

Reading Lines: Managing Anger

Explosive Anger: Part 1

Woman or Man: I think I have a problem with anger. I get so mad that I “explode” over little things. It’s like I can’t control it. But sometimes, I don’t want to talk to the other person about it and I keep my mouth shut, trying to ignore my anger.

Friend: If you “stuff” or hold back your anger, it isn’t very good. It can build up inside and cause you to become tense. Sometimes “anger in” (toward yourself) can even make you feel depressed.

Woman or Man: Sometimes I don’t want to hurt the other person’s feelings. So I keep my mouth shut and try to ignore it.

Friend: That can make you feel resentful, irritable, and bitter. If you don’t express your anger, it gets “bottled up”. “Anger out” can be released like an explosion the next time something triggers your anger. It can cause huge, angry outbursts at people who don’t deserve it.

Woman or Man: I hate it when I “fly into a rage” or feel like hitting or throwing things. I wish I could stop doing that.

Friend: People can learn to change their response to anger. Losing control is a choice you are making. With anger, we choose positive or negative energy as we express ourselves.

Attempting to Control Others: Part 2

Woman or Man: Sometimes I try to control other people when I get angry. I think if I can change them, they will quit doing what makes me angry.

Friend: If people can't control their own emotions, then they may try to control other people. But would controlling other people's actions really solve your anger problems?

Woman or Man: No, I can’t control everything that happens to me or what happens to them. Even if I could control my family, I probably would be angry

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about something else. I really should learn to control *myself* instead of other people.

Friend: That's right. No matter how you act, you can't control everything that happens. And your family probably doesn't like the controlling behavior.

Woman or Man: So, I need to give up trying to control things? Sometimes life isn't fair. Sometimes I am angry for a reason.

Friend: You can manage anger even when life's not fair. Sometimes our life experiences can be terrible. But that's how it is.

Woman or Man: I often think about how I was treated badly as a child. But, my life isn't all bad. I have a spouse (or life partner) and family. My childhood was not good, but I can't do anything about that now.

Friend: Acceptance is the key to moving away from anger. Accept that you can't control other people, or what has happened in your life.

Working Through Anger: Part 3

Woman or Man: But how do I deal with my intense emotions and anger? Does a therapist have to go all the way back to my childhood?

Friend: No. Once you are aware of the old anger, you can change the way it affects you. Then you can try to resolve it.

Woman or Man: Could "working through my anger" help me and my family feel better and to heal emotionally?

Friend: Yes, you can learn better ways to express yourself to the people you care about. When we get rid of old anger and focus on the future, it helps your relationships.

Woman or Man: So how do I work through my anger?

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Friend: You have to learn new habits and tools to express yourself. If you tend to be aggressive when you are angry, you can start with using a healthier “Anger Workout” if needed:

- Hitting a pillow, punching bag, or a kick-bag
- Exercise or play sports, take a walk, or go running
- Yelling at a sports event, or where no one can hear you
- Wringing a wet towel, or pounding on dough (like bread dough or play dough)

Woman or Man: Those things might help to get some negative energy out. But they won’t solve the problem.

Friend: That’s right. You will have to go back to the person or situation that triggered your anger. But go through these steps first:

- **Relax** by using deep, natural breathing and muscle relaxation. Do not say or do anything until you calm down (a warm bath might be helpful)
- **Recognize** what is making you feel angry
- Is it a situation, event, or person? Is it real or imagined?
- **Rethink** what is going on and why you are angry
- Is it because of old anger? Is it from having a bad day? What can I do to handle the situation?
- **Take steps to change the situation** by using assertive, not aggressive “I” statements (calmly but firmly say what you need), and how you feel

Woman or Man: Those steps can help me have a different, more positive attitude?

Friend: Yes. People will treat you differently if you can stay calm. Your life will begin to change for the better. It’s OK to be angry if you learn to express yourself clearly and assertively rather than aggressively.

Messina, J. J. & Messina, C. M. (2007). Tools for anger work-out. Retrieved 9-13-09 from <http://www.livestrong.com/article/14730-a-n-g-e-r-workout/>

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Beyond Traumatic Experiences: Part 4

Woman or Man: I was hurt deeply in the past, and I can't seem to get over it.

Friend: People who have been abused should try to get past it. Even people who have been abused or raped can recover. Going to counseling and learning new ways to cope can be helpful to deal with the anger and the hurt.

Woman or Man: I don't think I can forgive or forget what happened to me.

Friend: Somehow, we have to deal with those feelings. Forgiving and forgetting doesn't mean we go back to the way it was or letting them hurt you again. Of course, *I am not telling anyone they should go back to someone who abused them.* You can grow and change. You need to go on with your life.

Woman or Man: If they are not sorry, how can I forgive them?

Friend: Making mistakes is part of being human. Even if you have been hurt, it doesn't have to keep on hurting you. Think of all the energy that is taken from you when you feel blame, rejection, guilt, or wish for revenge again and again.

Woman or Man: I do think about the past a lot. I know I would be much happier if I thought more about the future than what happened in the past.

Friend: Putting those hurts behind you "clears the air" and helps you let go of the anger, hurt, and pain over what happened. You feel so much lighter if you let go of that "negative baggage" you are carrying around. Your past will still be part of you, but it won't be "weighing you down" anymore.

Woman or Man: I think forgiving and forgetting would help me even more than revenge. That's something I will work on.

Increasing Self-Esteem: Part 5

Woman or Man: I think my low self-esteem is part of my problem. I don't think I can communicate well enough to express my anger the way I want to.

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Friend: Sometimes low self-esteem can be related to idealism, as if things should be perfect. You and I will not be perfect, nor will anyone else. There is really no reason to feel bad if you aren't perfect. The idea of being perfect isn't rational or realistic.

Woman or Man: But I want to feel better about my relationships and my family. Things are not going so well because we yell at each other so much.

Friend: There actually are only three things we can control in life: the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we act. So we have to learn to think in a more rational way. Instead of saying, *"Why did that person make me angry?"*, we ask ourselves, *"Why am I angry?"* or, *"Why did I allow myself to be angry?"*

Woman or Man: I guess I have been putting all my energy into trying to change others. But, if I change myself, my relationships could be better?

Friend: Yes. You would be more likely to express positive emotions, like happiness, pleasure, and love if the negative emotions are released in healthier ways. If your anger is not "acted out", or "stuffed inside," you will manage your anger in healthier ways.

Woman or Man: If I don't look so angry, people may want to talk to me more, so some of my problems can actually be resolved.

Friend: When you learn how to tell people how you feel, you won't be as resentful and bitter. They will be more likely to share their feelings with you, too. Improving communication skills can even help build yourself-esteem.

Responding to Anger Part 6

Woman or Man: What can I do about people who are angry and yelling at me?

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Friend: When someone is in a rage, the best thing to do is to take some time to cool off and come back later to discuss the issue.

Woman or Man: If I can't get them to calm down, I don't want to stay and listen to the ranting and raving.

Friend: You could just tell them that you need some time to think about it. Say, "I don't want to say anything I'll regret later." Then leave the room for a while.

Woman or Man: That can be hard to do when someone is so emotional.

Friend: Yes, but sometimes it helps to "detach" yourself emotionally if you don't want to get angry. The issue might be something that really doesn't matter that much. It might work to just tell yourself you don't have to get angry. You can say, "Oh, well, that's how it is," or try to find some humor in it. Detachment is another form of acceptance, and can be a powerful tool.

Woman or Man: My mother used to say, "That's how the cookie crumbles," or "That's the way the ball bounces". Maybe that's how she handled some of her anger. She was also strong in her spirituality and faith, so that helped calm her.

Friend: By letting go of anger, hurt, and blame, we can find serenity. "Letting go" and believing in a Higher Power can help us a lot.

Woman or Man: I often find myself asking, "Why did that happen?" But if it already happened, you should be asking instead, "How will we get on with our lives?" There is really no need to blame anyone.

Friend: You are right. Acceptance is a big part of managing anger and control issues. Sometimes people say, "It is what it is." If we see things just as they are, we can deal with our problems better.

Griffin, J. (2002). Defusing anger and rage. Retrieved 9-7-09 from <http://www.spiritofmaat.com/archive/nov3/prns/messina.htm>