

## Clinical Corner – Anger Management

Anger is a natural emotion. When we deny that we are angry, we are denying something fundamentally human.

Some of us deny anger because of messages we received as children, telling us about how we should and should not behave. Acknowledging to ourselves that we are, indeed, angry is a positive step. Here's how to release it and maintain the respect of others.

### **Admit When You Are Angry**

The first step in dealing constructively with anger is to admit when you are angry. Trying to cover it up or pretend it isn't there will only make it come out some other way and distance us from other people. You may have been denying anger for such a long time that it will take some practice to recognize when it's there. But if you start looking for it, you'll begin to see that many things stir up angry feelings.

### **Stop, Look And Listen**

*STOP* - Try to identify what you are angry about. The cause of anger isn't always obvious. We're so accustomed to shutting off our feelings that we might have to think seriously about the cause of our anger before we can identify it. What made us angry might not be the last thing that happened today, but the first. Or it might have happened yesterday or last week.

*LOOK* - If you've identified the cause, think about it before you act. Could it have been avoided? Were you partly responsible for it by not giving clear instructions?

*LISTEN* - Anger is like an old friend reminding us what we like, what we want and what we need. It tells us when something has gone wrong. By being aware of what makes you angry, you can learn to shrug off the less important things.

### **Express Your Anger**

By taking the time to survey the anger-making situation, you have the opportunity to cool off, and you can make expressions of anger a choice rather than a reaction. This gives you more control, and you'll be able to monitor what you say and how you say it. Be honest, but be loving and respectful. Others will respect your honesty—and you will feel more satisfied in anger-making situations.

### **Harmful Effects Of Holding In Anger**

Imagine a really angry person. Do you picture someone who is aggressive and hostile, quick to blow up or out of control? Many people do. So, you may be surprised to learn that most angry people hold in their anger. In fact, a study by the University of Massachusetts found as few as 10 percent of angry people "act out" in a clearly aggressive manner.

People who hold in angry feelings show it in other ways, such as being overly critical and cynical or feeling depressed and victimized. Being angry uses a lot of emotional and physical energy. Consequently, internalizing anger can have harmful effects, debilitating both physical and mental health and compromising personal and professional relationships.

**PHYSICAL EFFECTS** - Anger is one of many ways the body responds to stress. Stress can be caused by most anything, such as job pressure, a fear of failing, chronic pain, memories of a traumatic event or relationship problems. Even minor irritants, such as traffic or waiting in line, can cause stress. When a person gets angry, the body reacts by increasing heart rate and blood pressure and releasing elevated amounts of certain hormones. Although the body is able to adjust to "normal" levels of stress, significant and accumulated stress can contribute to disease and eventual death.

In fact, medical researchers have linked the stress response of anger to:

- elevated blood pressure
- increased heart rate
- tense muscles
- heart attack
- stroke
- ulcers
- migraines
- low back pain
- shortened life expectancy

### **Psychological Effects**

Unexpressed—and expressed—anger impacts a person's mental health as well. Studies have linked anger to loneliness, chronic anxiety, depression, eating disorders, sleep disorders, obsessive-compulsive behavior and phobias. Anger's harmful effects spill over into a person's personal and professional lives, undermining a person's capacity for emotional fulfillment and personal and professional achievement. In other words, anger can hold you back and keep you down.

Anger inhibits the development and maintenance of intimate relationships, often resulting in marital and occupational instability. Angry people frequently blow misunderstandings and minor grievances out of proportion and are more inclined to end relationships with people, even close friends, than work to resolve problems. Other people find their demeanor and mood unpleasant to be around. Consequently, angry people often alienate themselves from others—even their own families. Angry people have trouble being effective parents and spouses.

### **Is Getting Physical the Answer?**

Yes and no. Physical expression of anger is appropriate sometimes. But angry outbursts typically offer only temporary relief, and can sometimes escalate the anger and aggression. If your anger is eating you up inside, there are books and courses that teach anger management strategies.

### **Source:**

American Psychological Association