

MENTAL FITNESS

A Newsletters of Self-Help Strategies

ANGER MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES FOR CONTROLLING HOSTILITY

Myths About Anger

Myth 1: *Aggression is the instinctive way of expressing anger.*

REALITY: Aggression is a learned behavior, acted out by individuals who have poor impulse control and have gotten away with it in the past.

Myth 2: *Expressing anger releases and gets rid of it.*

REALITY: This is not necessarily so. Studies indicate that habitual focus on and expression of anger can actually increase hostility.

Myth 3: *Tantrums in childhood are healthy expressions of anger.*

REALITY: Tantrums become a way of controlling parents, and: they reinforce the habit of demanding immediate gratification.

Myth 4: *You should always express what you feel, including rage and hostility.*

REALITY: It is often beneficial to say what you feel, but not always. It is important to express your feelings in a considerate and respectful manner, not in thoughtless or destructive ways.

Why learn to manage your anger?

1. Chronic anger is a strain on your cardiovascular system.
2. Considering response options other than rage will reduce the number of occasions on which you antagonize others, and may increase the likelihood of you getting what you really want.
3. Being more positive and less angry about life and other people will make you a happier person.

MANAGING ANGER

1. Keep a “rage log”

How often during the day you engage in aggressive actions, such as slamming doors, honking your horn, yelling at other motorists, or barking at retail clerks? How often do you provoke people to yell, scream, or honk their horns at you?

How often do you have negative thoughts about other people? “What a jerk she is!” “I’d like to punch him!” “Why don’t these morons move faster!”

How often do you blow your cool? Do you shout angrily, fantasize about physically assaulting someone, or even explicitly threaten violence? How often do you find yourself frowning, impatient, irritable, in a hurry, gritting your teeth?

Take a honest look at your hostility level. Even if you think it is everybody else’s fault, make note of the frequency and intensity of your rage.

2. Talk to yourself.

Make an agreement with yourself to try to delay getting angry. Don’t you have better ways to spend your time than flying into a rage? Many situations are too unimportant for you to explode about. Your time and your health are much too valuable.

Don’t jump to conclusions about the motives of the person who is annoying you. The person who is not moving through the traffic light on schedule is not deliberately trying to keep you from getting to work on time and is probably not a stupid idiot either. He or she is probably just tired and momentarily distracted. Besides, you are probably not going to be late anyway.

3. Cool It!

When you become aware of hostile thoughts or attitudes, yell at yourself “Stop!” or “Cool it!” It sounds silly, but yelling “Stop!” at yourself interrupts your anger program, decreasing the likelihood of you steaming yourself up by thinking of past injustices.

4. Distract yourself.

When your assessment of the situation leads you to the conclusion that your irritation is unmerited or not worth the trouble, simply getting your mind off the anger can be effective.

For example, suppose you are waiting in line at the bank. You can become increasingly irritated, or you could read a magazine, book, or newspaper while you wait. You could also simply watching and observing other people.

MANAGING ANGER (CONTINUED)

5. Decide what you can do about the situation; then do it and let the anger go.

Let's go back to the bank. You have a right to be irritated if you are waiting in line. You have several choices. You can complain to the manager. You can also use the ATM, use the bank when it is uncrowded, or change banks. You don't have to stand in line and stream.

6. If you are chronically angry, take a look at yourself.

What belief are you trying to justify? Do you keep finding examples of situations where life is unfair? It isn't fair. Life's unfairness is not a new discovery. What's the point of continually getting mad about it? It's also true that some people are jerks. Why bother getting mad about that?

7. Avoid overstimulation. Get plenty of rest and exercise.

When your body is in an agitated state, you are more likely to feel and express hostility. Too little sleep, operating under time pressures, and too many competing tasks all contribute to a state of agitation.

Give up or sharply cut back on sweets, caffeine, cigarettes, and/or alcohol. All these contribute to intense reactions and overreactions to people, situations, and stimuli. Steaming yourself up by thinking of past injustices.

8. Learn to listen.

When people talk, do you find yourself impatient, judging, or thinking about what you'll say next? Preoccupation with yourself and your judgments and lack of true attention to what someone else is saying are principal ingredients for angry exchange.

Start listening. Don't jump to conclusions. Fight the urge to break in with your own comments. Try to learn something new by listening. Don't turn conversations into cross-examinations.

9. Assume other people have good intentions.

If you get angry a lot you probably don't trust other people. You assume the worst of them. Many times your evaluation of their motives may not be correct.

Other people may be behaving more reasonably than you credit them for. Try to accept other people as they are, not as you wish they were. When you see a situation from another person's perspective, you will feel less threatened and judgmental.

10. Learn to laugh at yourself.

If you develop a sense of humor about yourself, you can laugh at some of the things that are truly too unimportant to work yourself up about. Getting yourself into and out of a trivial and petty state of anger can be quite amusing. Of course, don't judge yourself either.