

## **What is anger?**

Simply put, anger is an emotion like all other emotions. Emotions are signposts into our internal structure. It's simply something we feel.

## **How do we become angry?**

There is a direct and an indirect process of becoming angry. If we are referring to anger as an emotion like sadness, hurt, or joy, anger is simply a direct feeling response. So something happens, and we may react to it with feeling hurt, angry, or some other emotion. However, anger can also be a secondary emotion. Many people (particularly males) are trained to accept the feeling of anger, but not to accept the feelings that may have preceded it; such as feelings of hurt, fear, or vulnerability. Sometimes when we feel hurt or vulnerable, we immediately jump to anger because that's more acceptable to us. In this context, it becomes a secondary emotion, it's the feeling we can tolerate rather than such feelings as hurt or vulnerability.

## **When does anger become unhealthy? How do I know?**

Anger is unhealthy when it gets in the way of your functioning or your relationships; if anger is causing you to lose friends, put your job in jeopardy, if people complain to you about your anger, if you hear people talking about you having a bad temper. These are signs that your anger is getting in your way, and therefore it's unhealthy.

## **Does anger have a neurological basis? Is it hereditary?**

No, anger doesn't have a neurological basis any more than any other feeling. And no, it isn't hereditary. There are people who suffer from a certain kind of illness called intermittent explosive disorder. This illness results in anger being used as a secondary emotion, prompting an outbreak of rage, smashing things, yelling at people and so forth. There may be some hereditary basis to this, but there is no clear evidence at the present.

## **Can medication help treat anger?**

Certain kinds of anti-depressants reduce explosive disorders, and also reduce anxiety. But generally, medication is not used to directly treat anger. Anti-depressants are more often used to temporarily relieve symptoms associated with anger, such as anxiety or depression.

## **Is there a pattern and process to becoming angry?**

When it's a secondary emotion, there's the process of moving from whatever the original emotion is to the anger, because it's too hard to stay with the original feelings.

## **Two people in the same situation; one becomes angry, one does not; why?**

It's the same as with any other feeling. We are affected by the interpretation we have of an event. Some people become angry because they read something into an event which could cause hurt or pain that can eventually translate into anger. Somebody else either reads something else into the event or doesn't read much into the event at all, and therefore doesn't feel the anger.

### **How does one's anger affect other people? How does anger affect relationships?**

In particular, the violence that women and children face (primarily from men) is a result of anger. Anger can very much affect other people if it's tied into threat of violence, or into violence itself. It also tends to shut down the people who are around the angry person. Angry people may find their relationship becoming less open because people are afraid to argue back. This can be devastating, and ruin relationships.

### **What are some physical side affects of anger? Can anger kill me?**

There seems to be some small amount of physical side effects. There is clear evidence of increased blood pressure, and with increased blood pressure is a propensity towards a stroke.

### **What can I do when I'm feeling angry?**

You can attempt to process it. Think through right and wrong. Get clear about what your underlying feelings are. Pardon the cliché, but take a "time-out". Remember, anger is a feeling that is here today, gone tomorrow, but the pain and backlash we inflict on others during anger are harder forgotten. If the anger is so intense that processing and time-outs don't help, the best next options are to release the anger through activity or towards inanimate objects. It's also best if you do this alone, because even releasing anger on inanimate objects can be threatening to other people. After you get alone, you can do things like using a bat on a couch or pillow. Some other ideas for releasing anger might be playing basketball, racquetball, jumping rope, taking a pet for a walk, watching television, or reading a newspaper article. These are all excellent ways to take a time-out or release anger appropriately. Remember, the option that is NEVER available is hitting another person. \*You have the right to be angry, but you do not have the right to hit someone.

### **I've been told to keep my cool and don't get angry, but sometimes I can't. I'm so frustrated!**

The question is, do you have something to be angry about? Sometimes people treat us poorly, and don't expect us to respond. If you're in conditions which frequently upset you, then it makes sense to start looking for, or creating other conditions. So often we want to change what other people do that initiates our anger. That's part of the anger problem; so often people do things differently than we want. Getting angry is not going to change what other people do, and usually does not change or improve the situation much. The key to resolving anger issues is to get in touch with what is going on inside yourself, and to take care of yourself. Being frustrated by your anger plays into being more angry. If you really are having a struggle with being angry, recognize it, and give yourself a chance to work with it, to figure out what's fueling it, and how you can let go of it. For a few people, emotions, particularly like anger, can become like a habit; addictive in their pattern. They get a release of endorphins every time they get angry. But most important to remember, is anger is best used if processed, rather than acted on spontaneously.

### **Do men get angry more than women?**

No. There is no evidence of this at all. However, in our society, obvious anger by men is more acceptable than obvious anger by women. We see anger in women quite frequently too, but usually more subtly than the anger seen in men. Only two generations ago, a woman had to exhibit her anger only in ways that people wouldn't be able to pick it up. There's still some of that hiding of anger by women, but that doesn't mean women get angry any less than men. Anger is not part of how we identify women in the culture, but it is part of how we identify men. Therefore a woman being angry is less acceptable.

### **Sometimes I go back and forth from depressed to angry. Why?**

It depends on where your anger is coming from, or where your depression is coming from. If you're in a terrible situation or have been in a situation that is very hurtful to you, then at times you may feel sad and disillusioned about yourself and the future. And at other times you may be enraged at the situation, another person, or yourself. It's important to examine what's going on in your life. If things seem to be fine, yet you go back and forth between depression and anger, chances are that the anger is a cover up for the depression or vice versa. Depression can also occur if we're in situations where we aren't allowed to feel/show anger, then depression may be what we replace it with.

### **How do I let someone know I'm angry? Should I wait until I "cool down"?**

Ideally, we stay very much in touch with our feelings and we let people know what those feelings are best while we're still feeling them. Anger within the context of it being just an emotion, like all other emotions, can be stated plainly, "I'm angry about xyz." However, because anger can be such a strong emotion, and feel so personal, many times we're better waiting for some of the "heat of the moment" to cool down before we talk about what's troubling us. More often than not however, our "angry" feelings are primarily due to other feelings such as feeling hurt or abandoned. So what we can say to another person is, "I'm feeling hurt, abandoned and angry about what you just did". Unfortunately, what happens to a lot of people is they sit on things, then it all comes out in an angry outburst. Within this context, it's important to let a person know you're angry in a way that's not deliberately hurtful to them. It's important to understand anger, and to view it not as a separate and unwanted feeling, but rather one of the many feelings. We need to be willing to let others know how we feel about all feelings, not just anger. Revealing feelings can leave us feeling vulnerable, and therefore, it is true courageousness.

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[2. Of Course You're Angry](#) *A Guide to Dealing with the Emotions of Substance Abuse by Gayle Rosellini and Mark Worden*

[3. Anger Poster – Laminated](#)

[4. Anger, Depression and Indecision Healing What Hurts](#) *A 6 CD series explains how anger is a process.. by Earnie Larsen*

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