



How to Tame Your Anger and Handle Your Hot Buttons

Anger is a normal human emotion that can range from slight irritation to strong rage. With all the stress, pressures and worries of today, there are many things and many people out there to set you off, drive you crazy or push your buttons. How anger is expressed is key to maintaining healthy relationships and minimizing additional aggravation and stress. People who get overly angry (or defensive, irritated, furious, outraged, argumentative, ticked off or frustrated) will likely blow any chance of resolving problems. Anger is often handled poorly – but it doesn't have to be. Knowing how to recognize, tame and express anger appropriately can make a big difference in your life. Here are five ways to tame your anger and six steps to handle your hot buttons.

Five Steps to Tame Your Anger

Recognize Your Anger

What do you notice first when you begin to feel angry? Racing heart or elevated blood pressure? Perhaps the forceful feeling of fiery words ready to jump out of your mouth? These are physical signs of anger. Pay attention to the hidden signs of anger too, like tense muscles, frustration or sarcasm.

Identify the Cause

One of the key steps to overcoming anger is to identify the object of your anger. What “makes” you angry? The cause of your anger may or may not be obvious. Many people who struggle with chronic anger aren't even sure what they're angry about. It is necessary to identify the cause of the anger and take proactive steps to resolve it.

Resist Jumping to Conclusions

Analyze your thinking for incorrect assumptions. Many times we become angry because we assume an idea is true when it is not. These underlying assumptions warp our thinking, yet we believe we're basing our attitudes and actions on truth. Separating the past from the present is also key to not jumping to conclusions. You may be angry about things your family or friends have done to you in the past, even decades ago. This is called residual anger.

Realize Underlying Causes

Ask yourself questions about your physical condition first: Am I tired? Am I hungry? Do I feel physically bad? Then ask questions about your psychological state: Am I stressed about something else or toward someone else? Am I anxious or worried about something else?

Control the Energy of Anger

Find alternative expressions of your energy. Anger has tons of energy behind it. Finding a way to express that energy in a beneficial way is crucial. Exercise is a terrific option, and a benefit to your fitness as well. Anger expressed in an unhealthy way leads to numerous health problems. Any kind of physical activity can be a great outlet for angry feelings.

Six Steps to Handle Your Hot Buttons

Stop

Don't react! Easier said than done, but that's exactly what your angry or negative person won't expect. We tend to fight back at the first indication we are under attack. Resisting this hair-trigger tendency is the first step to handle situations and people that push your buttons. As soon as you feel anger start to build, take time out to calm down.

Breath

To help yourself calm down, focus on your breathing to keep from lashing back and to give yourself a chance to rationally collect your thoughts. Count silently to ten if you need to.

Think

Think before you speak. Choose your words carefully. Spoken words and actions of anger can be very harmful and often leave scars of pain that are not easily undone.

Listen

A conversation is often more productive if you will, early in the talk, shut up and listen! Be still and try to understand their opinion. This relays respect and models better communication skills. You are not agreeing; you are listening. Listen for the message behind the words. Ask questions to clarify exactly what is going on.

Affirm

It is probably best to begin the talk with taking the initiative to affirm, or validate the reality of, what is good in your button-pusher and in the relationship itself. Acknowledge that you heard what was said and any positive motive or meaning behind the (seemingly stern) position he or she is taking. It is helpful to repeat back what you heard. Example: "If I understand you correctly, you are concerned that..."

Speak

When you talk to your button-pusher, speak from your experience and life. Verbalize anger appropriately. This means using "I" messages instead of "you" messages. "You" messages express blame, as in, "You make me want to scream!" As a result of you messages, the other person usually responds defensively and is not open to hearing our feelings or ideas for solutions to the problem. Tone is also highly important, as you negate the words you are saying with the way you sound. A warm tone conveys safety and care, and that stands the best chance of keeping your button-pusher from becoming even more wary or defensive than they already are.

In practicing how to tame your anger, it is also important to know what you control. In truth, no one can "make you angry," even though they can provoke you. You can control your response to people and circumstances. Accept the fact that most things in the world are out of your control. If you try to continually control your family, friends or circumstances you will find the result frustrating. If you or a family member is struggling with anger issues, they're not likely to go away by themselves. Contact Centerstone for more information on effectively dealing with the powerful emotion of anger.

About Centerstone

Centerstone, a not-for-profit organization, has provided a wide range of mental health and addiction services to people of all ages for more than 50 years. Through more than 60 facilities and 170 partnership locations across Middle Tennessee, Centerstone serves more than 50,000 children, adolescents, adults and seniors each year. Centerstone is accredited by The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). For more information about Centerstone, please call 888-291-4357 or visit www.centerstone.org.

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Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.