

Anger Management

Angry Feelings and Aggressive Behavior

Most of us feel angry at times. Anger is a normal emotion and not in itself a problem. It is the way in which we express that anger that can become problematic. Learning what anger signifies can help to empower us—to challenge injustice or to make necessary changes in our lives.

People can feel angry for a number of reasons: perceived attacks on their wellbeing, status, rights or apparent unfairness.

When Can Anger Become a Problem?

For some people, anger is not a problem—they get angry, sort it out relatively quickly and then return to their normal state of viewing the world. Anger becomes problematic when it is too easily triggered or too prolonged. This often impacts concentration, mood, relationships, self-esteem, work and social life. This can result in aggression or violence to self or others.

For some people, dealing with angry feelings and the possible consequences is more of a problem than the situation that caused them. They try to suppress anger but inevitably allow it out in covert ways. Because of this, they may feel stressed and struggle to cope.

For a few people, anger is present most of the time, constantly re-enforced by negative interpretation of the things that happen to them and always just beneath the surface ready to explode. They feel highly stressed and very easily get themselves into conflict situations. This often just continues to reinforce their negative interpretations.

Anger and Change

Another common situation that can cause angry feelings to become a problem is failure to adapt to a change in our situation or in someone's attitude towards us. Change can feel unsettling until we have found a way to adapt to it. It can have an impact on our sense of self-identity. In our changed environment, it may not always be easy or possible to match how we see ourselves with the new situation. We may find that attitudes and ways of presenting ourselves that worked well previously don't work in our new setting, and we have to find other ways of presenting ourselves and relating to people.

When we encounter a situation that we perceive as threatening, the primitive centers of the brain that control the release of hormones involved in aggressive responses get aroused. These parts of our brain don't question the accuracy of our perception—when we are angry, we accept the validity of our feelings. Yet most of us have had the experience of discovering that what motivated our angry feelings was, in fact, misinformed. However, when you are angry, it can be difficult to keep a sense of perspective. Chronic anger can keep us in a state of physical heightened arousal which puts a great strain on our bodies and minds.

The problem is that angry expressions sometimes drive people away and prevent them from wanting to try to understand the problems we may be facing. We are then left feeling isolated which can increase our angry feelings and loneliness.

How You Can Help Yourself

If you think you may have a problem recognizing, expressing or controlling your anger, there are some things you can do to help yourself.

- Try to deal with angry feelings by confronting the source. This can help to effect a change that will reduce your angry feelings without resulting in destructive consequences for others and yourself.
- Develop control over your angry responses, and don't let them develop into a destructive force.
- Remember, suppressing and refusing to acknowledge angry feelings does not make them go away.
- If you are worried about your anger or some of the things that have happened because of it, visit with our Student Health Center or a Kelly Center counselor.

Reframing

This is the term used to describe the placing of a new frame of reference around your thoughts. Instead of developing negative thoughts and scenarios that fuel your anger, try looking for valid alternative explanations. For example:

- “My friend is usually late, if she really liked and respected me she would not keep me waiting,” might become: “This is part of her easy-going nature that I like so much. She is like that with everyone.”
- “This dorm room is a mess, and I'm the only one who cares or does anything about it,” might become: “Actually, it's not dirty or unhygienic. I just live in a dorm room where we all have different standards.”

Use the L.I.F.E. Model

L—Listen to the other person attentively and allow them the space to either confirm or modify your frame of reference by feeding back to them what you understand the situation to be.

I—Use “I” statements and tell the person just what it is that is making you angry without blaming them and escalating the conflict. For example: “I feel angry when you make arrangements without telling me and expect me to go along or get left behind. I feel as if you have no respect for me,” rather than “You have no respect for me, it's no wonder I get so angry.”

F—Allow people the freedom to deal with their problems as they see fit. It's no good getting upset because they can't see the wisdom of your approach; it just makes things worse.

E—Everyone's a winner! Continue to negotiate until both sides feel they have been heard and have got something out of the situation. Trying to “one-up” someone or make someone feel like a loser is only storing future trouble.

The L.I.F.E. model can give you a framework to help you address things that make you angry quickly without escalating the situation into conflict. “Stewing” in your angry feelings or “swallowing” them in order to pretend that it doesn't matter is unlikely to help in the long run.