

# Anger

## Student Counseling

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Bob is fuming because he is stuck in traffic and he is late for class. Joanne is furious because James is already a half-hour late in calling her. Maria is mad because she just discovered she left her wallet at the bookstore. Matt is frustrated because he has trouble registering for a class that is required for his major.

You probably have had some experiences similar to these students that have left you with feelings of intense anger. Almost everyone experiences anger from time to time. Anger is a powerful human emotion that we naturally experience in response to frustration, hurt, disappointment, annoyances, harassment, and/or threats to our security.

We usually tend to think about anger as a negative emotion, but anger can actually be helpful. It can energize us and motivate us to overcome obstacles, solve problems, and achieve goals. However, if we fail to deal with our anger constructively and effectively, it can create additional problems for us. Prolonged anger that is not dealt with and appropriately expressed is extremely stressful and can result in high levels of tension and anxiety, health problems, and increased accidents. Often the object of our anger remains unaffected and it is we who carry around that baggage. In other words, anger is really only harmful to you. It is important that you understand anger, how it affects you, how you respond to it, and how you can handle it.

When you are angry, your body reacts just like it does to stress. Your heart beats faster to pump increased oxygen, adrenaline, and sugar into your bloodstream. Your breathing becomes more rapid, your blood pressure rises, and your muscles tense. Your body is energized for action. In looking for a way to release tension you might yell or shout, slam things, or pound your fist. Bob, for example, might start leaning on his horn. You might take action to resolve a problem, or you might try to hold your anger in. However, if you do not find a way to release your tension you risk building up your anger to a level that is dangerous and difficult to control. Joanne may say nothing to James when he does call, but may blow up at him over a smaller issue later on.

Cognitively, your thoughts about others may become irrational and you may generate negative self-statements. Feelings of anger often arise from thoughts that you have been wronged in some way or that someone means to do you harm. Matt may begin to believe that no one in the university cares or ever thinks about students. Maria may tell herself that she always forgets things and that if she were halfway intelligent this wouldn't happen. These negative thoughts usually serve to increase your anger.

### What can you do to deal with your anger?

- **Recognize your anger**  
Admit to yourself that you are angry and know how you respond physically and mentally when you are feeling angry. What are the signs?
- **Try to calm down**  
The old adage of "take a deep breath and count to ten" really works. Tell yourself that you can deal with the situation more effectively if you are calm. Decide not to act on the situation until you have calmed down.
- **Use a sounding board**  
If there is a neutral person you can talk to about why you are angry, it may help you to determine if you are interpreting the situation accurately.
- **Identify your fears**  
Fear or hurt are often underlying anger. What might be the source of your anger?

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- **Don't avoid the issue**  
Don't allow anger to build up and interfere with later situations or circumstances. After you have reappraised the situation decide to confront it or let it go.
- **Examine your options**  
Identify the different ways you might respond to the situation and the potential outcomes that might result.
- **Decide how you will respond**  
Determine the response that will result in the most positive outcomes for you and others over the long run.
- **Respond assertively rather than aggressively**  
Express yourself firmly without making insulting remarks or trying to put someone on the defensive. Work to resolve the problem rather than to win.
- **Learn to fight fairly**  
If someone has done or said something to you that leads to angry feelings, tell them that it has and that you want to discuss it. First, take responsibility for your angry feelings by using an "I-statement," and then state specifically what the person has said or done and why it has made you angry. Ask the person to work with you toward a resolution of the problem rather than just blaming.
- **Avoid displacing your anger**  
Because the energy of anger wants to be released, there is a tendency to displace anger onto people who are not the source of your anger. This will only make things worse. If you are angry with a business, agency, office or department, ask to talk with someone in charge to express your anger. Avoid displacing your anger onto an unsuspecting clerk.
- **Use desensitization for recurring anger**  
Sometimes when you become very angry about a situation or with another person, you may experience feelings of anger each time you encounter the person or situation again. Your anger response is automatic and learned and can interfere with your ability to act cooperatively in future circumstances. A counselor can teach you desensitization methods to eliminate your automatic anger response.
- **Use humor, physical exercise or other enjoyable activities to release pent-up anger**  
Sometimes you experience minor irritations or problems that cannot be resolved, or the timing is not right to confront the source of your anger. Finding constructive ways to release your tension can help you to move on or to deal more effectively with the source of your anger when the time is right.
- **Seek help**  
If you have difficulty handling your anger in a constructive and effective manner, try talking with a friend or a counselor.

*"Bad temper is its own scourge. Few things are more bitter than to feel bitter. A man's venom poisons himself more than his victim."*

-Charles Buxton