



## Dealing with Your Own Anger

Anger can often be quite energizing but more frequently is a function of some distress. Most times people experience anger because they feel their expectations were not met or somebody did something hurtful to them.

Anger has some negative side effects including not only the experience of distress but negative physiological effects such as increased risk for stroke and heart disease. As well, anger is a trigger for aggressive behaviour (e.g., emotional aggression, physical aggression, and psychological aggression). Aggressive behaviour is what gets people into trouble.

There is little value in anger or aggressive behaviour. It is an emotion that is protective of us and occurs when we feel under some form of threat, however, it is unnecessary to deal with 99.9% of daily problems. So it is worth avoiding angry behaviour; rather try to develop a goal of being a calm but effective person. In fact, aggressive behaviour usually interferes with your ability to solve problems, develop relationships, and enjoy your personal and work life.

So, if you have made your goal to be calm and effective here are some suggestions to try.

- **Find your triggers.** Pay attention to the kinds of situations that make you angry or aggressive. Look for a theme. Are you feeling that your opinions or thoughts are being discounted? Are you feeling threatened? Are you being treated in an unfair or disrespectful manner? You might consider not going into those situations, however avoidance is not always an option and doesn't provide an opportunity to learn new skills. Sometimes we have to change how we experience the situation.
- **Watch your language.** You may be overreacting to an event. Listen to how you describe a situation (in your head or to other people) and see if it matches the reality of the experience. Instead of exaggerating, be realistic. Was it a "horrible" thing that happened or was it simply "annoying"?
- **Consider the lens through which you see the world.** We all have "mental filters" that we use to interpret and understand the world. These mental filters can significantly influence our perception of others like a pair of sunglasses. After you wear those glasses for a while, you don't even notice. It is the same with mental filters; after a while, you don't notice them either.
  - Often the mental filter an angry person uses is one that sees that others are hurtful, unfair, out to get me, or judgemental.
  - Notice whether your "mental filter" is similar. For example, are you being judgemental? If you experience anger too much, it is likely that you are.
- **Try to shift your mental filter to one that is more adaptive.** Try saying to yourself, "I am going to not be judgemental. I will try to see others in a light that allows them to be themselves and I will not be reactive. I am going to stay calm."



## resiliency builder

- **Take a time out if you can't be calm.** Often a person who gets aggressive can feel their anger building but they fail to manage the situation. If you feel your anger building, then get of the situation nicely and take a break.
- **Practice deep breathing.** Breathing slowly and relaxing at the same time is a good way to reduce the physical tension we feel when under stress. Focus your attention on the tip of your nose and watch your breath enter and leave your body. As you exhale, relax your shoulders. Do this for a few minutes and you will notice a quick reduction in your tension.
- **Commit to Being Assertive Not Aggressive.** If you can commit to being assertive instead of being aggressive, you will go a long way in standing up for yourself in difficult situations, building confidence, and being the kind of person others look up to. Being assertive is standing up for yourself without hurting others. Simple but it takes some effort to do when provoked.
- **If You Have Been Aggressive, Apologize.** Try to mend broken fences. If you have been hurtful to somebody, then go and say you are sorry. This helps you take personal responsibility and it goes a long way to improve damaged relationships. Of course, you can't keep hurting and apologizing but saying you are sorry helps you get accountable for your actions and helps you to not be angry or aggressive next time.
- **Get some help.** Finally, if you are experiencing frequent bouts of anger or aggressive behaviour then it may be useful to talk to a professional. A chronic pattern of anger could place your career and family life in jeopardy. Consider contacting your Employee and Family Assistance Program, a health or mental health professional or enrolling in a community or company program.