

Anger management - taking control

Anger is a natural emotion we all experience from time to time, but why do we get angry and how can we manage this powerful emotion, asks Julia Jones.

WHY DO WE GET ANGRY?

There are many reasons why people become angry and it is often thought anger is an instinctive emotion - related to primitive defence of our territory. A number of factors are known to create or increase feelings of anger.

Crowds and peer pressure: The combination of crowds and rivalries at football matches are well known to escalate anger and aggression.

Alcohol: Alcohol reduces self control and as a result makes us more likely to behave in an aggressive way. There is a strong link between alcohol and aggression.

Frustration: When there is no outlet for anger, feelings of frustration can manifest themselves in aggressive behaviour.

Hormones: Hormones, in particular testosterone, have been linked to aggressive behaviour. However this is controversial as it pinpoints men as being more aggressive due to their increased levels of testosterone. Yet many men are not angry and many women are.

IS ANGER A BAD THING?

It may sometimes seem that anger is a terrible thing, but actually it is just a defensive emotion. In some cases anger is a legitimate response to a violation of some sort and it enables us to stick up for ourselves.

According to www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk, "It is important to note that it is not people or events that make you angry but it is your reaction to them that makes you angry."

It is our behavioural response to anger, aggression, that can be the most damaging and that is why it is important to find ways of dealing with and responding to our anger.

Anger at its worst can be truly devastating, resulting in wrecked relationships, jobs and families. When anger becomes out of control in this way, it is important to seek therapy from a trained professional.

SEEKING HELP FOR ANGER

Seeing a psychologist or counsellor can help you reflect on the causes of your anger and ways to deal with feelings in a more positive way. Anger management therapy will equip you with the tools to recognise, manage and diffuse angry thoughts.

Self help materials such as the tips and exercises available online (downloadable handout) at www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anger.asp can also be very helpful in understanding and dealing with anger.

Things can seem bleak for 'angry' people. It may feel like nobody understands or listens to your views and this can lead to you feeling more frustrated and angry, but some simple techniques can see monumental results and literally change lives for the better.

FIVE IMPORTANT STEPS IN TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR ANGER

It is important to recognise anger and its affect on the human body. You may feel your heart thumping and a rising sense of tension or you may feel as if somebody has pushed a button and you are not in control any more.

Next you need to own your own anger and acknowledge it as your own emotion rather than something somebody else has inflicted upon you.

Think rationally about why you feel angry and ways you can deal with future situations. Where are your vulnerabilities? How can you address these?

When you realise you are feeling angry, try to take some time out if possible to let off steam and clear your head. This makes it much easier to calm down and think more rationally. If you remain in the situation, it can be easy for things to escalate out of control.

Try to find verbal ways of expressing your feelings. Explaining how you feel and exactly what has upset you can really help the other person understand how they upset you and give them a chance to address the issues. Often hearing the other person's point of view can present a new perspective on the issue and prevent future feelings of anger towards them.

For more details about anger management therapy contact your local First Psychology Centre:

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