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Feeling Angry



All of us feel angry, at least occasionally. Most of the time when we get angry, we get over it quickly because, somehow, we resolve the situation and our feelings of anger pass. Anger becomes a problem, however, if we "bottle it up" or if we "blow up". Both of these extremes cause problems for the angry people and for those around them.

When should you do something about anger?

Feelings of anger are a normal reaction to some situations beyond your control. They can also indicate that you are simply under too much stress, and it can be hard to know if you should just let your anger pass or work at getting rid of it.

It is time to admit that anger is a problem and to look for ways of dealing with it if your anger is:

- constantly on your mind for several weeks and is beginning to seriously harm your enjoyment of life,
- caused by something that happened a long time ago,
- causing you to do vengeful things,
- making you act violently to others or to yourself,
- interfering with your ability to do your job,
- hurting your relationships with your family and friends.

Dealing with your anger

It is important to deal with your anger before it causes you discomfort or pain. Studies have shown that anger can cause serious health problems such as ulcers and heart disease. It can also make you behave in ways that could cause you to lose your job or friends, or result in the break-up of your marriage. There are some things you can do to deal with your anger as it happens. Other things you can do involve changing your way of approaching life by learning new attitudes and taking a number of practical actions.

Short-term solutions

- Admit that you are angry. If you bottle up your angry feelings, they will not go away, and they will keep coming out over and over again, painfully.
- Try not to over-react. Step back from the situation that is making you angry and ask yourself, "What would I think of someone else if I saw him/her getting angry in this situation?" or "Is this situation really as bad as I am making it out to be?"
- Try to make yourself think about something else. Turn your attention to some pleasant memory rather than the line-up, traffic jam or whatever is irritating you.
- Identify the source of your anger. If the actions or words of another person are hurting you, try to deal with him/her directly in a peaceful and productive way.

- Listen carefully to what others are saying to you, and let them finish without interruption. Very often, you will not understand the real message if you "jump in" after a few words. Give people a chance to explain themselves.

Long-term solutions

- If your anger is caused by something beyond your control, such as a job lay-off, find out how others have dealt with the problem successfully, and try to follow their lead.
- Avoid blaming yourself, even if you are angry because of misfortune caused by your own mistake. It is best to try to learn from your experiences and avoid making the same mistakes again.
- Reduce tension by finding time for some physical activity. Go for a brisk walk, play a hard game of tennis with a friend, work in the garden, or clean the house.
- Reduce your stress level. Learn some stress management methods, such as relaxation and deep-breathing exercises. Try to find ways of doing more of the things you enjoy.
- Learn to meditate. When you are alone, practise withdrawing your thoughts from your day-to-day concerns. This may make you more able to do the same when you find yourself getting angry.
- Learn to laugh at yourself. If you can learn to see the silly side of things, you can laugh instead of lashing out.
- Learn to trust the abilities of others. Some of your anger may be coming from a lack of faith in the capabilities of other people.
- Look for professional help. If your problems are serious, you may need the help of a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker. Your family doctor can help you find these professional people.
- Talk to someone you trust (a family member, a close friend or a member of the clergy for your religion) who may be able to see things more clearly than you do.

Do you need more information?

If you or someone you know needs help in dealing with angry feelings, check your local bookstore and library for books on the subject. You can also contact a local community organization, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, to find out about counselling services and other resources available in your community.