

***TIPS FOR MANAGING ANGER* HANDOUT**

Learn how to recognize the physical, mental, and behavioral warning signs of your angry feelings.

As just discussed, awareness is one of the most helpful tools we have for keeping one step ahead of an angry outburst. In addition to becoming aware of situations and thoughts that trigger anger, it is also helpful to pay attention to physical signals that anger is building up. For example, clenching your teeth or fists, tension in your neck or stomach, feeling hot and flushed, increases in heart rate and breathing are common anger signals. These physical signals, in combination with anger-feeding thoughts and expectations, are cues that we should “cool down,” adjust our expectations or attitudes, or simply walk away from a situation.

Ask yourself if your anger is justified.

When we feel angry, we often feel somewhat righteous and justified in our anger. In some cases, this may be appropriate, such as when our rights have been stepped on or when a serious injustice has occurred. However, there are many times when our anger is not justified—times when we are angry simply because we don’t want to compromise, or when we “displace” our anger. To displace anger means to take out our angry feelings on someone or something that had nothing to do with the original source of anger. For example, my boss yells at me for something I forgot to do. This makes me angry, and I

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displace that anger later in the day by getting angry and yelling at my partner over something insignificant. In this case, I would likely be more justified in being angry with myself (since the situation was originally about something I forgot to do).

However, I would not be justified in taking it out on my partner. He/she had nothing to do with it. Some helpful questions to ask ourselves include: Is my anger an overreaction to a situation that is beyond my control? Am I misplacing anger with myself onto others? Am I expecting too much of others and myself? Am I taking things too personally?

Talk rather than act out your angry feelings.

Talk to someone you trust and who is not involved in the event that triggered your anger. “Venting” or talking with a neutral friend or with a counselor can help you get another perspective. Avoid venting with someone who fans your anger or encourages you to act on your angry feelings. Instead, choose someone who is cool-headed and able to help you talk about your anger in a way that allows you to resolve it and move on. It’s been said that words can be magic. Sometimes in talking things out with others and hearing their input, we actually create solutions to problems that we may not have come up with on our own.

Explore your options.

Often, when we are angry, we may feel stuck. When angry, it is easy to get into “black and white” thinking, instead of examining all of our choices and possible solutions. It is helpful to let things cool down before acting. Important decisions are best made when we’re in a calm, rational frame of mind. Then we are better able to ask ourselves: *What type of response is in my best interest?* It can be helpful to play out different scenarios in your head or to talk them over with a trusted friend. Try to let go of the problem for a day or two, and see if you get a new perspective. Doing something physical (taking a walk, playing sports, exercising) can help burn off some of the anger and put you in a better frame of mind for problem solving.

Recall what solutions worked for you in the past.

Most of us are able to recall situations in which we dealt with anger causing events in an appropriate way. Maybe we took time to cool down before confronting someone, or we were able to think before acting, or we simply decided to not let something bother us, or we realized that what we were mad about was really our own fault. Whatever the solution was, it has the potential to work again in the present. Recalling the past helps us remember that difficult feelings, no matter how strong, are always temporary. No matter how uncomfortable our feelings are right now, they will go away. Acting impulsively, exploding, or