

Anger & Aggression

Many things can make us feel angry. Anger is a natural emotion which we all experience, but which can sometimes be difficult to understand and manage. This leaflet is designed to help you think about your anger and think about how you may control it or express it in a way that is not destructive to yourself or other people.

Try to describe your experiences of being angry below:-

1. In which situations do you tend to get angry?

2. What happens to your body when you feel angry or aggressive?

3. What do you do when you feel angry?

It is not helpful for us to assume that all anger or aggression is a bad or destructive thing. However you may have been struggling with angry outbursts that concern you and seem to cause trouble for you or others.

What are the negatives to anger and aggression?

We sometimes cause harm (physical or emotional) to ourselves or others, or destroy our relationships or our surroundings. We sometimes become angry in order to avoid having to cope with

being hurt in some way. Generally, getting very angry will prevent us from thinking clearly at the time when we may need to solve a problem. Our anger may result in further problems, particularly if our aggression leads us into trouble with our friends, lovers, the police etc.

What are the positives to anger and aggression?

It is clearly important to be able to protect ourselves and others when under a real threat and expressing anger may be necessary to achieve this. Letting out your anger can prevent that "bottled up" feeling which can lead to unhappiness or lead to "explosive" outbursts. Anger is a sign that there is something wrong in our lives and drives us to do something about it. Anger can sometimes be usefully channelled into taking positive action.

What do you tend to do if your anger is let loose and uncontrolled? Do you become physically aggressive or verbally abusive? Do you self-harm? Do you have violent thoughts? Write down your experiences below:

What do you tend to do if you feel sorry after becoming angry? Does this tend to help the situation or make it worse? Write down your experiences below:

Do you really want to change? If so, start to think about getting onto the cycle of coping. Fill in the sheet on the good and bad things about anger and aggression on page 10. With practice, you will be able to act in a more assertive manner (i.e. honestly and openly express your feelings whilst paying respect to other people's feelings). Being able to do this is a positive step, but bear in mind you may not always achieve co-operation from others. However, if you treat others and yourself with respect, you are more likely to get co-operation and help from other people.

Trying to break the cycle of uncontrolled anger will often mean reminding yourself of how to act assertively. On the following pages there are some ideas about how assertiveness differs from aggressiveness.

	Assertive person	Aggressive person
Personal rights	Protects own rights and respects the rights of others	Violates rights; takes advantage of others
Basic message	This is what I think. This is what I feel. This is how I see the situation	This is what I think:- you're stupid if you think differently. This is what I want:- what you want isn't important
Usual outcome	Achieves goals. Takes other's goals into consideration. Makes decisions on the basis of acceptable compromise	May achieve goals, but at the expense of others. Intrudes on others' choices. Imposes choices on others or bullies and interferes
Often ends up feeling	Feels good about self, with confidence and self-respect	Feels defensive. Has to win or is unhappy with self. Self respect easily threatened

Communication style	Socially and emotionally expressive, honest, open and direct	Explosive, pushy, attacking or angry. Humiliates or puts others down
Others' point of view	Respects what others think and feel	Disregards or ignores what others think and feel
In conflict situations	Negotiates with others. Problem-solves to get best for both	Attacks or opposes others, increases conflict physically or verbally
Effect on people close to them	Others feel respected, informed, encouraged to work on problems	Others feel abused, hurt, defensive, unco-operative, angry
Goal	To give and get fair treatment. To leave room for individual needs and rights	To win at all costs. To overpower others so they become weaker and less able to express their needs and rights

Being (uncontrollably) angry and aggressive

Advantages (good things)	Disadvantages (bad things)

Not being (uncontrollably) angry and aggressive

Advantages (good things)	Disadvantages (bad things)

Should you continue to have difficulties in managing angry outbursts or feelings, then the following may help:

Talk to people (trusted friends, relations, or professionals) about your experiences. You may know or suspect there have been upsetting events in the past that are connected with the anger and talking about this may help. Watch out for old wounds - people or situations that remind you of people or times in the past when you have been hurt or angered may trigger off these "old" feelings. Recognising this may help you feel more in control. It may help you to see that the people currently on the receiving end of your anger and aggressive outbursts are not necessarily the people you are really angry with.

Taking steps to help yourself calm down isn't an easy thing to do. Anger is a powerful feeling. Consider relaxation techniques for helping anger, nervousness and fear. Do some physical activity (walking, sport, exercise) to release pent-up tension. Don't expect these to be a cure, but they may be of some help to you.

When you feel you might "explode", take time out. Count to 10 before doing anything. Go into another room or out of the house / away from the situation. Remind yourself that you are probably not thinking straight if you are very angry. Remind yourself that when you calm down, you may see things differently. Talk positively to yourself as you try not to destructively express your anger.

If you have to do something physical, thump a pillow rather than a person or a wall or window. If you feel you have to shout, shout in a private place. Don't shout at your children, wife, husband or other innocent people - they are not to blame for how you feel and you will make the situation worse.

Realise that you are the only person who can control your feelings. Although you may feel out of control when you are very angry, you are in control of what you do. When you are violent or aggressive, accept that you decided to act that way. To blame others and make them responsible for your anger and aggression means you will never change. You have the power to change, to act differently and to stop being aggressive.

Change your life situation. If possible spend less time in situations that lead to you getting very angry or change those situations so they affect you less. Find ways of getting breaks from things that frustrate you.

Cut down on stimulants:- tea, coffee, alcohol, amphetamines, etc. Do not let your blood sugar get too low (by not eating) or high (by eating or drinking high sugar foods). Check out whether any medication that you are on can lead to impulse control or anger problems. SSRI anti-depressants (e.g. Prozac, Seroxat) can cause these problems in some people.

Say what is leading to you feeling angry. Be specific. Say it in words rather than in actions (e.g say "I feel angry when you treat me like this" rather than smashing a plate or hitting the person).

Find different ways of getting the benefits you get from becoming angrily aggressive. Find new ways of saying no, persuading people to do what you want, keeping people at a distance, getting some privacy, getting excitement in your life, feeling powerful etc.

Let off steam as tension and anger build up. Do not bottle it up and become a pressure cooker waiting to explode.

Fill in the form on the following page. The top three boxes are for you to write down things that help you when you feel angry. The bottom three are for you to fill in things that do not help or make you worse.

This leaflet was written by Guy Holmes and Chris Pitts, Clinical Psychologists. It is designed to help you think about your anger and how you can control it.

Designed and arranged by Caroline Lacey and Joanna Watson.

Copies can be downloaded from www.shropsych.org or obtained from:

The Health Shop, 31 High Street, Madeley,
Telford, Shropshire. TF7 5AR.
Telephone: 01952 582659

	Think	Say	Do
Things to:			
Things NOT to:			