



Dealing with the Anger of Others

Most times people feel angry because they feel their expectations were not met or somebody did something hurtful to them. It is not the person's feelings of anger that are the issue, but rather how that is exhibited in their interactions with others. It is aggressive behaviour that creates problems for the angry individual and for those around them. Aggressive behaviour is defined as:

- Verbal aggression (e.g., name calling, yelling, threatening, sarcasm),
- Physical aggression (e.g., hitting, pushing, fighting),
- Psychological aggression (e.g., bullying, verbal intimidation, put-downs, destructive criticism, gossip),
- Withdrawal of self (e.g., turning a cold shoulder or snubbing, withholding of necessary information, social rejection).

If you are experiencing the impact of angry behaviour at home or work, the following steps will help.

1. Give yourself time and space to calm down after an aggressive event has occurred. You need to think this through and you will need a clear and calm mind to come up with the best solutions.
2. Get an outside point of view. Talk to someone you respect because of their skilfulness in handling situations and people. Focus on resolutions, not fuelling your reactions.
3. Consider the perspective and motives of the angry person. People often become angry when they feel threatened or, alternatively wish to exert their power over another through intimidation. Each of these requires a different response.
 - a. **A Person Feeling Threatened:** In this situation often people are angry or upset because what they expected to happen didn't happen and they feel like someone or something is to blame. This may well be accurate however their anger and aggressive behaviour is unlikely to resolve the issue.
 - b. **A Person Who Uses Aggressive Behaviour to Gain Power:** This situation is often described as bullying. The angry behaviour is deliberate rather than reactive to personal feelings of frustration or disappointment. Bullying is particularly pernicious and intimidating.
4. If you determine that the person was angry because something happened that didn't turn out as they hoped or expected, then you have an opportunity for a productive conversation with them. Be assertive, clear and calm. Pick a private time and a place when you, and the other person, are calm. If you did something that disappointed them, take responsibility for your own actions. Inform them that you do not like being treated in an angry manner. Try statements like: "I understand I didn't get the work done on time, but yelling and



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calling me names isn't helpful." Try to be empathic, to take their point of view. Acknowledge their perspective (which isn't the same as agreeing with them). If they are experiencing a particular problem or stressor, offer to problem solve together. This can often diffuse a situation quickly.

5. If you determine that the person was aggressive with you because they were trying to gain power over you, then you need to take direct action. Bullies only cease when their behaviour isn't effective. Document the incident, or incidents, in detail. If you are in a position to speak to the individual directly, then inform them that their behaviour is not acceptable and that you expect to be treated reasonably and spoken to in a civil manner. Standing up to people who are aggressive is the best approach if you remain calm but firm and clear. If you become aggressive or defensive, you defeat the purpose of your actions. If the person continues to be aggressive, then consult your workplace harassment policy (you may have to seek the assistance of your union or human resources department if you have one) and then inform your direct supervisor of the incident and ask for a resolution. Often a mediator can be helpful to work out these situations.
6. Strive for forgiveness. This does not mean being a pushover who is easily intimidated, but rather someone who can move on and allow for the frailties of others. It is difficult. If you are able to do this, and it can be difficult, it sets a higher standard and allows for better relationships in the future. It also spares you the burden of carrying your own fear, resentment and anger.