

# Anger Management - Overview

**Anger**, in simple words, is one's reaction to feeling threatened. It starts from discomfort and leads to irritation, and at times it aggravates to violent rage. Anger is often mistaken for aggression. Terms such as hostility, aggression, and mood swing are used almost as a substitute for Anger, however there is a thin line of difference between them.

- **Hostility** – While anger is the driving emotion, our own interpretation and judgment of situations result in Hostility. Hostility breeds and encourages Aggression.
- **Aggression** – Aggression is the behavior that has the tendency to harm people/property. It is the final outcome of the anger brewing inside us.
- **Mood Swing** – It is a lingering emotional state which can range from irritation to violent expressions of anger. When the mood is at its peak, it completely overtakes every other emotion. Interestingly, the word 'mood' derives from the old English word '**mōd**' which means '**courage**'.

## Negatives of Anger

Rohan lives in an apartment. He wakes up one morning and finds someone has moved his bike from its parking spot without his consent. He first experiences a discomfort at someone having encroached the private space of his property. Slowly but surely, anger starts to brew. "**Oh, sure! Go on – treat me like a worthless guy! Why even bother asking me for anything!**" A hostile mental environment forms due to this interpretation of the situation.

While he was still talking to himself in anger, suddenly his son appears and asks him to help fix the fan. Already disturbed with his internal conflicts, Rohan yells out, reducing his son to tears. This venting out might have calmed Rohan temporarily, but the guilt and shame inside him for having hurt his son makes him grumpy and disagreeable for the rest of the morning. At work, the colleagues will notice and whisper among themselves – "**Rohan is in a bad mood today.**"

## Try it Yourself

Recall an incident in your life where you had gotten angry and had become violent. *It is best if the incident happened recently.*

**Step 1** – Maintain silence and close your eyes before you recall the incident. Take 10 minutes for this.

**Step 2** – Fill in the Guide Form given below.

Event (What's the incident?)	Trigger(What made you angry?)	Emotion(How did you feel?)	Sensation(How did your body react?)	Thoughts(What was going in your mind?)	Behavior(What was your reaction?)	Consequence(What was the result of your reaction?)

## Anger Management - Myths & Facts

There are many widespread beliefs and myths regarding anger. Let's deconstruct these myths and know what the facts are.

### **Myth 1 - Venting my anger out relaxes me. Holding it in isn't healthy.**

**Fact** - There is a saying that holding on to anger is like holding on to red-hot coals in your palms. Anger should be drained out, but not by being aggressive. That will only lead to further confrontations.

### **Myth 2 - My aggressive behavior gets me attention, respect, and obedience.**

**Fact** - Power to influence comes from understanding someone and not by intimidating him. You may bully people into submission, but they won't respect you and will eventually desert you if you can't tolerate opposing viewpoints.

### **Myth 3 - I cannot control my anger.**

**Fact** - Just like any other emotion, anger also is a result of the situation you are in. Analyzing the situation from multiple possible viewpoints avoids misjudgment and prevents anger.

### **Myth 4 - Anger management is about learning to suppress your anger.**

**Fact** - Anger should neither be suppressed nor vented out, rather it should be expressed in a non-violent manner and in constructive ways. This is what Anger Management teaches people to do.

# Why Anger Management?

Chronic Anger can have many short-term and long-term ill-effects on your health, social life, and personal life too. In addition to losing friends and breaking relationships with every passing day, anger also results in a general feeling of mistrust and loss of peace.

## Anger affects your health

Prolonged periods of angry behavior exerts tremendous stress on us, thereby sparing less time for the body to relax. That results in health-related issues like high blood pressure, diabetes, and insomnia.

## Anger affects your thinking

Anger makes our judgment hazy and leads to misrepresentation of facts. It also results in repeated analyzing of the event. This drains a lot of mental energy, thereby leading to depression and hypertension, among other problems.

## Anger hurts your career

People who cannot accept constructive criticism, and cannot handle creative differences or opposite opinions end up expressing their discomfort aggressively, which results in colleagues and friends deserting them.

## Anger affects personal life.

Intense anger prevents people from socializing with you or feeling comfortable around you. Explosive display of anger also scars children's psyche for life.

## Anger Management - Symptoms of Anger

External factors such as personal issues with others, debts, frustration, unfavorable situations or lack of time for self and family leads to negative thoughts.

The **Mental Symptoms of Anger** are –

- Discomfort
- Irritation
- Restlessness

At the same time, our body also starts responding uncontrollably to these situations by exhibiting the **Physical Symptoms of Anger** such as –

- Heart beating rapidly
- Muscles getting tense
- Sweat buds forming on forehead

These mental and physical discomforts combine and lead us to exhibit **aggressive behavior** such as –

- Shouting and arguing
- Throwing objects
- Kicking walls, punching pillows, or slamming doors
- Crying

But the worst way to deal with anger is **to do nothing**, i.e., **bottle it up**. This suppressing of anger leads to getting drunk frequently, excessive smoking, and even taking drugs. In extreme cases, people also hurt themselves.

In situations like these, the most important thing to tell yourself is that people, situations, or the surroundings do not make you angry. It is the way we react to them that makes us angry.

**In short, anybody or anything that angers you – controls you.**

## Anger Management - Cues to Anger

A very effective way of identifying and preventing anger is to understand and recognize the four cues or hints that we receive from the way our mind and body reacts in a hostile environment or at the initiation of an unfavorable external agent –

- **Physical Cues** – These are the hints our body gives us to tell that anger has started building inside us. They could be increased heart rate, rapid breathing, tensing of muscles, etc.
- **Behavioral Cues** – The way we behave with others when we are angry, or what others observe about us when we are angry such as jaw-clinching, frowning our brow, and staring.
- **Emotional Cues** – These are some other emotions that accompany anger such as insecurity, helplessness, shame, and guilt.
- **Thought-related Cues** – These are our thoughts when we are angry such as disturbing mental images, imagining punching someone, connecting this incident with some other similar incident.

## Try it Yourself

Imagine a scenario that makes you uncomfortable and angry. Notice the changes that are occurring in your body, mind, thoughts, and behavior respectively. Now fill in the following table.

Your name	Physical cues	Emotional cues	Cognitive cues	Behavioral cues

## Anger Management - Angry Behaviors

### Analysis of Negative Emotions

Many think that anger is an emotion that just starts on its own and before they realize, it spirals out of control. On the contrary, anger is a defensive mechanism. It is invoked when we feel insecure so that it gets the body ready for the "**Fight or Flight**" mode of survival. Paying attention to the changes anger brings in our body can give us a hint of approaching anger.

Analysis of negative emotions include identifying thinking patterns that trigger and fuel anger. These include the following –

- **Clubbing Thoughts** – For example, "Nobody cares about me.", "Why am I so invisible to others around me?", "They all hate me."
- **Forcing a rigid opinion** – Having a non-negotiable view and opinion and forcing people to think identically when faced with opposite views.
- **Assuming and Concluding prematurely** – For example, "I know what he is implying.", "Oh, so that's what he is getting at.", "Okay, maybe he doesn't want to hear me. Fine, we are done for good."
- **Building on anger** – Looking for excuses to get angry and upset. This is both the cause and the result of irritation and brings in major misunderstanding between two people even if one of them is willing to help.
- **Blaming** – You blame everyone else rather than taking a hard look at yourself to identify problems.

## Anger Management - The Aggression Cycle

Any episode of anger display starts from scratch and builds up, either steadily or rapidly through three stages. Here we will discuss these stages along with the actions associated with them.

- **Escalation** – At this stage, we start receiving various cues that our mind and our body give us about the anger building up inside us. These cues are **physical** (heavy breathing), **behavioral** (teeth-clenching), **emotional** (guilt), or **cognitive** (images of revenge).
- **Expression** – If the Escalation Phase continues unattended, the Expression Phase will soon follow. This is characterized by violent display of anger which includes either verbal or physical aggression.
- **Post-expression** – It is at this stage when we start **realizing the negative** consequences that were the direct result of the verbal or physical aggression. They could range from inner feelings of guilt, shame, and regret to more external implications such as arrest, and retribution from others.

Every individual has his personal intensity, frequency, and duration of anger in the Aggression Cycle. For example, one person may get angry in just a few minutes. Another person's anger may escalate slowly over a long duration before hitting the **Expression Stage**.

The **Aim of Anger Management** is to prevent people from reaching the Expression Stage. With the help of effective techniques and practices, anger can be identified and controlled before it reaches the **Escalation Stage**.

## Anger Management - The A-B-C-D Model

The A-B-C-D model, developed by Albert Ellis, is regarded worldwide as powerful therapy to overcome anger management problems.

- **A (Activation Agent)** – The situation that triggers your anger.
- **B (Believing)** – How you interpret the activating event.
- **C (Consequences)** – This is your feelings and actions in response to your belief.
- **D (Dispute)** – "Disputing" is checking with beliefs if they are realistic or just a figment of your distorted imagination. This is significant in Anger Management.

### Example of the A-B-C-D Model

#### **A (Activation Agent)**

You're walking down the stairs and somebody collides with you and takes off without apologizing.

### **B (Believing)**

You think, "Everybody is so reckless nowadays; they treat others like pests."

### **C (Conclusions)**

You notice that your muscles are tense, your heart rate is high, and you feel like you want to hit the steering wheel. You roll down your window and yell an expletive out at the other driver.

### **D (Dispute)**

You could say to yourself - "Maybe he had some emergency... probably not, but you never know; this is life."

**Disputing your irrational belief with this kind of rational self-talk diffuses anger and calms you down.**

## Anger Management - Anger Control

Anger can always be kept under control; at least one can mitigate its severity by applying the following methods -

### Try to understand the feelings under your anger

Anger often covers up other feelings such as embarrassment, insecurity, shame or guilt. In order to control your anger, you need to realize what your real feelings are.

### Managing cues and triggers

Anger fuels the "fight or flight" defense mechanism of the body. Even if you might feel that you just get angry without warning, your body starts sending you physical signals much before that.



## Identifying Anger Buttons

- Clenching hands or jaw
- Flushing of face
- Breathing heavier
- Pacing around
- Pounding heart

## Learn ways to cool down

You can deal with your anger quicker if you know how to recognize the cues, before it gets out of control.

## Quick tips for cooling down

- **Breathing** – Taking deep breaths from the abdomen to draw fresh air into lungs.
- **Exercising** – It releases the brooding negative energy that you carry around.
- **Using senses** – Listening to music, or picturing yourself in a scenic location.
- **Slowly counting to ten** – Focusing on counting makes you think rationally and gets your feelings streamlined with your thoughts.

## Find healthier ways to express your anger.



If channeled properly, anger can be a great motivating tool. A lot of athletes have used anger to perform excellently.

## Giving yourself a moment to think about the situation.

- How important is it in the Big Picture?
- Must I should waste my time in being angry about it?
- Is it worth spoiling the day for me?

## Communication & Anger

Angry people tend to interpret things personally and jump to irrational conclusions. Improving communication skills reduces misunderstandings that lead to anger.

## Tips to Improve Communication Skills

Here are a few tips that you can apply to improve your communication skills.

- **Listening to Others** – Listen to what others are saying rather than speaking first.
- **Not Jumping to Conclusions** – Avoid mind-reading. Give a chance to the other person to put his point-of-view clearly and comprehensively.
- **Not Fighting Back Immediately** – Keep calm and find out what the other person's real feelings are behind his saying what he has said.
- **Expressing Your Real Feelings** – You need to be clear about what is the driving emotion behind your anger. The most common emotions behind anger are fear, shame, guilt, or frustration.

## Long-term Beliefs

Sometimes people hold extremely negative views about themselves that they arrive at on their own or have been drilled into them, for example – "**I'm not very smart.**", or "**I'm dull at studies.**"

You need to remind yourself that everyone has lived through unhappy times in their past. **It's best to let go of any negative self-critical analyses.**

## Anger Management - Tips

Here are a few time-tested tips of anger management –

- **Thinking before Speaking** – Collect your thoughts before saying anything.
- **Expressing Anger Calmly** – State thoughts clearly without hurting others.
- **Exercising** – Spend some time doing other enjoyable physical activities.
- **Timeouts** – Some moments of silence can help you focus your thoughts.
- **Identifying Solutions** – Instead of thinking what makes you angry, try to find a resolution to the issue.
- **Use 'I' statements** – Say, "I've been waiting to check your presentation," instead of, "You never finish your work within deadlines."
- **Don't grudge** – It's unrealistic to expect everyone to perform by your guidelines. Forgiving and forgetting can take a lot of negative emotion out of your system.
- **Use humor** – Use humor to dissipate the situation without turning it hostile.
- **Practice relaxation skills** – Practice deep-breathing, listening to music.
- **Seek help** – Consider seeking professional help if your anger is absolutely uncontrollable.

## Try it Yourself

Recall a situation that made you angry, and another one that caused you to turn violent in anger. Now compare both the situations and fill in the form.

- **What makes you angry? How would you react to this situation?**

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- **What behavior you want to avoid the most when you experience anger?**

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- **What will be your alternative line of action?**

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- **How will you deal with the early warning signs of anger?**

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- **How will you behave when you are very angry?**

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## Resources & References

- **Davies, William (2000); Overcoming Irritability and Anger;** Constable & Robinson; ISBN: 1854875957
- **Garber, Kathy S (2002); Stop Anger, Be Happy;** Trafford; ISBN: 155395095
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