

in a football game; the other person is obligated to return the gesture and stop talking.

Memorize a few positive statements to say to yourself when your anger is triggered.

- **Check it out.** If anger is a response to personal pain, it makes sense to ask the other person, “What’s bothering you?”
- **Make positive statements.** Memorize a few positive statements to say to yourself when your anger is triggered. These statements will remind that you can **choose** your behavior instead of reacting in a knee-jerk manner. For example, you might say,
“I can take care of my own needs”
“His needs are just as important as mine”
“I am able to make good choices”
- **Be prepared with a memorized response.** A few statements and questions to help deescalate anger are
“What’s bothering me is . . .”
“If this continues like this, I’ll have to do — — — to take care of myself”
“What do you need now?”
“So what you want is . . .”

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Managing Angry Feelings

INTRODUCTION

Most people find it difficult at times to express and manage angry feelings. Let’s take a look at what causes people to become angry and how to respond to stressful situations more productively.

WHAT CAUSES ANGRY FEELINGS?

People feel angry in response to either external or internal events. For example, you may feel anger in response to the behavior of a specific person, like your spouse or a coworker. You may also feel anger in response to an incident like being stuck in traffic or a late plane flight. You may feel angry as a result of your own thoughts and feelings—things like worry, fear, hurt, or memories of upsetting events. Any of these things can set off angry feelings.

Feelings of anger are neither good nor bad. The important thing to realize is that you have the ability to choose your responses to your feelings in any situation. Your way of dealing with angry feelings can be either positive or negative, leading to either a destructive or constructive outcome for yourself and those around you.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

McKay, Matthew, Rogers, Peter, and McKay, Judith. *When Anger Hurts: Quieting the Storm Within*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1989.

Rosellini, Gayle, and Worden, Mark. *Of Course You’re Angry* (2nd ed.). Center City, MN: Hazelden Foundation, 1997.

Tavris, Carol. *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*. New York: Touchstone, 1989.



HOW IS ANGER HARMFUL?

Psychologists have long disagreed about the value of venting feelings. Recent research shows that expressing anger often results in more irritation and tension than feeling more calm. Giving vent to anger can produce the following harmful effects:

- Rise in blood pressure
- The problem causing the anger is worse rather than better
- The person venting the anger seems negative and intimidating, driving others away

WHAT ARE THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ANGER?

People who are frequently angry tend to develop more physical problems than those who aren't. For example:

Heart. Researchers at Stanford University have found that of all the personality traits found in Type A patients, the potential for hostility is the key predictor for coronary disease. The combination of anger and hostility is the most deadly.

Stomach and intestines. Anger has a very negative effect on the stomach, and it has even been associated with the development of ulcerative colitis.

Nervous system. Anger is bad for you because it exaggerates the associated hormonal changes. Chronic suppressed anger is damaging because it activates the sympathetic nervous system responses without providing any release of tension. It is a bit like stepping down on a car's accelerator while slamming on the brakes.

WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME ANGRY?

Anger is our response to stress. Many times we feel anger to avoid feeling some other emotion,

such as anxiety or hurt, or when we are frustrated because we want something and can't have it. Sometimes, feeling angry is a way of mobilizing ourselves in the face of a threat.

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Anger may be useful because it stops (blocks) stress. Here is one example:

You have been rushing all day in your home office to meet an impossible deadline. Your daughter bounces in after school and gives you a big hug as you furiously type on your computer. You snap, "Not now! Can't you see I'm busy!"

People often respond with anger when they experience stressful situations like being in a hurry, feeling overworked, feeling attacked, feeling forced to do something they don't want to do, and feeling out of control.

When you realize that you're feeling annoyed by a situation, speak up. Don't wait until your annoyance escalates to anger.

WHAT ARE SOME ALTERNATIVES TO BECOMING ANGRY?

There are lots of constructive things you can do to deal with stress instead of becoming angry. Here are a few examples:

- Do relaxation exercises
- Beat a pillow or hit some balls at a batting cage
- Get some physical exercise
- Listen to your favorite music

- Make a joke of the situation
- Play a game
- Take a nap
- Tell someone about the situation
- Write about the situation

HOW CAN I DEAL WITH STRESS TO PREVENT ANGER?

An angry response often results when we are stressed over and unhappy with someone else's behavior. Here are some other responses you can choose instead of flying off the handle:

- **Set limits.** Let's say a friend hasn't returned a book you lent her. Now she wants to borrow another one. You could say, "I'm not going to be able to lend you this book until you return the first one."
- **Don't wait.** When you realize that you're feeling annoyed by a situation, speak up. Don't wait until your annoyance escalates to anger.
- **Be assertive.** Say what you want from the other person in a positive way. For example, say "Please call me when you get home" rather than "Would you mind giving me a call when you get home?"

HOW CAN I STOP THE ANGER SPIRAL ONCE IT STARTS?

Once you begin to feel angry, there are several things you can do to stop the process and keep things from spiraling out of control. Here are a few ideas:

- **Call a time-out.** This is a very effective technique for breaking the sequence of behavior that leads to a blowup. It works best if it is discussed ahead of time and both people agree to use it. Either person in an interaction can initiate a time-out. One person makes the time-out gesture like a referee