered you on solutions. Don’t remain focused on the problem—focus on problem solving. If your school uses peer mediation or conflict resolution programs, these options might provide a means of negotiating a truce or peaceful resolution.
- When you do talk about the problem, use “I” statements so that the other person does not feel criticized or blamed. For example, say “I felt upset because ...” rather than “You made me mad because ...”
- Don’t hold a grudge. Move past the incident and forgive.
- Use humor to lighten up the situation.

After the incident is over, take steps to help manage your anger better in the future:

- *Keep an anger log.* This could help you learn more about your anger and identify patterns in your anger. You could learn more about the situations that may trigger anger and what responses have been successful in dealing with anger.
- *Practice relaxation skills.* The more practice you have with relaxation skills, the more automatic they become. For example, it could become a habit to count to 10 before responding in a situation that could potentially make you angry.
- *Get help if necessary.* If you feel that your anger is really out of control, you could also consider talking to your school psychologist or counselor to learn more techniques for dealing with anger.

SUMMARY

You cannot eliminate anger. It's part of everyday life. Unpredictable things will happen in your life that may cause feelings of anger. This cannot be changed. You can, however, change how you let events affect you and how you respond to them.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

You can find some helpful resources in your public library or on the Internet.

Books

Potter-Efron, R. T. (1998). *How to control your anger (before it controls you: A guide for teenagers)*. Minneapolis, MN: Johnson Institute.

This book is a basic primer on anger and strategies for dealing with it. It is a short, illustrated guide that serves as a quick-read for teens.

Seaward, B., & Bartlett, L. (2002). *Hot stones and funny bones: Teens helping teens cope with stress and anger*. Deerfield Beach, FL: HCI Teens.

Based on interviews with over 75 teenagers across the country, this book offers honest stories about dealing with anger, stress, and other emotions. These stories are combined with stress and anger management techniques provided by mental health professionals.

Wilde, J. (1997). *Hot stuff to help kids chill out: The anger management book*. Richmond, IN: LGR Publishing.

A short book that uses humor to teach readers ways to de-escalate anger.

Online

About.com: Teen Advice, *Anger management for teens*: <http://teenadvice.about.com/od/violencebullying/a/angermanagement.htm>

Calm down and get-a-grip steps for teens.

Center for Young Women's Health, *Anger management: A guide for teens*: <http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/anger.html>

A thorough guide with some good strategies and resources.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *BAM! A guide for getting along*: http://www.bam.gov/sub_yourlife/yourlife_conflict.html

An illustrated guide to anger control for youth.

Mayo Clinic, *Stress management/Relaxation techniques*: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/relaxation-technique/SR00007>

Relaxation techniques can help you deal with feelings of anger. This website gives information about relaxation techniques.

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