Creative Strategies for Anger Management

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“Human anger is thought to be comprised of conscious thought, physiological changes, and some form of consequent behavior.” (Seward, Managing Stress). This is the mind/body connection of anger, which is really a complex range of emotions including guilt, impatience, blame, frustration, prejudice, resentment, discouragement, hostility and rage. Anger occurs when a personal boundary, or integrity, is violated. Fear, the flip side of anger, also triggers the above emotions when it is turned into anger.

We express anger when our needs and expectations of ourselves, or other people and situations, are unmet. Holding on to anger creates a “filter” which prevents us from experiencing a full range of other, more positive emotions.

Here are some suggestions for expressing anger in a healthy way, which means that we recognize our anger, take responsibility for it, express it in a mutually beneficial way and resolve it.

- **Know your anger style.** Are you passive, active, dominant? Do you tend to express your anger outwardly, or hold it in? Think about how you react when angry.

- **Learn to monitor your anger.** Keep track of when and how often you get angry. What are patterns and triggers for your anger?

- **Learn to deescalate you anger.** Count to ten, take a deep breath, stay as calm as possible. Physiological responses are quick, followed by a simmering period. If necessary remove yourself from the scene until you are rational, and have some perspective. Then return to address the person or situation.

- **Learn to think out your anger.** How can you use the energy of anger to resolve the situation for the benefit of all involved?
* **Get comfortable with your feelings and learn to express them constructively.** “Anger is like acid; it needs to be neutralized.” (Seaward, *Managing Stress*). The people who suffer the most from stress disorders are those who cannot recognize or express their feelings openly.

* **Plan ahead.** Learn to identify situations that trigger anger, and try to minimize your exposure to them.

* **Develop a support system.** Foster friendships and relationships with people to whom you can express your frustrations AND from whom you can get some good problem-solving ideas. Sometimes processing anger with a neutral party can provide better insight.

* **Develop realistic expectations of yourself and others.** Remember, stress and anger are often triggered by unmet expectations. It’s important to believe the best about yourself and those you care about, unless your expectations are too unrealistic.

* **Learn problem-solving techniques.** Gain as much information as possible, and then trust your creative juices. Look at the problem from the other person’s point of view as well as your own. This may help you develop options and choices you might not have considered.

* **Stay in shape.** Maintain fitness wellbeing from a holistic perspective – physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Eat properly, develop a regular exercise regimen, take time for yourself to stay “centered,” maintain your personal integrity and contribute your time and talent to your family, friends, work colleagues and community.

* **Turn complaints into requests.** Complaining, which often involves blaming behavior, is a treadmill experience from which you never move forward. It is a sign of victimization. You can gain leverage if you are willing to address the problem and request a change in behavior from all involved, including yourself.

* **Make anger pass.** Anger is a healthy emotion (survival) only when the problem is addressed and a resolution is achieved. This requires both an internal and external dialogue. The most important component of resolving anger is forgiveness, which enables everyone involved to accept the situation, make whatever changes are necessary and move on.

Adapted from B.L. Seaward, *Managing Stress*, Carol Tavris and Harold Weisinger