



Anger management begins with owning one's emotions

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Quite frequently therapists are called upon to help persons for whom anger has become a problem. Sometimes a referral is made by a company because an employee's anger may be creating a hostile or potentially unsafe work environment. More often people seek help because their anger is causing problems in relationships.

While anger can be a very destructive factor in people's lives, it is important to note that in itself it is not necessarily bad. Anger is a normal human emotion, and as such it is as valid to say "I am angry" as it is to say "I am happy" or "I am afraid." The feeling itself is not bad – it depends on what we do with it and how we express it.

Anger actually can be used in positive ways. It can be a signal to us that something is wrong and needs fixing. It can be used to energize an otherwise hesitant person to stand up for himself or herself and deal assertively with situations. In relationships appropriately expressing anger can help to clear the air, resolve festering problems and enhance a sense of closeness. But again, it depends on how we express our feelings of anger.

The first step in getting anger under control is to own it. This means that no matter what the situation is or how others might provoke us, we are responsible for our reactions.

The second step is to take responsibility for our anger which implies that we have choices -- a choice as to whether or not to get angry and a choice as to how we want

to express our anger. If we choose to get angry, we also have a say as to what means we will use to express our anger and how big we will allow it to become.

Often people will say after a strongly intense outburst, "I just snapped," or "I went into a zone," implying that they were in a state that they had no control over. The fact is that somewhere in the course of escalation they gave themselves permission to totally lose control.

The next important step is breaking the automatic response. We are creatures of habit and are conditioned to respond to certain situations in typical ways. The real key to anger management is to break this automatic response, to be able to pause and turn on our rational faculty before we react.

Sometimes it is said that before we get mad we should count to 10. This can give us the pause we need to keep ourselves under control. When we pause, we can pour gasoline on the fire by a string of inflammatory thoughts. But we can also use the pause as an opportunity to decide the next step in our response - calming down, working off frustration through exercise, journaling, or talking things through.

After reading this a person might conclude, "That's easy to say, but not easy to do." And this is true. If anger has become a habitual response it will be difficult to make significant changes and very easy to relapse. If you feel like you cannot control your anger or that it is interfering in your everyday functioning, you may need to seek out services that work towards

treating anger. In the long run, you and a lot of other people will be happier.

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