

# ANGER



Anger is one of the most misunderstood emotions, so let's begin by looking at some key factors about anger:

1. Anger is an emotion – energy + motion – a pure physical sensation/energy in our bodies. Aggression a behavior, yet most people tend to confuse the two. Anger itself is not a bad thing, but if it results in aggressive behavior, then that's where the problem lies.
2. Anger is a survival tool that alerts us to a problem, like an alarm system, so we need to understand what it's trying to tell us.
3. Anger is stored in the side of the brain responsible for action, not withdrawal; so once we've assessed it, we can respond in the healthiest way possible. But responding doesn't mean reacting – i.e., it's not a license to blow up.
4. Anger is often a secondary emotion to hurt, pain, sadness, guilt, fear, feeling like we've let someone down – this is particularly the case for men since they're discouraged to show those primary feelings. So when someone appears angry, it may be a response to what's going on inside them, not necessarily you.

An anger style is the type of style we embody when we experience anger. There are ten types of anger styles – we can vacillate between them, but if one style starts to categorize us consistently and becomes a part of our personality, then we might be looking at a serious problem.

1. Hidden Anger – a.k.a. Anger Avoidance. These people are afraid of anger – theirs and that of others – so they keep it inside, instead of expressing what they feel (that would make them feel guilty). As such they avoid conflict, but the unresolved feelings disrupt their peacefulness.
2. Sneaky Anger – These people never let others know when they're angry – consistent with passive-aggressive individuals. Sometimes they don't even acknowledge it to themselves, so it comes out in different ways, like them forgetting things, being underhanded, and becoming very frustrating, because they'll often ask you why you're angry with them, to control you. Since they don't use anger effectively, they lose track of their own wants and needs, which leads them to boredom and unsatisfying relationships.
3. Paranoid Anger – These people feel irrationally threatened by others and seek aggression everywhere. They believe people want to take what's theirs, even when it isn't true, so they're hyper-vigilant, jealously guarding everything. They assume everyone's angry so don't have any trouble giving it away, without guilt, because they feel they're just in self-

protection mode. They're insecure, they trust no one, and they have poor judgement because they confuse their own feelings with other people's, thereby seeing anger in everyone.

4. Sudden Anger – These people are like thunderstorms on a summer day; they zoom in from nowhere, blast everything and then vanish. Sometimes their thunder and lightning hurts people, and can break up homes because they say things they don't mean and later regret, when the damage's been already done. They release all their feelings and feel better, but others get hurt due to their loss of control. These people have a very short fuse and poor impulse control, once they experience a surge of anger.
5. Shame-Based Anger – People who feel worthless, unloved, not good enough, and broken, are highly sensitive to criticism and need a lot of attention. So if someone ignores them or criticizes them ever so slightly, it sets off their shame, since they take that as proof that they don't like them. So they lash out at them, feeling entitled, because they assume the other party meant to hurt them. They get rid of their own shame by ridiculing and blaming others. But raging against others to hide your own shame doesn't work very well – it hurts others and when they recognize what they've caused, eventually their sense of shame worsens.
6. Deliberate Anger – This type of anger is well-planned; these people know what they're doing and they do it without much emotion. They use their anger (and at times violence) to control people and get what they want, but it breaks down in the long run, when people figure out ways to get back at the bully. It's a polarized way of thinking, to protect one's own ego, at the expense of diminishing others
7. Addictive Anger – Some people need the intensity that comes with anger, even if they don't like the trouble their anger causes them. Their anger gives them a rush, an emotional high, and power. When they explode, they feel alive and full of energy, but like any other addiction, this is not a healthy way of coping with one's negative feelings. Regardless, they look for fights, with an all-or-nothing quality.
8. Habitual Anger – These people get into the habit of becoming angry very often, even over the smallest things that don't bother most. They often wake up grumpy and go through their day looking for a fight, they look for the worst in everything and everybody and usually go to bed angry about something and may even have angry dreams. Even though anger can make them unhappy, they can't quit. They feel life is predictable and steady so it makes them feel safe. But they can't get close to people because their anger keeps them away, so they often ruin their own lives.
9. Moral Anger – aka Entitled Anger – Some people think they have the right to be angry when others have broken a rule, which makes them bad, evil and sinful and feel they should be scolded and punished. They're enraged by the bad they think people are doing and feel they have the right to defend their beliefs. They assume moral superiority and feel their

anger is for a good cause, so they don't even feel bad about their anger, which stems from their simplistic black and white thinking. They attack every difference of opinion versus listening, understanding, negotiating, or compromising.

10. Hateful Anger – This is the most destructive type of anger; it's hardened and nasty, and they feel the other person is so bad that forgiving them is impossible. Anger which turns to hate never gets resolved, it turns into resentment which lives forever – can't let go of it. Haters often think of ways of getting back at the offender and they sometimes act on those ideas. These people feel they're innocent victims and create a world of enemies to fight and they attack with great enthusiasm and vigor, however, the hatred causes them severe damage over time. Haters can't let go and go on with their lives, so they get bitter and their lives become small, mean and narrow.

The healthiest way to use anger is when you use it to gauge danger, protect yourself, or take action to get to an emotionally healthier place.

In general, *people handle anger in three ways: expressing, suppressing, and calming*. The healthiest way to express it is to make yourself heard in an assertive, non-aggressive manner, without hurting anyone else. You also can try to calm down so you can control your anger, versus having it control you – count to 10, take deep breaths, and learn to ride the wave, versus giving into the tsunami. But don't suppress or hide it, because that can turn those negative feelings inward and lead to high blood pressure or depression.

Beyond controlling the emotion itself, you can also control how you respond. For instance, you can use humor to defuse the situation; focus on the solution instead of the problem; and avoid saying the first thing that pops into your head.

Next, I'd like to discuss how to identify the triggers/cues that get you angry, so you can recognize them and better manage your anger, because we're not trying to get rid of anger in unhealthy ways. There are four cues of anger:

1. **Physical Cues** – the way our bodies physically respond to anger provoking situations. These include, pounding chest, feeling hot, flushed, etc. Know what happens at level one versus level ten, so you know when you're headed into the danger zone. Physical cues tie into the flight or fright response, where the blood leaves our brain to get our body ready for action.
2. **Behavioral Cues** – these are the behaviors we display when we become angry, example, pacing, slamming doors, voice raising, kicking walls, etc. Again, important to know how these behaviors escalate in response to anger, on a scale of one to ten.
3. **Emotional Cues** – these are the feelings which occur concurrently with our anger. Anger is generally a secondary emotion to a primary core emotion. For instance, fear, abandonment, feeling discounted, disrespected, guilty, impatient, jealous, or humiliated, to name a few.

As such, it's important to follow our anger to its source, to access our primary emotions – the ones that provoke those raw feelings – so we can respond adequately and effectively.

4. Cognitive Cues – these are the thoughts we're thinking at the time of the anger provoking event. It's never truly what's happening that makes us angry, but our interpretation of it, which is different for everyone, based in our values, experiences and such. FYI, when we have a disproportionate response to something, it could be anchored in some old wounding.

Knowing when you're getting angry and why, being able to manage it appropriately, and using appropriate anger styles is healthy; being unable to identify the source of anger, mismanaging it, and staying stuck in one style is not!

### **What Happens When We Don't Express Our Anger Constructively**

Expressing anger doesn't mean you're a violent person. But when that heated energy remains bottled up, something's going to give, and you'll default to destructive ways of thinking, speaking, and acting.

When we don't accept something we experience, and try to discern what it's telling us, we judge it negatively, and self-righteously, feel convinced that if the world and/or other people would just conform to how we think they should, everything would be just fine.

But our "shoulds" in response to unmet expectations, fuel more anger. So we need to get rid of that physical energy vs putting our expectations on others and magnifying what we're feeling.

### **How do we express angry energy physically?**

Identify where you're feeling that energy in your body, recognize it for what it is, and then do what a toddler would do – have a temper tantrum! But do it in a safe place, so you can do it in a non-damaging way. Take yourself to that place where you can let go and express the energy hard, fast, and with abandon. If you release anger energy physically and constructively, you'll be too tired to fight, and those places where you feel it will relax!

An easy way to do this is to lie on your back on a bed and flail your arms, legs, and head, while yelling and grunting. Make sounds and noises because emotions are beyond the realm of words. No blaming or swearing. If you use words, yell something like, "I feel so angry. I feel so mad. I feel so pissed!" Swearing or saying negative things while expressing anger physically, just stokes the fire and reinforces thinking that the *outside* world is the problem and it'll keep you mad.

You can also stomp around, push against a wall or a door with all your force, or shout into a pillow. The idea is to move the energy out of your body, hard, fast, and with abandon, until you're exhausted. Catch your breath and do it again. Repeat until you can't anymore!

## **Change Your Point of View**

End your healthy meltdown by reminding yourself, you must accept the reality – what is, is. Remind yourself, over and over, that: "People and things are the way they are, not the way I want them to be," "This is the way it is," or "That's the way they are."

When these phrases are repeated out loud with focus and energy, your anger turns into acceptance. After repeating these words for a few minutes, it becomes a fact, instead of a big conflicting deal.

Acceptance does not mean passivity. If you need to speak up, accept the reality first, and then speak up and act from a centered place. When you feel more centered, you can locate the specific thing that set you off and let go of your fantasy around how it should be, and accept what is, even though in your perfect world you'd do it differently.

## **Look within to Determine What is Appropriate Action**

Now you can look within your heart to decide what you need to say and/or do about the specific event in order to honor yourself and all involved. Once you put your mind on hold, pause and ask yourself, "What would be the best thing to do to bring me peace?" Listen from your heart to what really resonates for you. Maybe it's to remove yourself from the situation temporarily. Maybe it's best to say nothing, if taking a stand will only lead to more frustration and ultimately pull you back into the anger loop. Only you know what will make you feel resolved. So you've got to ask yourself, not rely on what others might suggest.

## **Speak up and Take Action**

Now, if you know you need to speak up to feel like you can let it go, be sure you talk about what's true for you. This means your communication is not laced with finger-pointing and global generalizations. You need to stick with addressing one specific situation at a time, saying what you need, want, believe, etc. and doing so, in a kind way.

If you or someone you know isn't managing their anger in healthy ways, it's important to consider anger management work.