

Anger – A Disabling Emotion

Anger is not an involuntary emotional response to a specific situation. Anger arises from a philosophy—a way of viewing the world. At its core, anger represents an outlook of grandiosity, self-righteousness, commanding, and condemning. Many mental health professionals disagree with this view, that all kinds of anger are generally bad for you. Most therapists classify anger as “appropriate” or “inappropriate” according to context, and they usually argue that, when appropriate, it is healthy to express anger (“let it out”) and unhealthy to suppress anger (“bottle it up”).

Recent research, however, contradicts this popular view, and suggests that all anger, expressed or suppressed, is harmful to your health and damaging to your relationships with other people. Among the many difficulties associated with anger are:

- ✱ Increased likelihood of heart attack, stroke, and hypertension
- ✱ Greater difficulty in solving problems constructively
- ✱ A tendency for the anger, which may start in one area of your life, to overlap and extend into other areas
- ✱ Preoccupation with thoughts of revenge
- ✱ Adopting an antagonistic attitude, which needlessly alienates other people with whom it’s advantageous to have cordial dealings
- ✱ A predisposition to violence, especially child abuse

Doesn’t expressing anger help release pent-up frustration?

It’s true that an outburst of anger may sometimes momentarily provide relief. But psychological distress often takes its toll on the body, and some preliminary evidence suggests that expressed anger causes more physical damage than suppressed anger. There is, however, a third alternative to suppressing or expressing your anger: Don’t make yourself angry in the first place!

The “expressive” approach implies that anger is something inside you, like a gallbladder. If your gallbladder bothers you, you could have it removed, and then it won’t bother you anymore. Similarly, if you can get your anger out, it won’t be inside you any more, causing distress.

This view is hopelessly mistaken. Anger is not a physical entity. It’s a feeling generated by an attitude or belief. You don’t free yourself of feelings by expressing the attitudes and beliefs that create them. That usually reaffirms and strengthens those attitudes and thus makes the feeling more likely to return.

Consider an opposite sort of feeling, like love – a feeling that we often want to continue. It’s clear that the more you express feelings of love, tenderness, and caring, the more loving, tender, and

caring you are likely to become. No one would suppose that by expressing such feelings you were “letting them out” and thus losing them.

It’s exactly the same with the self-destructive feeling of anger. If you express your anger, you reaffirm and solidify your angry attitude, and make it more difficult to dispel. If you refrain from expressing your anger, this may be the first step towards avoiding anger entirely.

Some Things Anger IS

- ✳ It is acting out of control in order to gain control.
- ✳ It is emotional disturbance.
- ✳ It is distorted thinking.
- ✳ It is self-righteous.
- ✳ Unhealthy and can literally make us physically ill.
- ✳ Usually a mask for other, deeper emotions (hurt, fear).
- ✳ Addictive, because it can make us feel good in the short run.
- ✳ Psychologically harmful, because it can increase our frustration and anxiety in the long run.

Some Things Anger IS NOT

- ✳ A stress reducer.
- ✳ A safe way to express feelings.
- ✳ A good way to motivate behaviour change in myself or others.
- ✳ An effective way to express a message.
- ✳ An agent of control.
- ✳ A requirement when threatened.
- ✳ A symbol of strength.
- ✳ A result of unmet needs (neediness is the problem!)
- ✳ A learned behaviour (it is inborn!)
- ✳ An emotion that will run its course (it escalates!)

Tips for management of anger

- ✳ Always try to say I made MYSELF angry.
- ✳ Give up the idea that anger must be expressed.
- ✳ Know what to overlook.
- ✳ Recognize that people aren’t against you, they are merely for themselves
- ✳ Lower your voice.
- ✳ Recognize the hurt or fear that precedes anger.
- ✳ Recognize that another person’s abusive behaviour says more about them and their emotional pain than it says about you.
- ✳ Ask yourself if your feelings of anger are helping your problem-solving skills.
- ✳ Avoid scorekeeping.
- ✳ Learn not to hit the sore spots.

- ✳ Ask yourself how important the issue will be in a week.
- ✳ Avoid mind reading.
- ✳ Learn to agree to disagree.
- ✳ Kill them with kindness.
- ✳ Work on anger coping self-statements for “comprehensive emotional rustproofing.”

Techniques for anger management

- ✳ Express feelings in a safe environment (catharsis).
- ✳ Report anger to the person you are angry with.
- ✳ Mourn any losses connected to an incident that angers you.
- ✳ Keep a journal of what triggers your anger and how you respond.
- ✳ Identify and correct cognitive distortions.
- ✳ Replace ‘hot thoughts’ with ‘cool thoughts.’
- ✳ Revise ‘should rules’ to be more realistic.
- ✳ Analyse the costs and benefits of being angry vs. ‘letting it go.’
- ✳ Develop the ability to empathize with the person you are angry with.
- ✳ Recognize when you are feeling angry or when it is a cover-up for fear, shame, guilt.
- ✳ Practice a quick form of gaining control, such as counting to 10.